

# The return of the Lord

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Preacher: Andy Meadows

[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to have our first reading now, so please turn in the Bibles to page 756. Page 756, Isaiah chapter 65, verse 17.

And God is describing the new creation that he's going to make through Isaiah. Chapter 65, verse 17.

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.

For behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.

No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days. For the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

[ 1 : 19 ] They shall build houses and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit. They shall not plant and another eat.

For like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity.

For they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord and their descendants with them. Before they call, I will answer. While they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord. The second reading this morning comes from 2 Peter chapter 3.

And this can be found on page 1226 of the Church Bibles. 2 Peter chapter 3.

[ 2 : 28 ] 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 that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles, knowing this, first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

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.

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water, and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these, the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

But by the same word, the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

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.

[ 3 : 51 ] The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

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.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 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.

But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by

him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you, according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

[ 5 : 18 ] There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. Amen. We'll do keep to Peter 3 open. Let me pray.

Father God, we thank you that you speak to us. We pray that you would speak to us now through your word. Amen. I just want to start this morning by reminding you that Christmas is in five days. But you probably don't need reminding of that. I reckon all of us here know it's Christmas in five days' time. You've seen the Christmas adverts.

You've been to the work parties. You've been to the nativity at school. You've had the carol services. We've had lots of stuff going on, haven't we?

[ 6 : 45 ] School concerts. We've had the jam Christmas formal with a family Christmas party. We had an nativity last week and a carol service and another one this afternoon. We don't need reminding that Christmas is coming.

And your children definitely don't need reminding. I reckon they know. I reckon they know. But as Simon said earlier, Advent is all about looking forward to the second coming.

And whilst it's hard to forget about Jesus' first coming, well, it's quite easy to forget about the second coming. We may tick the box and believe Jesus is coming back one day, but is it something we think about often?

Does it actually affect the way we live now? Is it something we talk to our children about, perhaps? If you're not a Christian here this morning and you're looking into the Christian faith, well, do you think the world is heading anywhere?

Is it just going to continue day after day? Are we going anywhere? I'm well aware this is not an easy subject, the end of the world.

[ 8 : 01 ] It can be like opening that Christmas present when it turns out to be something rubbish and something that you don't want. But Peter here aims to force this to the forefront of our thinking.

Today, as it were, we're getting a divine reminder, a divine post-it note, as it were, of the second coming, that Jesus will once again step into creation.

And there's an outline of this morning's talk on the back of your service sheet, so do follow that along with me. And you'll see the first point here. Remember that Jesus will return to judge the world.

Remember that Jesus will return to judge the world. Have a look down at verse one. This is now the second letter that I'm writing to you, beloved.

In both of them, I'm stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles.

[ 9 : 08 ] Peter's writing to these Christians with a specific aim, a specific purpose, that they remember what they've already been taught. He's not trying to teach them anything new.

He's just reminding them of the old things, of what they already know about the future. And the future, the second coming, is the aspect of the gospel that we often forget, that we don't concentrate on, really.

Is it part of the gospel you tell people when you explain the Christian faith? Is it why you don't tell people the gospel, maybe? Maybe it just sounds a bit too weird, all this stuff in 2 Peter 3.

My mates might just be able to comprehend an existence of God, that might just be able to comprehend that he came down to earth to die for sinners, but this whole stuff about destruction and coming again, it's just too alien.

When we read this, we think films like Day After Tomorrow, 2012, those kind of films come into our heads. and it's just so alien. Maybe it's too weird, even for our friends.

[10:20] Jesus coming back to judge the world, really? The friends might, they might put us in that same camp as you see the people on films who have to have those sandwich boards walking along saying the end is nigh, the end is nigh.

And we don't want to sound like that to them. So maybe we don't forget, we forget about it. And it's the parts that often gets shunted and it gets mocked.

And Peter says here, verse 3, there'll always be people who take the mick. Always be people who take the mick. Have a look down, verse 3. Knowing this, first of all, the scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

They will say, where is the promise of this coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. When told of the second coming, the reaction is, really?

You still believe that? Where is he then? What's happened? He's promised it. Where is he? He's nowhere. Can you really trust him?

[11:32] What kind of God promises he will come back and doesn't show for ages? But look again, what is the cause of this scoffing? Verse 3, they follow their own sinful desires.

These people aren't neutral. It's not a lack of knowledge problem. It's a sin problem. Because verse 5, have a look down, they deliberately overlook the facts.

And if we deliberately overlook the facts, I don't have to deal with the consequences. If Jesus is not coming back, if there is no judgment to come, then I can basically do what I want and it ultimately doesn't matter.

