

## “Hurry Up ... and Wait”

2 Peter 3:8-13

<sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. <sup>11</sup> Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! <sup>13</sup> But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (ESV)

First as a side note: some people have asked me if I am embarrassed to be wearing a stole that matches the University of Washington [colors]. That's not why I'm wearing it. They don't make a garnet and gold one to match Florida State. Purple is the traditional color for Advent when you wear a robe. That's the reason for that.

In a word, Advent means one thing. It means “coming.” The church historically has not celebrated Christmas, *per se*. It celebrated Advent, the coming of Jesus. We celebrate it by looking backward from where we are, at His incarnation, and by looking forward to His coming again. In fact, historically the church, until relatively recently, the past 100 years or so, spent the majority of time at Christmas considering not Jesus coming in the manger but in fact looking with expectation to His second coming. So as I preach through the Advent calendar that the church has historically used, a lot of these passages have to do with the second coming and not with the manger.

If you remember, last week we looked at Mark 13 where Jesus spoke of His own coming. Regardless of your view of end times, or your view of what's going to happen, in the moment or days or weeks before Jesus gets here, almost every Christian that I know agrees that what will happen or must happen is that the Gospel will be preached to the nations, that everyone to whom God wants to extend His reach will hear. That will happen and not until then. So regardless of where you are, that's what's going to happen.

Peter, in this book, is addressing the very question of Advent. In a sense this book of 2 Peter is the most Christmassy book of all the books in the New Testament because it has to do with the second coming of Jesus, and some people who denied it. In fact, Peter says that very clearly in the first few verses of the chapter I read to you. He says why he wrote this book. I'll read it to you.

<sup>1</sup> This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, <sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” (ESV)

So there are a couple of things we need to lay as a foundation before we even jump into what today's text said. First of all, when is the “last days”? It depends if you have a Jewish worldview or if you have a Christian worldview. In the Jewish worldview they thought that after Adam and Eve sinned at creation, from that time until the coming Messiah was considered the “old age.” We would know the old age was over when Messiah showed up. When Messiah showed up He would immediately usher in, in all of its fullness, 100% of the new age. In other words, you would go from old age to new age in the twinkling of an eye and the world would be new and the world would be different. That did happen, sort of. According to a Christian worldview, as the Christian understands his Bible, the old age continued much as the Jews said, and then when Messiah comes He does inaugurate a new age, but the new age and the old age overlap.

It's during that time that people started to get sort of squirrely. Notice Peter is talking to a specific church saying, “In the last days scoffers will come.” And he rebukes those scoffers. So as far as Peter was concerned they were in the last days right then. In other words, the last days began as soon as Jesus appeared and they will continue all

of the way until He comes again. So Peter says, “They will show up and they will say to you, ‘So where is he? He said he was coming back. What’s the story? The fathers (I’m assuming he’s talking about the apostles), have been dead for a long time since creation and he’s not back yet.’” If I can summarize what Peter says about these guys, he basically says, “They’re idiots. They don’t get it, because if they really understood the Bible they would understand that from creation until the flood was a long time. God came to judge during the flood. What they apparently forget is that while God promised judgment, He brought it. It was a long time and yet it came. Just by virtue of the fact that the flood came in the time of Noah, they should realize that when God promises He’s going to do something, He does it.” Then Peter reiterates. He says, “In fact He is coming back to judge.” He’s talking about these false teachers. “He is going to come back and judge the ungodly, but this time it’s not going to be with water, it’s going to be with fire.” If Peter ended his book right there you should be saying, “Woo, that’s sort of harsh.” Yet Peter uses what I’ve told you many times is maybe the most important word in the whole Bible, the word “but.” In fact Peter uses it three times here. I was tempted to entitle the sermon, “The Three Buts of Advent.” But, I knew some of you would write letters and I didn’t want that. But three times he says, “But, but, but.” On one hand he says, “You know if they really understood things they would realize that this earth is reserved for fire. God will come to judge the ungodly.” And then he says, “But.” We’re only going to look at two things this morning. We’re going to look at the purpose of God’s patience. That’s point number one. And we’re going to look at the priority of our purpose. That’s point number two.

