

The importance of readiness \* 2 Peter 3

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Summer is almost here and that means that it's just about time for Qs from the Pews. I love getting your questions every year and then digging into all of the pastoral and practical and theological things that you are thinking about. I love being able to take what we know about God in the Bible and see how that applies to everything else in life. I'll start collecting those questions in the next couple of weeks.

But this morning, we're actually going to consider a Q from the Pew that's in the Bible. That means that it's a two thousand year old question but it's still a question that's relevant for us: Why hasn't Jesus come back yet?

Before He went back up to Heaven, He said that He would return and many of His followers assumed that He would 'BRB' – be right back – and yet it's been more than two thousand years and we're still waiting. Why?

That question could have been written yesterday and yet it comes to us from the people who were alive in Peter's time. When Peter was writing his second letter, people were asking 'why on earth has Jesus not come back to earth?' and so Peter took the final part of his letter to answer that question.

So turn with me to 2 Peter 3. 2 Peter 3 right at the end of the letter. And there are four things that I want to highlight as Peter unpacks this question.

The question.

A correction.

The reason and

The response.

These are the ideas that Peter is going to address – the question, a correction, the reason and the response – and we'll talk about those four things too.

So first, the QUESTION, verse 3:

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" (2Pe 3:3-4 NIV).

Now here's the thing. When we ask the question 'Why hasn't Jesus come back yet?' we're asking it out of legitimate curiosity. Our eternal hope is tied to this idea that Jesus will return and so we legitimately wonder 'when is Jesus coming back?'

The people in Peter's day though weren't coming from the same perspective. They seemed to asking this question to cast aspersions on Jesus' followers; they seem to think Jesus' delay in returning means that He'll never return.

And you can see in the passage there, these people are looking around and saying 'nothin' ever changes.' The sun rises, the sun sets; generations come and go everything seems to stay the same.

They take that constancy and say 'well, it's not very likely that Jesus is going to come back in some world-changing manner because the world just doesn't change.' And so they ask our question in a kind of snarky way – 'where is this 'coming' that Jesus promised?'

That's the question but Peter has a CORRECTION to it. 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.

Do you see what Peter's doing here? He's correcting the question – they say 'nothing ever changes' and he says 'that's just not true.' And he points to two big events that prove the point. Do you recognize them?

In the beginning, at Creation, God spoke the word and the heavens and earth were formed out of water. There was nothing, then there was Creation. That's a big change.

And then, at the Flood, God saw the evil in the world and said 'enough of that;' He spoke the word and the world as Noah knew it was destroyed by water.

It's just not true to say that nothing ever changes or that God doesn't intervene in human history. God made nothing into something. God overran the world with the waters of the Flood. These people say 'nothing ever changes' but then Peter says – 'What about the Flood? What about God's judgment against evil then?' You can't say that Jesus isn't coming because nothing crazy ever happens; the Flood happened. And something like it will happen again, when Jesus returns.

And that's actually part of the REASON that Jesus hasn't come back yet.

Back up a couple of verses to look at 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 (God spoke again and the Flood happened).

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.

Peter says: God spoke once and created the earth. God spoke again and destroyed it with water. God will speak a third time when Jesus returns and at that time, the earth will be destroyed by fire.

This is what happens when Jesus comes back. Jesus returns to rescue His people and to cleanse the earth of every evil. What God did in Noah's time with the Flood, God will do again when Jesus returns, this time with fire.

And Peter adds a little extra note here; these people say essentially 'why is it taking so long for Jesus to come back?' and Peter says 'what you call a long time is NOT a long time in God's eyes.' Verse 8:

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

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.

That's the REASON that Jesus hasn't come back yet. He hasn't come back yet because He wants to give people the time to turn from sin and be delivered from the cataclysmic judgment against evil that He knows will happen when He returns. Because it will be cataclysmic. Verse 10:

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief [ie., unexpectedly]. 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.

The Triune God knows that at the end of the age, what He did at the Flood *with water* will happen again *with fire*. He will render judgment on the earth and every trace of evil and ungodliness will be burnt up. Everyone who is estranged from Him will suffer the fullness of His wrath.

