

The Coming Day of the Lord Jesus, pt. I (2 Pet 3.1-10)

I. INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SECOND COMING

- A. The reality and certainty of Second Coming of Jesus was one of the most important parts of the belief system of the early church. Throughout the New Testament, the Second Coming is seen as the *blessed hope* for each and every believer.

¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2.13)

- B. Yet, most believers are completely unaware of and unfamiliar with the truths related to the Second Coming. Often, we believe the lie that studying the events surrounding the return of Jesus are difficult and unclear — or unknowable — thus leading us to a type of ambivalence related to these truths.
- C. However, the expectation of Christ's return — and the events that surround it — were a foundational part of Christian belief.

²that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles (2 Pet 3.2)

⁵Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? (2 Thes 2.5)

³²From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates (Matt 24.32-33)

- D. The certainty of Christ's immanent return stands behind the faith, obedience, and encouragement of every single book of the New Testament. Because of that, it is important for us to familiarize ourselves with the glorious truths related to Jesus' return in order that we might be filled with hope and steadfast endurance in this world.
- E. It was precisely the teaching concerning the Second Coming — and particularly the judgment that will happen at Christ's return — that the false teachers of Peter's day had sought to undermine.
- F. In this 2 Peter 3, the apostle looks specifically at the false teachers' disregard for the second coming and outlines the faultiness of their beliefs, the right understanding of the "delay" of Christ's return, and an exhortation to holiness in light of the immanent and certain return of Jesus.

G. Outline of 2 Peter 3

3:1-2	Purpose of writing this letter reinforced
3:3-4	The presence of scoffers who mock the reality of Christ's Second Coming
3:5-10	Two answers to the objections of the scoffers
3:11-18	Exhortations to holy living in light of Christ's return

II. PURPOSE OF THIS LETTER (2 PET 3.1-2)

- A. Peter again outlines the *purpose* he has in writing this second letter. He reminds them that he is writing in order that they would remember the truths (predictions) that had been given to them by the holy prophets (OT Scriptures) and their apostles (the apostolic witness).
- B. The reminder of these truths was not simply to reinforce specific information to them — but was given in order to produce a specific: this reminder was intended to *stir up their sincere mind* to lay hold of the truth in faith and pursue lifestyles of humble obedience to the ways of Jesus in the face of the demonic deception of the false teachers.

- C. It is important to understand that Peter assumes that his hearers will be familiar with the predictions of the holy prophets and the apostles. One of the necessary elements of shoring up the church against false teaching is a diligent study of the Holy Scriptures.
- D. Peter is concerned to *strengthen the church* by reminding them of the things they should already know to be true.

III. PRESENCE OF SCOFFERS (2 PET 3.3-4)

- A. Peter wants his readers to know that there will be scoffers who come in the last days that mock the reality of the coming of the Lord.

³knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing (2 Pet 3.3)

- B. This is an important interpretive point in Peter's argument. The irony of the false teachers' teaching is that it actually *proves* the predictions of the prophets and apostles. What Peter wants his readers to understand is that the presence of false teachers in their midst is precisely a *marker* of the last days.
- C. It is important to understand that the New Testament understanding of the *last days* is that they began at the day of Pentecost and will continue until the Second Coming of Jesus.

¹⁶But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh... (Acts 2.16-17)

¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb 1.1-2)

- D. Jesus declares that the presence of false prophets will mark the last days.

⁴See to it that no one leads you astray... ¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray (Matt 24.4, 11)

- E. Paul warned the churches that false teachers and false prophets would mark the life of the church in the last days.

¹But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty... ⁸just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. (2 Tim 3.1-8)

- F. What this means for Peter is that the disciples of Jesus need not be worried about the reality of false teachers in their midst. Even though they promote a scoffing spirit that Jesus will not in fact return (and thereby, they believe that God's judgment is not going to come against them or their hearers), they are unaware that their very presence fulfills the promises of God given through his prophets and apostles.
- G. So what Peter is showing the church here is that there will always be those who seek to make light of the things that are in fact weighty and important (and urgent) in the Scripture. If the Scripture teaches that the certain immanence of the coming of the Lord is to fuel a sobriety and alert-spirit among Christ's disciples — a scoffing spirit will attempt to mock the coming of the Lord to minimize and undermine the truth of his coming.
- H. Peter outlines two realities related to the scoffers that are important for us to understand.

1. *Their scoffing is rooted in immorality* (v. 3). Peter declares that these teachers are scoffing against the predictions of the prophets and apostles *because* they long to follow their own sinful desires. It is important for us to understand that false teaching is *moral problem* and not an intellectual problem. Although it may be presented intellectually, it is ultimately rooted in an attempt to promote and bolster their sinful desires. (Thomas Cranmer: *what the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies*).

2. ***Their scoffing makes them enemies of God*** (v. 4). Although we may not pick up on this immediately, the way that Peter frames the content of their scoffing is intended to draw on a rich Biblical history of voices that mock the purposes of God. The introductory words “where is...” are often on the lips of scoffers, the foolish, and the wicked throughout the Scriptures. What Peter is attempting to show (even in narrating the question) is that these teachers find themselves on the wrong side of the Biblical tradition. Rather than walking in the way of faith and trust, they put themselves with those of the Bible who have mocked and questioned God’s character and ways.

