

## Patiently Looking Ahead

2 Peter 3:8-15

December 4, 2011

It is the second Sunday of Advent and we are continuing our hopeful preparations for the coming of the Lord. Even as we make our way toward our annual celebration of His first coming—as a baby in a manger, born of a virgin—we also make our way toward His triumphal return when He shall come as the King of kings and Lord of lords! This is our hope and the future the Father has promised. It is for this coming that the prophets longed and God's people have sighed for millennia.

We step into this morning's passage after Peter has already started dealing with the day of the Lord. Peter has already told his readers that people will scoff and doubt that Jesus is coming back. They will use as evidence the fact that He has not yet returned and that the world continues as it always has. They forget the flood of Noah's time, and they forget that the God who brought that flood still sits on His throne and is still in control of the universe. What God did once with water He has promised to do again with fire. Indeed, God has done it once. Do not think He will not do it again, especially if your only reason for thinking He won't is that He hasn't yet.

Peter has reminded us that the coming day of the Lord, foretold by the prophets, is still ahead of us. The prophets of old predicted it. Jesus confirmed it. We must wait for it.

So, it is here that our text begins. With the prophecy of the Day of the Lord yet to be fulfilled, Peter

looks at the issue of timing. What are we to do with the fact that the world will continue as it always has for a long time before Jesus returns?

The first answer is that God does not measure **time** as we do. In fact, it is fair to say that time is not really a factor for God at all. He knew how the universe was going to end before He began it. He sees the past, present, and future all so clearly that it is as if He were always in all of them. Many theologians believe His is. We don't really know how God perceives time. Peter's allusion here to Psalm 90 is enough to tell us that God does experience time, but not in the way we do. For us there is a vast difference between a day and a thousand years. One is a small fraction of our lifetime. Our lifetime, in turn, is a small fraction of the other. For God, they may as well be the same thing, or even ten thousand years for that matter. He is not going to die. He does not age. He knows all things. Time is very different on those scales. And again, God knew the end of all things before He started to create.

Because God does not experience time as we do, we cannot say He is ever late or slow to keep His promises. Peter tells us what is going on in verse 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."* This is the answer to those who say God will not because He has not yet. God is far more **patient** than we are. He is willing to wait, thousands of years if necessary, when doing so achieves His goals and brings Him glory. He is patient with His creation, waiting for all who will be

saved to be saved. The salvation that is found in Jesus Christ must be offered to all.

Note that the way to avoid perishing is through repentance. If we are not going to die and be eternally separated from God we must **repent**. We must feel godly sorrow for our sins, seek God's forgiveness, and turn from our sins to the One who has called us to be His own. We cannot be saved or know God if we hold onto our selves or our sin. As John says, "*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.*" (1 John 3:9) Without repentance, there is no forgiveness. We cannot continue to live life on our own terms and think that we belong to God and are saved. The first step in moving from death to life is repentance, and every day we must repent of the sin that still lives in us as we work with God to root it out.

So, God delays in order that the maximum number of people might be saved, and that those who are saved will have time to allow repentance to bear fruit in them. What happens when God is done waiting? What will the Day of the Lord look like? "*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.*" (v.10) When it comes, it will come suddenly, swiftly, and with finality. It will sneak up like a thief. This is a point Jesus made. It was Jesus who first used the language of the Day of the Lord coming like a thief in the night. Peter is remembering what his Lord said here. There will be signs that it is drawing near, but no indication as to when it will take place. It will be a surprise.

The Day of the Lord will also bring destruction. Peter says the very elements will be destroyed by fire. When that day comes there will be a radical reordering of the world, not only of political boundaries, but of the very nature of the universe itself. We do not appreciate just how much damage sin has done to God's creation. Paul talks about creation groaning, waiting to be relieved of the burden and effects of sin. When the Day of the Lord comes and God begins to set right the devastation sin has wrought, the world we know will be no more so that God's creation can be renewed.

Peter goes on to ask the appropriate question. "*Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?*" (v.11) In the face of this coming cataclysm, what are we to do? More to the point, what are we to **be**? As we wait for God to bring about the restoration of the world He created, how should we live? Peter gives us the answer in the same verse. "*You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.*" (vv.11,12) As we eagerly, expectantly anticipate the coming of our Lord, we must always be in communion with Him and behaving like His **children**. If we are children of God then we ought to live like it, living to please Him rather than ourselves. If we claim the salvation He offers, we must also live the life He commands. We do not want Him to come when we are marred by sin. We should live godly lives so we can be presented to Him without stain or blemish, pure and holy. Sin cannot enter His presence. Why would we want to be covered in it when we meet Him? We do not know when He will come, so we must always be ready.

It is interesting that Peter says we can speed its coming. We look forward to the day, and we speed its coming. God has decided when He will bring the day about. He has determined the conditions on which Jesus will return. Yet we have a role to play as we faithfully carry out our mission. If God's goal is to offer salvation to all, then it may be that we can speed Jesus' return by sharing the gospel. As we live lives in keeping with God's word and will, and as we share the message of salvation, calling people to repentance, we may actually be speeding the return of Jesus! Even as we wait patiently for it, we can play a role in helping it along.

Of course, God's promise is not just that Jesus will return and destroy the world as we know it. That is only the beginning. Peter reminds us, "*[I]n keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*" (v.13) Once God destroys what sin has wrecked He will create anew. Through repentance we have the promise of a new, eternal home with the Father of lights—a home of righteousness where sin cannot molest. We look forward to this with joy and anticipation of the glories and delights that await us as we receive the desire of our hearts, even the God who purchased us for Himself!

Peter reminds us that, since this is our future, it ought to effect our lives now. "*So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.*" (vv.14,15) Thanks be to God that through the shed blood of Jesus Christ we can

be declared spotless and holy before our God and Maker. Thanks be to God that through the Holy Spirit those who are in Christ have the strength and courage to live out what they have been declared to be. We cannot do it on our own. We must have the help of God, both to be saved and to live out that salvation. Once we have repented, with God's help, we must make every **effort** to be holy and pure, spotless and blameless before God. We must change our lives, and allow Him to change us until we are at peace with Him because nothing stands between us anymore.

We were reminded Wednesday evening that the time is passing. We still do not know when these events will take place. That is why it is so important that we are always ready for them. Jesus told several parables about staying alert as we wait patiently for Him. We must wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled. God often takes hundreds, or even thousands of years to work out His purposes. He is not late. He is not slow. He is patient and takes the ultimate long view. His patience means salvation.

Because God did not come while Peter was still alive, you had a chance to be born and to come to know a Savior. Because God tarries now, others will be given the opportunity to come to know Him and be saved. God is patient because He has a plan He is carrying out. We, too, can patiently look ahead to Jesus' return and the establishment of His kingdom on the earth, and while we wait we can live godly, pure lives and be about the mission He has given us.