Now a lot of you have just had the last day of term. Now the last day of term is always an odd one, isn't it? It's always an odd one because you're kind of at school, but basically nothing really happens.

And that's that kind of, you're in that kind of free reign of basically I can kind of push the boundaries a bit. If you're honest, come on guys, if you're honest, you can say, well I can do what I want.

They're not going to give me detention. Last day of school.

[12:40] Maybe you feel that when your last day of job. You know, you're moving jobs, you think, nothing's going to happen. Very hard to get work done, isn't it, on the last day of your job. And we can kind of have that approach to this world.

If there's no threat of future judgment to come, then basically it doesn't matter how I live now. I can do what I want. If we operate on that belief, I can do what I want.

Nothing will happen. And it does feel like these scoffers, these people, have a point, doesn't it? It feels like they have a point. The world just keeps going.

It just seems to keep going. The sun rises, the sun moves, it sets, it rises, it moves, it sets. It's stable. You get back to school or work after the Christmas holidays and nothing's really changed. Same office, same classmates, same lessons, just keeps going. Another year. But when we're tempted to feel like that, Peter's answer to the scoffers is get your facts right.

[13:50] Get your facts right. The world hasn't just carried on from the beginning of creation. And Peter gives two examples of why that's not the case.

So have a look down, verse five. The heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God. and that by means of these, the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

God intervened when he created the world. Those repeated words in Genesis 1 and God said and it was so. God intervened at the very beginning through his powerful word and he intervened again in the time of Noah.

Genesis 6, 7 So the Lord said, I will blot out whom I have created from the face of the land. God said and it happened. God stepped in to judge.

So no, things just haven't continued as they always had. And so verse seven, have a look. By the same word, the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

[15:07] scoffers, get your facts right. Everything hasn't just continued. God intervened in the past through his powerful word, both in creation and in judgment.

And so, we can have confidence that the world is heading somewhere and then when God through his powerful word says he's going to do it again, well, we know that will happen. The final whistle will be blown.

The curtain will come down. It will be put your pens down and stop writing time. And it will be one of cataclysmic proportion.

A day of judgment and destruction for the ungodly. That's a divine reminder from 2 Peter.

Remember that Jesus will return to judge the world.

But why the delay? Where is this promise then? Now, Peter's writing just decades after Jesus said he was going to come back and people are mocking because it's too long.

[16:14] They've been waiting 30 years or so. Too long. We're now 2,000 years since Jesus promised to return. And so, the voice of the scoffers grows.

The voice grows and Peter deals with that delay. He tells us there's two reasons not to overlook and that's our next point.

Verses 8 to 10. Jesus hasn't returned yet because of God's timing and patience. Look down at verse 8. Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as 1,000 years and 1,000 years as one day.

Now, we are so bound by time, aren't we? I'm so bound by time that I can't even handle the clocks going forward and back. I walk around in a daze that I've got jet lag and I go up to people and say, you know, at 7, it's actually really 6.

And you do that for like a few days and it takes forever. It's chaos in your house. Children, patterns of sleep get thrown out the window. It's chaos. I can barely handle it getting at dark at 4 p.m.

[17:27] It's chaos. But because God is eternal, he is outside our time. He is not bound by it. A day is like 1,000 years and 1,000 years a day.

So to God, when we think about it, try and get our heads around this, 2,000 years is two days.

That's a weekend. That's nothing. Now, my grandparents and my fiancée, Alice's grandparents, are all still alive.

They're in their 80s and their 90s. And if you add up their ages, eight people, you get to 700 years.

That's quite a lot, isn't it? That's quite a lot. 700 years, eight people. It really isn't that long a time.

700 years takes us back to Edward II on the throne and the events of the film Braveheart. That's 700 years. And if we added up all the ages of everyone in this room, I reckon we'll comfortably get to 2,000.

Now, some get us closer than others. But I reckon we will comfortably get, I'm trying not to look at anyone now, we'll comfortably get to 2,000. We'll comfortably get to 2,000 years.

[18:40] The entire time between now and when Jesus was on the earth. Yes, it's a long time to wait for a bus, but for the end of the world, well, not really.

Not when we consider God's timing. He's outside of time. And also, not when we consider the reason for the delay. Have a look down verse 9.

The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards ye, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

God has got a fantastic reason why Jesus hasn't come back yet. God's aim is that the gospel would go out to all nations, that millions and billions of people will put their trust in Jesus so when he does come back, there'll be more and more people praising his name forever.

Do you remember when you became a Christian? Maybe you have that date in your head that you know when you committed your life to the Lord, or maybe it was gradual for you.