¹⁰As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” (Ps 42.10)

¹⁷say, “Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” (Joel 2.17)

¹⁵Behold, they say to me, “Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come!” (Jer 17.15)

I. In our contemporary moment, the scoffing spirit evidences itself in two ways:

1. ***Disbelief about the Second Coming***: many in our contemporary moment have abandoned belief in anything related to God and his future intervention in the world. The waters that we swim in have become atheistic (whether explicitly or functionally) and *most* around us would embody the mocking spirit of those who doubt the presence of God’s certain judgment.
2. ***A fear of being “radical” or “paranoid”***: Within the church there is a lot of fear related to the topic of Christ’s return. Many believe things like: “hasn’t every generation believed they were living in the end” or “doesn’t every generation think theirs is worse than any before”? These subtly cynical questions keep us from engaging the realities of the Scripture, and in small ways are an embodiment a scoffing spirit about the Second Coming. Although we wouldn’t say we don’t believe in it — we would live with a spirit of indifference or ambivalence related to it.

IV. TWO ANSWERS TO THE OBJECTION OF CHRIST’S CERTAIN COMING (2 PET 3.5-10)

- A. Peter summarizes the content of the scoffing spirit among these false teachers by showing that they believed that “nothing ever changed” as evidence that God would in fact not judge. They declared that since the time of the “fathers” (likely the OT patriarchs) the world had gone on unchanged. To their faulty logic, they believed that if God was so concerned with righteousness and holiness, then why would he not have intervened with cosmic justice and redemption already.
- B. Peter spends the remainder of this section outlining two primary arguments to refute the claims of the false teachers. He wants the church to stand firm on the reality and certainty of Christ’s return — not casting it off in a scoffing spirit. He wants to demonstrate that this scoffing spirit ***overlooks*** (vv. 5, 8) two specific things.
- C. First, Peter shows that the scoffers are deliberately (or willfully) overlooking ***historical fact***. Although the false teachers were claiming that God had not intervened in creation, Peter demonstrates that this is overlooking the historical reality in three ways.
 1. ***God intervened in creation itself***: Peter wants us to see that their own argument is faulty. If the false teachers were trying to demonstrate that God had not in fact intervened in the created order, their own reference to the “creation of the world” undermines their own position. Peter shows that they forget that the heavens and the earth existed *because* God brought them into being, ‘judging’ the chaos of nothingness (*formless and void*) to give order to the earth (cf. Gen 1.1-2).
 2. ***God intervened in the flood***: The same creation that was formed *out of water and through water by the word of God* was destroyed and judged by these same means (the waters and the word of God).

3. **God will bring judgment and destruction through fire:** Now, Peter says, the same word that created the world and judged it with water at the flood, holds it together until the final day of judgment and destruction to the ungodly. However, this time the world will not be destroyed by water, but it will be purged by fire.

D. Peter then turns to remind his readers to not overlook a **theological reality**. Although the false teachers scoff at the coming judgment of the Lord based on the appearance that things “go on as they always have”, Christians ought to know that there is a different interpretation to the delay of judgment.

1. Peter begins by alluding to an important passage from Psalm 90 to show that they should know that one day is like a thousand years to the Lord. This demonstrates that God’s outworking of his purposes is not bound to time in the same way we would evaluate and understand it.

⁴For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night (Ps 90.4)

2. This ought to lead believers to reject a scoffing spirit (“where is his coming”) for a correct understanding of God’s purposes. This should lead us to understand that God is not slow to fulfill his promises as we might deem him to be in our natural thinking.

³For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end — it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay (Hab 2.3)

3. Peter then gives the *reason* for God’s apparent slowness. It is not because he will not judge — let alone that he doesn’t care. Rather, the fact that God allows the creation to go on “as it has” is proof of his holy character — namely, that he is patient toward those who are wicked, not desiring that they be judged, but rather that they would come to repentance and be saved.

⁶The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exod 34.6)

¹¹Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezek 33.11)

⁴do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Rom 2.4)

³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (I Tim 2.3-4)

E. Peter concludes this section by looking at the certainty of the coming of the Day of the Lord and the results surrounding it. The **Day of the Lord** is shorthand throughout the Old Testament for the day when God would consummate his redemptive purpose — this includes the judgment of the unrighteous, the salvation of his people, and the restoration of all things. In the New Testament, the Day of the Lord becomes synonymous with the return of Christ Jesus.

F. Peter highlights two realities related to the Second Coming:

1. **Thief in the night:** Throughout the New Testament, the suddenness of the return of Christ is often compared to the coming of a thief in the night. This image is intended to promote *watchfulness* and *faithfulness* among God’s people as we wait for his coming (cf. Matt 24.36-51; 1 Thes 5.1-11).
2. **The purging of the heavens and the earth:** Peter here says that the heavens will burn up and that the earth and the works on it will be exposed. The meaning here is that God’s judgment will come like a fire and ultimately *show forth* the quality of things done on the earth and the works of individuals for what they truly are (cf. 1 Cor 3.10-15).