

Jesus is returning soon!

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[0 : 00] 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 Savior 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.

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. 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.

[1 : 43] But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Well, it's only eight days until Christmas, and that means if you have got an advent calendar, as Simon was showing earlier, you've probably opened quite a few presents, chocolates from the advent calendar, if your advent calendar has chocolates itself.

And I guess advent calendars are hugely popular, aren't they? If you just kind of go on Google and type in advent calendars, you get thousands and millions of hits, and there's a huge amount of money to be made by selling them each year.

But I want to suggest, as Simon's already hinted, that advent calendars have made a huge mistake. And the mistake is the picture on the front. See, as we've already seen, advent means coming or anticipation of an important event, and it's often used to mean the coming of Christmas.

But the festival of advent really refers to Jesus' second coming, not his first coming, because his first coming has already happened. We can't look forward to his first coming, because it already happened 2,000 years ago.

So advent is really talking about Jesus' second coming. So what should the picture on the advent calendar be? Not a baby in a manger, but a king coming to judge the world.

[3 : 10] Jesus coming a second time to wrap up history. Now I wonder if you suggested to Amazon or Tesco or whoever about whether they should change the picture on the front of their advent calendars, whether they'd be that excited.

I'm sure they wouldn't sell as many in the shops. If advent calendars were about Jesus' second coming, I'm not sure they'd be quite so popular. But I guess it shows, doesn't it, that our culture has forgotten, perhaps deliberately forgotten, that Christmas is not only about Christ, but that the Jesus of Christmas promised he would come again.

I wonder about you. I guess it's easy to forget, isn't it, with all the preparations for Christmas. What are we going to get people for presents? What are we going to make for Christmas dinner?

When are we going to watch the Queen's speech? All these things in our minds, it's easy to forget that Jesus will come again. See, we forget that the baby in the manger grew up, died on a cross, rose again, ascended to heaven, and he will come a second time.

Well, today we're going to be looking at the book of 2 Peter, chapter 3 in the New Testament. So if you've got a Bible, keep it open or turn back to page 1226, 2 Peter, chapter 3.

[4 : 29] And have a look at verses 1 to 2, which we had read just now. So in his letter, Peter was writing to Christians like us, who attempted to forget.

Have a look at what he says in verse 1. This is now the second letter that I'm writing to you, beloved. In both of them, I'm stirring you up, 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.

See, Peter wants us to remember that Jesus' first coming points somewhere, it points to his second coming. He wants us to be as certain of his second coming as we are of his first coming.

Well, how certain are you of his first coming? Have a look just over the page back to 2 Peter, chapter 1. And you'll see how certain Peter was of Jesus' first coming.

So chapter 1, verse 16. Peter says he was really, really certain that Jesus did come the first Christmas. Peter was there.

[5 : 58] Peter was there when Jesus came the first time. Now perhaps you were here this morning and you've always thought that Jesus' first coming is kind of part of cleverly devised myths.

It's a kind of nice fairy tale and you've always thought the idea of God coming to earth in the person of Jesus is just kind of a bit quaint. It's a nice story for Christmas but if you think that, that obviously his second coming, it just doesn't seem credible.

If you don't think he came the first time, you won't think he'll come the second time. So if that's you, why not spend a bit of time this Christmas having a read of the Gospels in the Bible, the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' first coming.

Peter was convinced that the Jesus of Christmas did come the first time. He was convinced that he was who he said he was. Do you remember the message of the angels? A saviour has been born to you.

Christ the Lord. God come to earth. And it's because of Jesus' first coming that Peter wants to remind his readers and us of Jesus' second coming.

[7 : 06] So we easily forget, perhaps particularly, at Christmas. So turn back to 2 Peter chapter 3 and have a look first from verses 1 to 7.

I want us to see the first thing that Peter tells us is that the Jesus of Christmas will return as judge. If you've got a service sheet, perhaps turn on the back and you can see an outline that might be helpful.

The Jesus of Christmas will return as judge. And that's from verses 1 to 7. So have a look down again at chapter 3 verse 2.

Peter talked about, didn't he, the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles. That is the Saviour, Jesus. So what's the prediction?

What is it that the apostles and Jesus and the prophets promised all those years ago that Peter wants his readers to remember? Well, it's there in verse 4.

[8 : 07] Have a look at verse 4 in the words of the scoffers. Where is the promise of his coming? See, the Old Testament prophets and Jesus and the apostles, they'd all pointed forward, they'd all promised that Jesus would come a second time to wrap up history, to judge the world once and for all.