What is the purpose of God’s patience? Peter recognizes that Jesus has not returned yet. For us it’s even more the case because back then it would have only been maybe 30, 40, or 50 years after the fact. Now it’s been nearly 2000. Peter says, “Why is God patient?” or, “Why has He delayed his return?” The answer is, “But . . . God is patient.” Notice what he says in the first verse. Although destruction is coming, he says,

*<sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (ESV)*

So the first thing that Peter says is “But . . . God is patient. For the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day.” A lot of people spend a lot of time with that. The basic point there is that God’s timing is not your timing. And God’s timing is not my timing. God’s timing is perfect.

My youngest daughter and I started watching the Lord of the Rings trilogy again. One of the funniest scenes at the very beginning has Frodo the Hobbit sitting in a pasture reading as Gandalf the wizard comes riding down on a cart. Frodo comes out and rebukes him. He says, “Gandalf, you’re late.” And Gandalf looks at him and says, “Master Frodo, a wizard arrives precisely when he means to.” Think about it. In other words, “I’m not late, I’m here when I decided I would come because I’m in charge, not you.” Peter basically says, “God’s timing is different than our timing.” He’s not slow like we would count slowness. He’s not slow to keep His promise, but He is slow in coming. Why? Because He is patient and He is not willing that any should perish. Particularly the word “you.” He says, “any of you should parish.” You can’t understand this unless you understand the very purpose of the first coming, the first Advent. Why did Jesus come in the first place? The best summary of why Jesus came in the first place is Galatians 4:4. Let me read it to you.

*<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (ESV)*

So when the fullness of time had come, when God thought it was the right time He sent forth His Son, born of a woman. In other words, born of human flesh just like we were. Born under the law. He was born into submission to the law and under the law. Why would the One who gave the law have to submit Himself to the law? The answer is because you and I have no ability to keep it. We just can’t. Not just the Ten Commandments, but also everything else, even your own conscience. Paul says that God in the fullness of time sent forth His Son born of a woman, born under the law because He would keep the law on our behalf. He would be the One Who would live the life that we should live and then He would ultimately die the death that we would deserve so that He could redeem those born under the law. So unless you understand the purpose of the first coming it’s useless to think about the second coming. The purpose of the first coming was so that Jesus might

offer forgiveness by virtue of His death on the cross to any and everyone who would want to receive it. Everyone. That's why God is patient.

Do any of you have friends or family members who you're not sure know Jesus? Or you're absolutely sure they don't know Jesus? Do you really want Jesus to come back right now, right this second? Or would you rather share that message with them first? God is patient, not desiring anyone should perish but in fact that all would be brought into repentance. In other words, the reason that God is delaying in sending Jesus the second time is not because He is a procrastinator and it's not because He doesn't care, but it is in fact because of His grace. He has an infinite amount of care and He will not send Jesus back until every one of His children is brought in. "But." Right? God is patient, but.

I've told you the joke, whenever you say "but" you negate everything that came before it. So Peter says, "The ungodly will be judged, but God is patient." And then he says "but" again in the next verse. But what? Let me read it to you.

*<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. <sup>11</sup> Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (ESV)*

On one hand God is patient. Oftentimes I've talked to people who are skeptics who would say, "Why does God let all these bad things happen in the world? If your God is so powerful, why does He delay? Why doesn't He do something about it?" My answer oftentimes is, "Because He's patient. If He came back right now, would you be ready?"

"Yeah, but what about all the suffering."

How about you? If He came back right now, are you in good shape? Are you set up the way you're supposed to be? Perfect, moral, completely obedient to the law, never did anything wrong?"

People don't know what to say to that. Peter is saying, "On one hand God is patient, and the purpose of His patience is grace. He is not willing that any would perish. That anyone who would embrace Jesus would be saved from their sins." And then Peter says, "But . . . He will come." In other words, His time of patience will end, and when He comes His coming will be like a thief in the night. He is taking that teaching, by the way, from Jesus. What does He mean when he says he will come like a thief in the night? He's saying that His coming will be unannounced and unexpected. If that's the case, what kind of people must you be or you ought to be?

The purpose of God's patience is His grace, but what's the priority of our purpose? Given the fact that Jesus might return at any moment, what does that do to the way we live our lives? That's what Peter does. He asks the question. It's a logical question. If Jesus could come back at any moment, what sort of people ought you to be? What he says, if you read it closely, should surprise you a little bit because it's different than what most of us would think. In verse 11 he says.

