

How to be Ready for Jesus' return

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[0 : 00] So 2 Peter chapter 3 and starting at verse 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. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 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 done in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 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. But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

[1 : 08] This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray as we sit.

May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. Amen. So keep your Bibles open.

You should have, when you came in, you should have got a sheet with points on it. And I hope that will be of some use. Right.

Great. My passage is, as you would expect, very closely to the verses that come before and those that follow. And so in the first third of the chapter, Peter has been talking about scoffers.

And the doctrine that the scoffers mocked was that of the second coming. They said, where is the promise of his coming? Is Jesus really going to come back?

[2 : 18] We expect it any day. And look, 30 years have gone past and he's not here. And today the scoffers are much the same, except they can say, well, look, it's 2,000 years almost and he's still not here.

And one of the scoffers' arguments was that nothing ever changes. You know, it's always the same. Everything goes on and on. We're in a completely stable, unchanging world and that's it.

What reason is there to suppose that God will suddenly intervene in a dramatic way? And last week, Peter's response was to point to the story of Noah. He says, in the time of Noah, God did act.

And the flood shows both that God acts and that he acts in judgment. And Peter's point is that God will act again. So on to tonight's passage.

I think it divides into two halves. The first half, which is verses 8 to 10, look to vital cross-references or sets of cross-references.

[3 : 33] And they're really words to the scoffers. And the second half is really words to the faithful. So first, let's look at verse 8.

It says, 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. Well, it's not difficult to find the cross.

Have I got this working right? Okay. First, the cross-reference. It's not obvious what the cross-reference is. Very obvious. It's Psalm 90. So let's look at Psalm 90.

I know we've sung part of it already this evening. You'll have noticed that when we sung, Oh God, our help in ages past. Thank you. And it's worth looking at the cross-reference because the reference appears to be to the psalm as a whole as well as to the reference in verse 4.

The reference in verse 4 is obvious enough. A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by or like a watch in the night. And I'll come back to that in a moment.

[4 : 43] But when you look at the psalm as a whole, it says that God is the everlasting God. Verse 2b, 2c perhaps you might call it.

From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. He doesn't need to be in a rush. God's timing is his timing.

He's the God who creates. Verse 2a, verse 2b, Before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the whole world. But he's also the God who destroys.

You sweep people away in the sleep of death. Verse 5. He's the God of both wrath and steadfast love. Verse 7, We're consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.

But on the other hand, when you get to verse 14, Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

[5 : 50] You can see how this follows on from the story of Noah. The story of Noah is a story of God's wrath against sin and also of God's steadfast love towards Noah and his family.

And here we see that God, as we've just said, is a saving God. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, which is obviously what he will do when he saves and when he relents and saves and makes us glad.

And he's our eternal home. Lord, you've been our dwelling place throughout all generations. So let's go back to 2 Peter, chapter 3, and we're going to stay there. I'm not going to jump about lots of times, only once.

We've had jumping about for tonight. Peter says that the scoffers are pointing people away from the eternal God, for whom a thousand years are as one day.

That they're pointing people away from the true God, who is a God of both wrath and steadfast love. A God in whom we can dwell forever.

[7 : 13] Moreover, in cutting off God's people from the second coming, the scoffers were removing one of the great incentives for holiness. One of the incentives to holiness is that God is coming and we need to be ready.

But there's actually a subtle addition in verse 8 that's not there. Well, it's slightly different in the psalm.

With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. I wonder if the second one, if the other one of those has a subtle meaning.

A thousand years are like a day. It's to do with God's, you know, his view of time is different from ours. But a day is like a thousand years, is the idea perhaps that it's amazing what we can do in a day.

In one day can be the day we respond to Jesus. It can be the day when we share the good news with someone else and they respond. So days are really critical.

[8 : 23] It's not just that God's perspective on time is very long, but individual days matter too. So let's go on to verse 9.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. I think that God's people always think that God is slow.

Why doesn't he answer my prayer now? Or you all do not have that problem. It's just me who thinks that. When I was thinking about this sermon I was sitting in our cottage in North Berwick and the whole project has been delayed by contractors.