I guess if most of us are honest with ourselves, we find the end of the world stuff a bit difficult to believe. I mean, Hollywood have made some quite impressive films about the end of the world or the apocalypse and there's this kind of fantasy and science fiction and it's great, but it just seems a bit unrealistic, doesn't it?

After all, I mean, what we have known is getting up in the morning, seeing the sun rise and the sun set. You get up the day after, the sun rises and the sun sets.

Why should it be any different? Why should history have an end? I mean, why not just go on forever? That's what the scoffers were wondering. You know, everything goes on since the beginning of creation.

Well, no wonder then that the scoffers in Peter's day and the scoffers in our day doubt Jesus' return. Maybe you're one of them.

[9 : 25] Maybe you would say, yeah, I'm a scoffer. I don't really believe Jesus' second coming. Well, in verse 3, he says that scoffers will come in the last days and they will say the same thing today as they ever have done.

They'll say, ever since our fathers fell asleep, everything continues as it did since the beginning of creation. It seems fantastical, too ridiculous.

The idea that history would just stop, that the world would come to an end until you realize what it is that the scoffers have forgotten, what they've deliberately forgotten or deliberately overlooked.

So have a look come with me to verse 5. Look at what Peter says about the scoffers. For they deliberately overlooked 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 the word, the world of that time was delisted with water and perished. You see, the universe has not always existed.

[10 : 34] It's not this kind of cycle that goes round and round forever. The world has not always existed. History had a beginning. It didn't just spring into existence. God created it.

And so God created the world as we read in Genesis chapter 1 with his word. He destroyed the known world in Noah's day in Genesis chapter 8. And it's by the same word that Peter says God will one day destroy the current heavens and earth with fire.

That's what he says in verse 7. And by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored for fire. I guess our culture has deliberately forgot, hasn't it, that Christmas is about Christ.

They've deliberately forgot that God created the world in the first place and therefore that he'll bring it to an end. And they've deliberately forgotten that God judged this world in the past in the day of Noah and he will judge it again in the future.

Now when I was younger, probably about, I don't know, eight or nine or something, I remember my mum telling me that I'd kind of forgotten something important to do. And what it was is she'd asked me to do something, which I actually can't remember what it was even to this day, but she'd asked me to do something.

[11 : 50] And I just kind of said to her, well, I didn't do it because I forgot. You know, I tried to make it out that it wasn't really my fault. Forgetting is just something that happens to some people sometimes and, you know, I was just kind of this innocent bystander in it all.

She'd asked me to do something I'd forgotten and I hadn't done it. Well, you know, not my fault. And I remember her saying to me, if something's important enough, you'll remember it.

You know, if doing what she'd asked was important to me, I would have remembered it. But it's just that I didn't really care. It was way down my priority list. Now, I know that some people are better at remembering things than others.

But no one here has forgotten that it's Christmas in eight days' time. No one has forgotten at all because it's important. But what about the return of Jesus as judge?

See, we do forget, don't we? We kind of put it way down on our priority list because we don't want to think about it. As a culture and perhaps as a church, we put it to the back of our minds.

[12 : 57] In some ways, we deliberately forget, just as the scoffers did in Peter's day. Or perhaps you'll hear this morning, you kind of think about the idea of Jesus returning as judge as, you know, it's sort of a thing that makes you feel uneasy.

I guess the idea of judgment is not very popular today because it feels so, well, judgmental. That is, until people start talking about crime or terrorism or the Grenfell Tower or wanting justice to be done.

You see, the truth is people do want justice. They love the idea of justice. They just don't like it when they're being judged. See, we want it both ways, don't we? We want our cake and we want to eat it.

We want justice but we don't want to be judged ourselves. But the Bible says, doesn't it, that we're all naturally under God's judgment. We all reject the God who made us and we go our own way.

And that's why Jesus had to come the first Christmas. Do you remember the message of the angels? A saviour has been born to you. We needed saving. But this saviour who came at Christmas the first time will return as judge.

[14 : 12] History had a beginning and it will have an end. Well, you say, I mean, well, why hasn't Jesus come back already? I mean, it's been a pretty long time, hasn't it?

2,000 years, in fact. 2,000 years. Why have 2,000 Christmases gone by? I mean, what's God playing at? Why hasn't Jesus come back already?

Where is the promise of his coming? Well, that brings us to the second thing I want us to see from this passage and that is that God is patient. Again, if you've got a service sheet, do have a look on your outline.

Secondly, God is patient to give us more time to turn back to him this Christmas. And that's from verses 8 to 9. So have a look at verses 8 to 9 with me.

What Peter writes is he says, do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as 1,000 years and 1,000 years is as one day. The Lord's not slow to keep his promises as some count slowness but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.