That's why Jesus hasn't come back yet. Verse 9, He doesn't want anyone to perish. Verse 9 again, He wants everyone to come to repentance. In other words, He wants each and every one of us to have the opportunity to turn from sin and trust in Him so that we are made right with God and delivered from this wrath. He's giving us time to get ready.

Broadly speaking, there are two times in human history when God will deal with sin. One is the Cross, where Jesus died for the sin of the whole world, to forgive that sin and give us the opportunity to be reconciled to God. The second is at the end, when Jesus returns to make all things new. Either your sin is paid for at the Cross, and you receive it by grace through faith, walking with Jesus, or you bear the cost of sin on your own when Jesus returns.

And Jesus doesn't want that. He's already paid for sin. He's already borne the cost of rebellion and been judged for you. It's like Jesus paid for gas at the pump and yet you go in and pay it again in the convenience store. Jesus doesn't want that. He wants to give you time to turn and receive His gift. And so it's not that He's not being slow in coming back – to Him a thousand years are like that (snap) – He's taking His time so that everyone has a chance to repent.

That's the REASON that Jesus hasn't come back yet; He's giving everyone the chance to turn from sin and to trust in Him to be delivered from the judgment that happens when He returns.

So, question: Why hasn't Jesus come back yet? Nothing ever changes so it's not likely that He'll return.

Correction: Not true; what about the Flood? At the Flood, God cleansed the earth of evil, wiping it all out.

Reason: God will do it again when Jesus returns and so Jesus is taking His time so that everyone will have the chance to repent.

If that's the case, then what do we do? How do we respond to this news?

That's the RESPONSE, 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 3:11-14 NIV).

How do we respond to the reality of Jesus' return and cataclysmic judgment against sin? We live holy and godly lives. We look forward to the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness. We make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him. In short, we get ready to go by living for Him. We embrace the news that Jesus will return and live in light of His coming.

So that's Peter's response to the people who mockingly asked 'Why is Jesus taking so long to come?' He's giving people the chance to turn from sin and be delivered from the wrath that's coming when He returns and he wants you to be ready. (He doesn't want anybody singing 'if I knew you were coming I'd have baked a cake/turned from sin. He wants us to know!).

But let's take a minute to think about what this means for us. Because we're coming at it from a very different perspective relative to the people Peter is talking about. We're not asking it to diminish Jesus' reputation. We legitimately WANT to see Jesus come back and we're asking the question with eager anticipation.

I know this isn't going to apply to any of you because you were all perfect children, but when you were younger, did your mother ever say to you 'Just wait 'til your father comes home'? The implication is that when he gets back, you're in big trouble! You've done something wrong and wrath is coming.

Now that's one thing, but think about how that sounds to a child who is eagerly waiting for dad to get back. 'Just wait 'til your father comes home! You can show him all the things you've done and the crafts you've made and enjoy time with him because he loves you.'

That's how we need to approach this passage. Just wait until Jesus comes back! 😊

What do we do in the meantime? Let me give you four quick ideas.

1. Get ready. I know that from a certain point of view, this all seems a little crazy. You look out the window and think 'How is this possible? The sun always sets and then the sun always rises. The seasons always go winter-spring-summer-fall?' From our point of view, it DOES seem like it's been a long time since Jesus left and it DOES seem kind of crazy to think that there will be a cataclysmic judgment at the end of the age.

And yet Peter tells us here, Paul tells us in the Thessalonian letters, Jesus told us again and again, He's coming back and He wants us to be ready. Take that idea, make it a part of your worldview and let it motivate what you do today.

One of Stephen Covey's seven habits of effective people is to 'start with the end in mind;' that is, know where you want to go and make decisions that will get you there. Know that Jesus is coming back; know that you want to be there with Him and take the kind of actions that will get you there.

So 1. Get ready. And here's a way you do that: 2. Get right. Get right with God.