[19:48] But if you remember that day, aren't you glad that Jesus didn't come back the day before? Aren't you glad of that? If you became a Christian this year, aren't you glad that Jesus didn't come back last year?

Praise God for that delay. He delayed his return so you could turn back to him in repentance. Praise God for his character. What keeps him from judging the world?

Well, his love. He doesn't want people to perish, but people to reach repentance. What amazing love and patience God has.

With all the evil that is happening in the world, God is still deliberately delaying Jesus' return. Think of your neighbor, your classmate, your mates in halls who you share a house with, those people you're going to be spending Christmas to stay with if they're family.

God is deliberately holding back his judgment out of love and patience for them to turn back to him.

Well, if you're not a Christian here today, you're looking in on the Christian faith, well, know this about God's character, that he doesn't wish you to perish.

[ 21 : 09 ] He doesn't want you to face his punishment. It's like he's holding out his arms, ready to welcome you back. That is why he's being patient. But then comes the warning.

How long will you wait? Because you don't know how long we've got. Have a look down verse 10. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief and then the heavens will pass away and with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved and the earth and the work that are done on it will be exposed.

Peter's writing his reminders and he's writing to his people to remind them, verse 1, of what the holy prophets and Jesus said. And so, like Jesus in the Old Testament, he's using this imagery about the future judgment and it brings to mind words of Jesus in Matthew 24 on Mark 13.

That was read out earlier. The sun will be darkened. The moon will not give its light. It gives us, reminds us of Isaiah 34. All of the hosts of heaven shall rot away and the skies rolled up like a scroll.

Micah 1, 4. And the mountains will melt under him and the valleys will split open like wax before fire. And Nahum 1, 5. The mountains quake before him. The hills melt.

[ 22 : 36 ] Now, people differ on how we should interpret 2 Peter 3 if it's literal. But one thing is for sure. The whole Bible points to the truth that the world as we know it will end.

The coming of Jesus will be a monumental and cataclysmic event and it will not be missed. No one's going to wake up the day after and miss it. And Jesus in Matthew 24 and Peter say here that that day will come like a thief.

It will be unexpected. Now, over 50 predictions have been made about when it will happen this day. Even the world heavyweight boxing champion of the world, Tyson Fury, has recently weighed in.

A lot of things he hasn't said recently but he said this. We all live, we live in an evil world. The devil is very strong at the minute. Very strong.

And I believe the end is near. The Bible tells me the end is near. The world tells me the end is near. Just a few short years, I reckon, away from being finished. The end may be near.

[ 23 : 48 ] It may not be. God is being patient. God is holding back out of his love. But just as you don't know when a burglar is coming, we don't know when this day will happen.

But it will come and there'll be nowhere to hide. the works that are done on the earth will be exposed. And so maybe you're here and you've been putting off Jesus for a while.

Maybe you're here, you've been learning about him but you're just wavering. You just don't know what to do. Well, please don't presume that the patience of God will last forever.

Please don't presume that we can wait until your deathbed or when things quieten down because they probably won't quieten down. Today, God has been patient.

We don't know what tomorrow will hold. And so in the words of our kids song earlier, are you ready for him? And it's great to be reminded that when we put our trust in Jesus, we are ready.

[ 24 : 56 ] We are ready for him. Jesus will return to judge the world. He hasn't yet because of his, God's timing and patience but it will come just as Jesus himself said and just as the holy prophets said.

Well, so what? So what? What difference does that make now? What difference does that make tomorrow, Tuesday, Christmas Day?

What difference does that make? Well, three times in this last section, God's people are described as people who are waiting. But we've still got to go to work.

Sorry guys, but you've got to go back to school. You can't just ditch school, ditch your job and just sit on the sofa and look out the window and wait. We've got to carry on.

We've got to work. We've got to raise the kids. And so, what does it mean then to wait for God to return? What does it mean then?

[ 25 : 59 ] Well, that's our last point in this last section, verses 11 to 18. Knowing all this, live godly lives whilst waiting for Jesus to return.

Have a look down at verse 11. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 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.

But according to his promise, we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. In reminding his readers of the future, of what's going to happen, Peter's big application is towards holy living because holiness and righteousness are the things that will

ultimately last.

Verse 13, we are waiting for the new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. Out of everything in his life, righteousness will last.

Now last, Monday just gone, Alice and I went to John Lewis. We had to do the wedding gift list thing where you go around and you get this electronic zapper and you get to zap all the things that you want on your wedding gift list.

[ 27 : 24 ] I mean, it's the longest I've spent in any shop. Like four hours. It's mental. But you go around and we had a great system. I had the zapper. Alice chose what went on the list. I had the electronic zapper.