[15 : 26] See, Christmas may not happen this year. You might think it would be a real shame. You've got only eight days left and all your preparations you've done already but Christmas might not happen because Jesus could return in the next eight days.

I wonder how you'd feel about that. Perhaps a huge amount of relief. Perhaps real regret for all the preparations you've made already but if he doesn't return in the next eight days it's not because he's forgotten.

It's not because he's changed his mind that he's kind of given up on us. It's because he's patient. See, God's time is not our time. In verse eight it says that a thousand years are just like a day.

Picking up the idea from Psalm 90 that God is eternal and we're temporary. A thousand years is nothing to him. It's as if Jesus' first coming was two days ago so Friday just gone.

We're so impatient but God is patient. Perfectly patient. He doesn't want anyone to perish. And that's why he's waiting for more to turn back to him.

[16 : 37] But Peter says when Jesus returns as judge he will destroy those who've rejected him as king. See, justice demands that evil is punished and the Bible says that those who have rejected Jesus will themselves be rejected.

But he doesn't want to. He doesn't want to. You see, Jesus doesn't want to destroy anyone. He doesn't want to have to destroy any of his people. It's not his heart because he longs that all people will be restored to a relationship with the God who made them.

So the reason that God is holding back the day of judgment is so that more people including you and me can be saved. So if Christmas comes this year, if in eight or nine days time Jesus hasn't returned, it's so that you and I have more time to turn back to God.

Now a few months ago the US led coalition with the Arab and Kurdish militias recaptured the city of Raqqa in recent months from the so-called Islamic State and it took them months and months and months of fighting and kind of trying to gain ground little by little in order to take it back because they were trying to save as many civilians as they could.

Obviously many didn't survive but the point was they wanted to save the civilians because they could have captured Raqqa a lot quicker couldn't they? They could have just bombed it completely to pieces.

[18 : 12] But then no civilians would have escaped at all. The reason that judgment on so-called Islamic State took so long is so that more civilians could be saved. They wanted as many people to be rescued from the city as possible.

The coalition didn't want any civilians to perish so they had to be patient. And I guess in a similar way God hasn't destroyed all evil yet because he'd have to destroy us.

He's patient with us giving us more time to turn back to him. When Peter talks about reaching repentance in verse 9 repentance is a bit of a jargon word but he just means turning around.

He means to stop living for yourself and start living for the God who made you. I guess if I was to ask most of you what are your plans over Christmas many of you would say well I'm going to relax have some time off I'm going to put my feet up take it easy slow down.

Isn't that what Christmas is about? Many people would say what Christmas is about is sitting in front of the TV with your family and just nothing to do at all. Christmas is a time to relax. No hasty decisions no rush no deadlines nothing urgent to do at all.

[19 : 33] But of course that's not the message of 2 Peter chapter 3 is it? See the main reason that God is withholding his judgment is to give us time to turn back. Not tomorrow or next year or in 50 years time but now he wants you to use this Christmas time to turn back to him before it's too late because Christmases will not go on forever.

This might be your last Christmas to choose to turn back to him. And that's because of verse 10 isn't it? Have a look down with me at chapter 3 verse 10 because of verse 10 the day of the Lord will come like a thief.

It will come without warning as we saw from the reading in Matthew earlier. And when Jesus comes he won't just come to judge the world he'll also make a new world.

And that brings us to the third and final thing I want us to see from this passage is that your Christmas presence won't last because God is making a new world. And that's from verses 10 to 13 in our passage.

So in verse 10 Peter uses this phrase the day of the Lord will come like a thief. It's a phrase that the Old Testament prophets thousands of years ago used to talk about the end of history.

[20 : 53] When God would make everything right again. When perfect justice would be done. When God's King Jesus would judge the world. But it will come like a thief.

It will be unexpected. It could happen in the next eight days. I guess many of us have had experiences here of being burgled. We weren't expecting it were we?

None of us were expecting it. Our possessions were taken without warning. It happened like a thief. You can't predict it but it can change everything.

Like a thief breaking in to our world. Peter says the return of Jesus will come unexpectedly and it will change everything. Not just a few possessions or your Christmas presents going missing.

the very fabric of the universe will be ripped up. Have a look at the language that Peter uses in verse 10. 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.

[22 : 04] Later in verse 12 have a look he describes the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

It's apocalyptic cataclysmic language for the end of history. It feels so over the top to us but that's the only way Peter can describe the fundamental change that's going to take place.

It's not that the world is getting a makeover or it's being refurbished or it's being done up. It's being destroyed. A Hollywood film or even nuclear war with North Korea cannot come close.