I mean, that's the big idea behind this whole passage. Our sin separates us from God; it sours our relationship with God and sets us up to face God's wrath. God though is so full of mercy, abounding in steadfast love that He gave His one and only Son so that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

And Jesus does not want anyone to be lost and so He is delaying His return so that everyone will have the opportunity to turn from sin and trust in Him and be delivered from God's wrath against evil that gets unleashed when He returns. Take advantage of that time and get right with God. Turn from sin and trust in Him and God makes you His child.

And even if you're already done that, if you've turned from sin to live for God, keep hacking away at those sins that so easily entangle and trip us up.

As I was writing, I got thinking to thinking of it like this: moving day is coming so get rid of your junk.

The last time we moved, I couldn't get over the amount of junk we accumulated in our house. Papers that didn't make it to the trash, broken Happy Meal toys, dust bunnies galore. I don't need any of that stuff. Frankly, some of it was taking up space that I needed for better things.

Sin is like that too. It takes up space in our hearts and minds and threatens to pull us off course. Get rid of it. Moving day is coming, so get rid of your junk. Get right with God.

So 1. Get ready, 2. Get right, 3. Get holy.

It's pretty clear when you read this passage what Peter wants us to get out of it isn't it? It's the response part. Knowing about Jesus' return isn't going to do any good unless we do something about it. So Peter wants us to start living in light of it now.

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...

(2Pe 3:11-12 NIV).

Verse 14: '...Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.'

The really neat thing here is that Peter is really just saying – 'If you've been made right with God, be who you are.' Because the reality is that when you 'get right with God,' when turn from sin and trust in Him, God makes you spotless and blameless (Ephesians 1:4, Colossians 1:22). If you've been 'made right with God' ie., justified, then you are at peace with Him. Paul literally says in Romans 5:1: Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Peter says 'Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with God,' he's essentially saying 'You who are spotless and blameless and at peace with God, live out that spotlessness and blamelessness in the course of your life.'

To borrow from Peter's first letter: God says: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1Pe 1:15-16 NIV).<sup>i</sup> Live out the holiness that God has given to you when you turned to Him.

So Jesus is coming back, what do we do? 1. We get ready, 2. we get right, 3. we get holy and finally: 4. We get excited.

You know when you have a vacation planned and you just keep thinking how great it will be to put your feet up and enjoy some rest? As it gets nearer and nearer on the calendar you get more and more excited?

Just imagine what it will be like when we arrive in the new heavens and the new earth, the way the world was always supposed to be; the world where every ounce of evil has been burned away and nothing but perfection remains. We say to our kids in this life: 'Life's just not fair.' That's not true in eternity.

And notice, it's not heaven per say that we are looking forward to – we are looking forward to the new heavens and the new earth, the restored and redeemed world that God made for us to live in before the Fall. I love the old hymns but sometimes I struggle because they make it sound like 'heaven' is our eternal home – like 'we go up to heaven.' But the reality is that God comes DOWN from Heaven, restores His original creation and dwells with us forever in the new heavens and the new earth.

Look forward to it. Get excited about it. Twice in three verses (12 & 14), Peter says 'you have so much to look forward to.' Imagine, a world without conflict. A world without fear. A world without sorrow or sadness or pain. A world where your body does exactly what you want it to. A world of perfection and beauty and abundance and the ability to see God face to face and feel the overwhelming power of His love for you. Get excited.

Get ready.  
Get right.  
Get holy.  
Get excited.

Now, if you recall, there's something special about Peter's second letter. Do you remember what it is? He's writing it on death's door. He says, 'since I won't be with you much longer, I want to make sure that you remember these things.' This has the gravitas of the apostle Peter's final words to us.

And what does he say? Jesus is coming back. He's not dillydallying and waiting around. He is giving people time to turn from sin, to clean out their junk, before He comes back to wipe out every trace of evil and usher in an eternity of perfection and righteousness and grace. I don't know about you but I want to be there. So how do we prepare?

We get ready.  
We get right.  
We get holy.  
We get excited.

BENEDICTION

ESV Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

(Rev 21:1-5 ESV).

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<sup>i</sup> 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (1Pe 1:15-16 NIV).