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If you ask most people who claim to be Christians, "What do we need to be doing when Jesus returns?" Most people, in my experience, would say, "We need to be found holy and we need to be found good." In other words the bumper sticker – "Jesus is Coming, Look Busy." Most of the time He needs to find us being good. That's not what Peter says. He says, "What sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and goodness?" In other words he's saying, "Given the fact that you are holy and you are good by virtue of the fact that Jesus has given you all this, what should you be doing?" If you've trusted Jesus you are, according to your paperwork at least,

holy and good. Peter says, “Given the fact that that’s who you are, what should you be doing?” What does he say?

He says that what we should be doing is this statement that I hated to hear when I was in the Army. When I was in the Army I was in a unit that deployed a lot. We had different bags packed for different things. You’d get a call at midnight (that was before cell phones, so you had to tell them where you were going to be) so if you’re at the movies or some place, you get a call. You knew something was going on in the world. They would just tell you, “OK, you need that bag.” You never knew where you were going. You knew the environment because you had a bag that was more or less desert. You would rush to the airfield. It’s now 3:00 a.m. in the morning. You’re rushing; you’re getting everything together. Then you would get your parachutes on. Now it’s about 6:00 a.m. in the morning. The jump master would grab you by the hands and lower you down on your back like a turtle and then you would lie in that position for 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8 hours and everyone would complain, “Why did we have to hurry up?” “Hurry up and wait” was basically the phrase. You’re constantly hurrying and then once you get there you wait. What Peter says, “What kind of people ought you to be as you’re living these lives of holiness and godliness. What you need to be doing is hurry up and wait. You need to live lives that are defined by hurry up and wait rather than waiting and hurrying up.” What does he mean by that? The holiness and godliness are what we are. Waiting and hastening are what we do. Let me read that to you again.

<sup>11</sup> . . . what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God . . . (ESV)

On one hand we’re waiting. We’re patiently waiting for the day of God, Christ’s return. On the other hand we’re to be hastening the day of Christ’s return. The question is, “How do we hasten the day of Christ’s return?” By making sure the Gospel is preached to all the nations. Do you really long for Jesus to come back? If you really say to me that you long for Jesus to come back and you’ve never invited your neighbor to church or a service or talked to them over coffee about Christ, then I doubt that you really want Jesus to come back that much. Peter says, “Our job is to both wait and to hasten.” We are to be busy. But that should also be a way to order our priorities because in the context of all this stuff, Peter basically says another version of what Paul says about how we should build our lives. We either build with wood, hay, and stubble, or we build with gold and precious stones. Peter says, “Everything is going to burn some day.” It’s not a burning of destruction but it’s a burning of refinement. It’s a refiner’s fire. So at some point, everything you do, all the stuff you’ve collected, all the money you’re saving, all of these things will one day be gone. The question is, “Knowing that that’s the case what are your priorities in life?” Let’s up the ante. What if you knew for a fact that Jesus was coming back tomorrow? Is there anyone you would talk to differently? Is there anyone you would pursue? Are there people that if you had the ability you would walk, run, drive, take a plane in order to talk to them, and let them know that the day of the Lord is coming? And yet, He is patient. He will forgive all your sins. Will you do it? If you knew He was coming back tomorrow, would it change your priorities? Would it change your priorities on how you spend your money? Would it change your priorities on how you raise your kids? Would it change your priorities with what you did? Would your life be defined by trying to keep safe and making sure your kids were safe or would your life be a little more risky? Peter reminds us of this when he talked about the flood earlier, that you can believe God’s promises that a) He will come back, and b) it may be tomorrow. It could be tonight. Sometimes when I’m in the middle of what I think is a bad sermon I wish it was right then. But it could be any minute. If you knew He was come back any minute, how would that change your priorities? I ask you to think about that this week. As we move forward as a church, we transition into either eventually being a church that’s just here and is waiting and being good, or eventually becoming more and more a church that is waiting and hastening. That is waiting and gathering. That is waiting and is defined by this purpose and the fact that Jesus could return at any minute. Until that time we will drag every person into the kingdom that we can. Think about that as we continue on in the service.