So what about your Christmas presents? Maybe they're already sitting under the tree and you're longing to open them or maybe you're going to have to dash to the shops on Christmas Eve for a last minute purchase or dash to the internet in the next couple of days.

Hold on to them lightly because they're going to be destroyed along with everything else. And what's far better is what God will make which is a new creation.

[23 : 15] Have a look at verse 13. According to his promise we're waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

new new creation. Now you might say what's wrong with this heavens and this earth? What's wrong with this creation? It's quite fun. Got lots of Christmas presents. What's so good about this new creation?

Well what's so good is that righteousness dwells there. No evil, no suffering, no sickness, no death, no homelessness over Christmas, no family arguments around the Christmas table, no regrets, no broken families, no broken homes.

In the new creation God dwelling with his people will restore us to the relationship that we're created for. So how should we live differently in light of this new world?

Well Peter tells us in verse 11, doesn't he, he says since all these things are going to be destroyed, since your Christmas presents are going to ultimately perish, how should you live in lives of holiness and godliness?

[24 : 23] In other words, lives which point people to the first coming of Jesus and get them ready for his second coming. Lives which point people, verse 12, to the day of God, the coming of the day of God, Jesus returning as judge.

And lives I guess that show that we're not living for our Christmas presents or our homes or our families or our careers because they're not going to last. We're living for a new creation.

We said earlier, didn't we, that Peter was writing his letter to his readers to help them remember and help us remember things that we forget, things that we sometimes deliberately forget, things we'd kind of rather not think about, especially not at Christmas.

Perhaps you're here and you've been sitting here so far and you're kind of thinking, well, I feel a bit unsettled by all this talk of judgment. I mean, it's Christmas in eight days' time. Judgment and the end of the world is not exactly the Christmas spirit.

But actually it is. It is what Christmas is about because Jesus' first coming points to his second coming. He came the first time because he would also come the second time.

[25 : 42] As saviour and as judge, we desperately need to turn back to God while he's still patient with us. So if talk of future judgment kind of unsettles you, then perhaps it's a good thing because perhaps this Christmas will be the first time that you've taken the Jesus of Christmas seriously.

We live in a culture, don't we, that is desperate to forget what Christmas is really about. It's desperate to make as much money out of Christmas as possible, not just Advent calendars and Christmas puddings, but the latest gadgets and toys, and it's commercialised Christmas, hasn't it, to make it soft and fluffy and I guess not really about Jesus at all.

And I suppose that's a danger for Peter's readers, not that Christmas was being commercialised back in the first century, but that their culture was pulling them away from Christ.

Have a look at the end of Peter's letter to them in chapter 3 verses 17 and 18. Just down again, chapter 3 verses 17 and 18, to see what Peter is saying to his culture.

He says, you therefore beloved, knowing this, sorry, saying to Christians around that time, knowing this beforehand, take care that you're 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.

[27 : 14] To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity. Peter's reader's danger is our danger.

Not that we get rid of Christ altogether, but that we keep him in the manger, that we're carried away by error, by the error, by the lie that says Jesus isn't coming back.

The lie that says the baby in the manger, he's not going to judge the world. The lie that says God has broken his promise, that he's forgotten. See, Peter writes to his readers and to us to warn us not to be carried away by the lies of our culture, but instead to grow in knowing Jesus better, to long for his return, to tell people about his first coming, and to get them ready for his second coming.

I had a bit of a look when I was preparing to speak on this passage on the internet for Advent calendars with Jesus coming as judge.

And I wonder how many you think I could find. I mean, perhaps I wasn't looking hard enough, but I did search for about 20 minutes, and I couldn't find one. I couldn't find a single Advent calendar that had anything to do with Jesus returning as judge.

[28 : 31] I mean, there are thousands and thousands of Advent calendars with Jesus as a baby in a manger, but not one of them has him coming a second time. Now, for the more creative of you, you may decide that next Christmas you want to make your own Advent calendar, perhaps give it as a present to someone with Jesus returning as judge, and see what they say.

But the point is, isn't it, that in our mind, and in our culture's mind, we want to keep Jesus as a baby. I mean, babies, as I've sort of learned recently, are relatively safe.

I mean, babies are relatively safe, but the baby in the manger grew up. He died on a cross and rose again. He went into heaven and will come as judge.

So as you enjoy Christmas this year, and I hope you do, if Jesus doesn't return in the next eight days, remember that he is coming again. It's not that he's forgotten, it's that he's patient.

But as surely as he came the first time 2,000 years ago, he will come a second time to judge this world and make a new one. Thank you.