I was actually sitting there waiting for a delivery from Ikea. And when it came it failed to come once and this time they came with too much.

So that was a problem too in a different way. So and the contractors always blamed suppliers or workmen. And in a way the scoffers were complaining about God's slowness.

[9 : 37] He didn't act. Perhaps they were by implication saying well he can't control his world. They were mocking God. but what Peter says is that God is patient.

God is he's not slow in the sense that he's dilatory. He's waiting for people to respond. If you look for cross references here I'll give you several.

Here's Habakkuk 2 verse 3 you don't need to look it up. But still the vision waits for the 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. But I think the most important cross reference is to Exodus 34 verse 6. None of you will need to look it up because we've all done it in home group unless you're a long way behind.

Even our home group has got there now. And so you won't need to look it up. You'll know it as soon as I give you the rest of the reference. It's a place where Moses asked for a vision of God but he only gets a partial vision.

[10 : 53] What he does get is God speaking to him. The Lord proclaims himself as the Lord the Lord a God merciful and gracious slow to anger abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Slow to anger. In fact the quotation is slightly confusing I think what the actual reference he's making.

Slow to anger when you translate that into Greek you get the same word as you get for patient in 2 Peter 3 verse 9.

The Lord is merciful and gracious patient. patient abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. of course when I think about God being slow to anger I often tend to go not just to the original verse in Exodus I think in some ways Jonah's use of the verse is almost my favorite.

I mean the great thing about Jonah's use is that he was so cross that God was slow to anger. He wanted the Ninevites got rid of he was furious that they'd responded and he said to God that is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish for I knew that you were a gracious God and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

[12 : 29] So the point that Peter is making is that Jesus hasn't come back yet because he's waiting for us to repent. he is kind and loving and not dilatory.

Just as aside at this point it isn't always that God is slow sometimes God is quick. Think of the father in the parable of the prodigal son.

The moment the son is on his way back to him the father ran and embraced him and kissed him. So God can be quick but he's slow to return because he's waiting for people to respond.

The eternal God the patient God and now in verse 10 we have a cross reference to one of Jesus' favorite pictures 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 done in it will be laid bare.

There are lots of possible places I could go but if I go to Luke 12 39 Jesus said but know this that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming he would not have left his house to be broken into the point is clear if we know that the thief is coming well if we're brave we'll sit up with our rolling pin all ready to hit the thief or if we're more sensible probably just leave the lights on and perhaps turn them on and off a bit so that he knows we're there and disappears but the point is that we don't know when the thief is coming so we aren't prepared with either rolling pin or lights switch to get rid of him we don't know when Jesus is coming the fact that he hasn't come so far doesn't prove he won't it's a favorite picture in the bible we find it used in various places

[14 : 47] Paul used it when he wrote to the Thessalonians 1 Thess 5 2 and 3 for you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night while people are saying there is peace and security then sudden destruction will come upon them the scoffers are really saying the same thing everything's peaceful and unchanging and Peter says it will change we just don't know when but there's another example of the story of the thief that I hadn't I'd never seen before I mean I'd read it before but it hadn't really struck me in Revelation 3 verse 3 in the letter to the church in Sardis Jesus says remember then what you received and heard keep it and repent if you will not wake up I will come like a thief and you will not know what hour I will come against you that there the picture isn't being used of

Jesus' final return in glory Jesus' unexpected coming to visit his people doesn't only happen at the end of time but can happen anytime anytime we need to be ready at anytime he may come and the earth and the works that are done in it will be laid bare as the NIV puts it I remember when I was at school sometimes the master would have to leave the class in order to go and there would be some sort of issue that would require his attention and he'd give us a task to do and leave the room and for a little bit of time we'd sort of think he'll be back any moment and we'd sort of start on the task and then we'd think well probably he's not coming very soon and the noise would get louder and louder and you know things would begin to know the paper darts or some excitement would happen you know and then less and less would get done the problem is after a while we forgot that he was coming back but he always came we need to be ready for Jesus to come

