

What's taking so long? \* 2 Peter 3:3-14

Advent 1 (December 2, 2018) \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Christmas hit our house at full strength last weekend – Julie's family gathered at our house for an early Christmas celebration and so we had ten adults, six kids, two cats and a dog on the loose in our house on Saturday afternoon.

Saturday morning was a little different though. We were busy getting ready for their arrival. We got out the chairs and folding table from the garage. We set up the little ceramic Christmas tree so that there would be somewhere to put the gifts. We checked every single bathroom to make sure that there was lots of toilet paper on hand. Much to my chagrin, we got the Christmas music out and all cued up. In short, we got ready for them to come.

And really, that's what Advent is all about. Certainly, we think back to the time when Jesus first came, and we countdown the days to Christmas when we celebrate His first coming, but we do that to remind ourselves that He will come again and that it just makes sense for us to get ready. That's why you sometimes here about Advent being called a season of preparation – but really, we should be thinking in terms of a lifetime of preparation because just as Jesus came once as a baby, He will come again as the conquering king.

Now if that leaves you with questions, don't worry, you're not alone. In fact, within a generation of Jesus' death and resurrection, people were wondering things like 'Is Jesus coming back?' 'What will happen when He does?' 'And if He's coming back, what should we do about it?' Those questions actually found their way into the Bible and we're going to unpack them together this morning in 2 Peter chapter 3. If you go towards the back of your Bible, you'll find 2 Peter, just between James and John. So - 2 Peter, chapter 3 – and let's start in verse 3.

Peter writes -

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

Now in Peter's day, some people were asking that question in a mocking way – like 'where is this 'coming' that He promised – but it is \*admittedly\* a reasonable question to ask.

After all, we've been two thousand years and Jesus still hasn't come. And we've gotten used to 'everything going on as it has since creation' haven't we? The sun rises and sets on us just as it did on our parents and on their parents and on their parents - generations back. I think that's probably one of the biggest hurdles for us to clear as we think about Jesus' second coming – given the two thousand years of world history that we can look back on – is that it's hard to wrap your head around all of that changing in a cataclysmic way when Jesus returns.

But, Peter says, as hard as it is to wrap your head around, it is coming. And he points out that the world really *hasn't* been the same ever since creation – God has intervened in world history a number of times. Verse 5 –

5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.

7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

In other words – everything has NOT stayed the same since the beginning of Creation. God reached into the world to cleanse it at the Flood and He's going to do it again when Jesus returns – this time by fire.

See, implicit in the idea of Jesus' return is the idea of judgment. When Jesus comes back, He is going to establish the perfect reign of God over all the world and so He is going to do away with all that isn't perfect.

And that's why the scoffers that Peter is talking about were so eager to discount the idea that Jesus was coming back. Because if there's no Jesus, then there's no judgment. And according to verse 3, they didn't really care about Jesus – they just wanted to do whatever their hearts desired. They just wanted to do what's right in their own eyes and they did not want to consider the fact that someday they might just be held accountable for all that they do. And Peter here tells us – that day is coming. Verse 7 – when Jesus returns, He will come to judge all of humanity and cleanse the world of all unrighteousness, which means, again, verse 7, the destruction of ungodly men.

Now listen – Peter is being intentionally blunt here. He wants everyone to recognize just how high the stakes really are. Eternity is on the line here. But he also wants us to realize that God in His great mercy has made it possible for us to be delivered from that destruction and so he continues – verse 8 –

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: (and I would argue that 'dear friends' is too weak a translation – it's more 'beloved' – like 'dear people I love with all my heart' - With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

His timetable is not like ours. What we call 'forever' is like a single 'click' of a second hand to Him and so we can't use the appearance of delay to suggest that Jesus is not coming back. Really...

9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Do you get that? Jesus has not returned in the last two thousand years because He's never coming back – Jesus hasn't returned in the last two thousand years because He doesn't want to lose a single soul. He doesn't want anyone to perish but for everyone to have eternal life. His desire is that all people would come to Him and so, His patience ought to lead us to repentance.

Now let's talk about this. When God sent His Son into the world, He did not send Him to condemn the world, but to save it – that's John 3:17. And He 'saved' the world by dying on the Cross. That is – He gathered all of the sin, from every time, and every place, thru all history – my sin and your sin – and He paid for it all by dying on the Cross. In His divine perfection, He was able to bear the wrath that all of our sin deserved. And this is the Gospel – that if we simply believe in Him, then He makes us righteousness, He makes us spotless, He makes us blameless and perfect and when He returns, He will stand beside us at the judgment seat of God and say 'I paid for this one's sin on the Cross and so he lives.'