So I had the power of veto. And so she'd bring the stuff to me. I'd say yes or no. So we're doing that. And it worked. The system worked. It went well.

It was fine. And at the start of it, John Lewis, they give you a sheet of paper to help you get started. They give you a list of all their essentials that you think you should have on your list.

And I do that because I think John Lewis and I differ on what essential is. I mean, I don't think an ice bucket for champagne is essential. I mean, you may differ on that, but I, for one, think it's not.

And we were going around and we were zapping away. And it's very easy to get carried away.

Alice's back is turned. I zap a TV on there. That got removed. That got removed.

[ 28 : 21 ] But it's very easy to get carried away. And we had to remind ourselves that even this stuff is not going to last. Even John Lewis stuff will not last.

In the words of Two Peas, it will burn. It will melt. It will be gone. We still want people to buy that stuff. Don't get me wrong. But ultimately, it won't last.

It won't last. But Peter says, what will last? Righteousness. Holiness. That's where we're heading. And so live like that now.

I mean, our salvation completely rests on the finished work of Jesus. It's very important to stress that. Peter stresses that. Flick back to Peter 1. 1. 1. How does he open his letter?

Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. That's how we're saved.

[ 29 : 23 ] By the righteousness and God and through the Savior Jesus Christ. Christ. And when we put our trust in Jesus, that place is secure. That place in that new creation is secured.

But whilst we have the security that we will be there, Peter describes waiting for that day as an active wait. It's not passive like we're waiting for a train to come.

There's three words Peter uses, active words, diligence, care and growth. This is how a Christian should wait. Diligence, verse 14, have a look.

Since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace. We're diligent in lots of things, aren't we?

Our jobs, maybe you're diligent in your school work, your revision, you're diligent in practicing your musical instrument. adults. We're diligent in work, we're diligent, maybe we're diligent even in getting to church on time.

[ 30 : 30 ] We're diligent in preparing for growth group. We're diligent in preparing for Sunday club or jam. But what about godliness? What about diligent in fighting sin?

Teenagers, would the apostle Peter think revision is a good reason for missing church and jam? Would you think that? Would you think is a good reason that revision or sport or music is a good reason not to read your Bible?

I very much doubt it. I very much doubt it. This passage this morning is a divine reminder for us to be godly. That godliness matters.

When we're at home, we're in the classroom, we're at work, we're on the rugby pitch, we're at the school gates, godliness matters because that is what lasts.

And this is a divine reminder to Peter 3 to parents amongst us about how we model this to our children. When children see parents reading their Bible, making it to growth group in church each week, it shows them we value godliness and growth.

[ 31 : 46 ] But the flip side is also true. A diligence in other things over and above diligence in godliness.

Well, it models to them what we truly value and what will truly last. Diligence to be found with him without spot or blemish.

another application Peter makes is in verse 17 and 18. Have a look down. You therefore beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory both now to the day of eternity. Amen. See, verse 17 contains the negative application. Don't get carried away.

Verse 18 is the positive. Instead, grow. And notice these are only the two options Peter gives. That's quite stark, isn't it? The two options Peter gives.

[ 32 : 57 ] We're either becoming unstable, following the error of lawless people, or we're growing, becoming more like Jesus, growing in godliness, waiting for that day.

Peter doesn't give us a middle ground, a standing still. So more than we seek to grow in our skill set with our job, more than we seek to grow in knowledge at school, or musical instrument, or anything like that, Peter says the Christian life is a growth in godliness.

That is what he's saying. Growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. God has a tendency to push Jesus out of the front of our minds.

And so no matter how long we've been Christians, we shouldn't just rest on the years of Sunday club, the years of sermons, the years of quiet times we had in the past.

Each day presents a fresh challenge to remember what Jesus has done in the future. each day comes the fresh challenge to not forget and replace it with error.

[ 34 : 16 ] A twisted view that Jesus is coming back, is not coming back, so we can do what I want. If you're not a Christian here today, well know where the world is heading, but know why it hasn't happened yet.

God's kindness and love to this world. allowing people time to come back to him. So will you do that? And if Christians amongst us this morning, this is a divine reminder of Advent, of the day and the future where God will come.

So remember the future. Remember where this world is heading. Don't listen to the scoffers and become unstable. Look forward to the new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. Righteousness lasts. So when we have that secure place in heaven, we're getting ready for that now by being godly. We're growing in godliness now as we wait for that day to come.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the truth in your word about where the world is heading. And we thank you that evil in this world will not go unpunished.

[ 35 : 39 ] And we thank you, Father, for the new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. Father, we thank you for your work on the cross that has secured that.

And Father, please help us now to wait and grow in godliness. Amen.