I think if we wanted to sum up what Peter is saying to the scoffers I think he's saying you don't know God your picture of God is not right you don't understand that he's the eternal God you don't understand that he's the patient God and you don't understand that he operates in ways that may be unexpected or at least at a time that's unexpected but he's also speaking in the passage to the faithful given the future given that Jesus is coming what sort of people ought you to be since everything verse 11 will be destroyed in this way what kind of people ought you to be you ought to live holy and godly lives more literally

I think I've used more we ought to live sometimes it's translated in holinesses and godlinesses the second one really is a plural the first one is more like godly forms of behavior it's plural it's not it doesn't say you ought to be holy and godly although we ought it it seems to be about actual actions we ought to be doing godlinesses doing holinesses I know those words don't have proper plurals in English it's a sort of practical thing that we have to be doing not just thinking holy thoughts although that would be good but to work them out in action there's no list of holinesses and godlinesses here there are many ways in which we can work that out in practical action but I wonder if the point is this we can't make ourselves holy very quickly we can't suddenly be transformed in that way but we can try and do holy acts what do

I mean by that maybe there are people you habitually avoid or I habitually avoid well I can speak kindly to them it may take time for them to become a friend but they can at least make a start maybe there's someone I envy well I can go up to her and congratulate her on her success I can go on doing the right thing until it becomes real in my heart until it becomes more real maybe that's not the right way of looking at it but I think that's the way I think of trying to do these holinesses and godlinesses I can make a start in the right direction I can seek to become holy by doing what's right so as we get ready for Jesus' return it's about holinesses it's also about hastening we don't have that exact phrase we have a different word here you ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of

[20 : 32] God and speed its coming some translations say and hasten its coming how do we hasten the coming of Jesus well we can pray thy kingdom come when we say the Lord's prayer we look forward to it coming we can pray the prayer at the end of revelation even so come Lord Jesus we can hasten his coming but I think most obviously we can hasten the coming of Jesus by mission Matthew 24 14 this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come in the earlier 20th century there was a powerful slogan evangelized to a finish to bring back the king that ties obviously in with the idea that God is patient while we wait for people to repent well we can go out and talk to people and point them to

Jesus and urge them to repent so by prayer and evangelism we can hasten the day of God hasten the return of Jesus and that day of Jesus that day of God will be a day when we are in a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells I'm not going to discuss in detail the relationship between that new heaven and our present one our new earth and the old earth I think it's quite difficult and there are lots of different bible verses that we compare with each other and it wouldn't help us terribly much here it seems very discontinuous old earth new earth but if you look at Romans 8 the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of

God which does suggest more continuity than we seem to be seeing as we naturally read here so I don't want to talk about that tonight because that's not what this passage is about the important thing here is that the new heavens and the new earth are the home of righteousness our present earth shows all the marks of sin the new one will be free of all that and so the challenge is to be ready to live in that new earth that new world are we looking forward to being in the place where righteousness dwells in the home of righteousness for me is that a hope or a horror do I have any of the child's anticipation of Christmas you know how you weeks before

Christmas children are looking forward to it there's this tremendous sense of excitement they say I can't wait how do I feel about the second coming do I say I can't wait is it something I'm looking forward to am I hastening it to bring it closer by my prayer and my evangelism that's a real challenge to me as I read that as I been reading this because what is clear is that people matter since all these things are to be dissolved what sort of people ought you to be sort of people we are is what matters and how we help other people to become what they ought to be so we're challenged to holiness to hastening we're looking forward to that home of righteousness we're fixing our eyes on the eternal patient yet at least as far as time is concerned unexpected

God let's pray as we said Lord Jesus maybe there's lots in our culture that causes us if not to scoff just to down pedal the thoughts of your return and so tonight we've come and we've thought maybe there are people that we long there are people that we long to see come to know the Lord Jesus we know that you're waiting for some of them to come to faith we pray for them now we pray that their coming will hasten the day of God their coming to faith we thank you that you are eternal and patient help us to be holy even so come

[26 : 23] Lord Jesus Amen