Jesus' patience in returning is meant to give EVERYONE the opportunity to repent – to turn from sin and self and to believe, to receive the free gift of forgiveness that Jesus offers. And to be righteous and counted as a child of God, saved for all eternity.

Because, verse 10 - 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

There is no Advent calendar which will count us down to the day when Jesus returns and when He does, everyone's hearts will be laid bare. Everyone will have to give account for the way that they have lived. And everyone who has resisted the gracious forgiveness of God will pay the price for their sin themselves. There are only two times in the history of the world when sin will truly be dealt with – either Jesus pays for it on the Cross and we receive forgiveness by faith, or we pay for it ourselves at the end of time. And that mean destruction and eternal separation from God.

Now listen – on one hand, I have to admit that my humanity resists this a little. And maybe you're feeling that too. Like, you're scaring me into responding. Like, I have this really clear memory of being at my grandma's house and misbehaving and her saying 'Just wait til your grandpa gets home.' There IS some of that in this text. The Bible does say – 'there is judgment coming and God will wipe out every unrighteous thing on the earth' and I don't want you to end up at the judgment seat going 'If I knew You were coming I'd have backed a cake' or 'got things right.' He IS coming and it WILL be disastrous for people who resist God.

But not only that, and even more than that I think – look how much Jesus cares about you. He has already laid down His life for You. He suffered on the Cross so that you don't have to at the final judgment. He has extended His unfathomable mercy to us and He says 'my beloved – receive the forgiveness that I began when I first came, so that you will live eternally with me when I come again.'

Friends, beloved, if you haven't turned from sin and made following Jesus the number one priority in your life, please do today. Not just to avoid the judgment, but to experience the fullness of the love of God. That's why Jesus came the first time – so that He could extend to us grace when He comes again.

So Peter has made it pretty clear that Jesus is going to coming again. Yes, from our perspective, He's being slow about it, but from His perspective, He's being patient so that as many as possible can turn

from sin and be delivered from the judgment at the end of the age. And that is when He will indeed return.

Now this brings us back to the beginning – because what do you do when you know someone’s coming? You prepare right? You get ready. So how do you get ready for the coming of the Saviour king who will come again to wipe out all that is evil and restore all that is good? Well, Peter’s going to tell us. Verse 11.

Verse 11 -

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (2Pe 3:3-14 NIV).

Peter tells us there two ways to get ready. First - Make every effort to live a holy and godly life. He says that right off the bat in verse 11, doesn’t he? What sort of people should you be? You should live holy and godly lives as you look forward to Jesus verse. And then he echoes that idea in verse 14 - ‘so then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him.’

Now listen – that might sound like a call to pull up your bootstraps and make yourself good enough for God, but remember – that was why Jesus came in the first place – to die in our place and MAKE us good enough for God. So if you have turned from sin to follow Jesus, then you are already ‘holy and godly and spotless and blameless.’ Peter is simply reminding us – live like that! You are holy, so be holy. You are spotless, so BE spotless! Make every effort to resist temptation and do all you can to reflect the perfect character of God in this world. That’s preparation number 1 – Live a holy and godly life.

Preparation number 2 is this – live an expectant life. Here’s what I mean by that. Sometimes, it can be hard to pursue godliness and perfection. Sometimes our resolve wavers a little – what should motivate us to keep at it? The expectation that Jesus is coming again.

I mean, just look at those verses – three times in three verses - 12, 13, and 14 – Peter says ‘as you look forward to the day of God’ ... we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth ... since you are looking forward to this’ – Jesus’ return is something that we should eagerly expect. The knowledge that that day is coming and that it will mean eternity with God in a sinless, diseaseless, conflict free earth ought to push us forward.

I mean, in the weeks leading up to my vacation, whenever I felt sluggish or unmotivated, I reminded myself that ‘just a little longer’ and I would be sitting in the warm sun, for a time of rest – that’s a

picture of how Jesus' second coming should push us forward – knowing, looking forward to the day when He returns to make all things right should motivate us to press on in the here and now.

As surely as Jesus came once as a baby, He will come again as King and we should get ready by living godly lives, eagerly expecting His arrival.

So listen – I know that in the month ahead, you're going to be preparing for a lot of visitors. You're going to be doing lots of good and valuable things to get ready for them to come. Take a minute in the midst of it to watch what you're doing. You're expecting something good to come – the joy of a smile under the Christmas tree, or the warmth of having loved ones around the table. And look at the effort that you're putting into making it happen.

That's a picture of how we ought to get ready for Jesus' second coming – eagerly anticipating eternal good and doing all we can to be holy and spotless as Jesus has made us. Let Jesus' second coming inspire you to godly living.

#### BENEDICTION

15. 1 Th. 3:12-13 - May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.