

Everything has it's time

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[0 : 0 0] quite amazing how much of the Bible is in that song that we've just sung together. We've started back up our fourth Thursday Bible studies out at Old Farm Court, and last year we did, and part of this year, we did The New Heavens and the New Earth, and of course that hymn was quoted quite often. But if you'd like to take your Bibles and turn with me to 2 Peter chapter 3. So Peter comes after Hebrews and James. In fact, it's quicker to find it if you go to the end of the Bible, Revelation, Jude, and John, 3 John, 2 John, 1 John, and then you get to 2 Peter chapter 3.

So 2 Peter chapter 3, beginning in verse 1. Now hear God's Word.

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 commandments of the Lord and our 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 Word that then existed, the world, sorry, that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But the same Word, the heavens and the 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 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 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 in 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. There are some things in them which are hard to understand, which the ignorant and the 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 glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Amen. Well, we're going to stand and sing These are the Days of Elijah. Well, this is the final message before our day of prayer, and again, something else for us to think about. And so I want to begin by saying that what I'm about to say I've said before, but I want to say it this evening as by way of reminder. Samuel Johnson once said that people only need instructing once, but they need reminding all the time. And that's exactly what Peter is saying here in the last chapter of his letter. It contains lots of instructions, but it's really not an instruction sense that this is the first time that they've heard it. Rather, they are being reminded of the instructions that they have received before. It's not that they need instructing again, but what they need again is to remember the instructions that they have received. Now, growing up, I constantly couldn't tell the difference between the two. I always thought that if I was being told again, that I didn't need to be told again. I understood the instruction. But the reason why I was being told again was not because

[5 : 58] I didn't understand the instruction. It was actually because I didn't carry the instruction out. The second time I was told was not for reason for instructing me. It was a reason for reminding me of the instruction that was yet to be done. And that's kind of how Peter is writing his letter to these believers. And if you imagine these believers to be like, just for a moment, you know, growing children. And it would be wrong to say, yeah, you've told me a thousand times. Yeah, but you've told me.

Yeah, but you've told me. Yeah, but you've told me. Well, yeah, and I'm going to keep telling you until you do it. So the instruction is continually brought to them as a reminder so that they actually keep fulfilling the instructions. It's not that they need instructing again. It's that they need reminding of the instructions again and again and again. Now, just stop and think for a moment of what would your final words be?

I had a conversation with a few ministers once over what we would like on our gravestones. I don't know how it got on to that, but, you know, we wanted different things. And John, sorry, Peter here, has got his final words. What would be your final words?

You're just about to die. Peter seems to be anticipating that he's near the end of his life anyway. And soon after he writes this letter, he's going to be martyred in Rome.

And so he knows that what he writes, he has to write with clarity and he has to, you know, God the Holy Spirit brings it to the people. But it's interesting that Peter doesn't decide to say anything new. He decides to say something that he said to them time and time again.

[8 : 09] And so you might want to stop and consider just how important is it for you as a Christian not to receive more instruction, but to be reminded of the instruction that you have received over the years of being a Christian. And the reason why you're reminded again and again of the instruction, all the instructions that you have received to follow Christ faithfully.

And it is because it's not that we need instructing again, but because we forget to fulfill the instructions that we've been given. We don't fulfill them. And so what's the point? What's the principle here? Well, Peter knows that living in this world is difficult. He also knows that living in this world as a Christian is even more difficult. The Christians that he is writing to understand exactly what Peter understands, that this is a difficult world to live in, even more difficult if you believe in Jesus.

And so what do you do when you know things are difficult? Well, I think you do, like most people, and that you long for it to be over. You're almost preoccupied with the thought of how much longer is this going to continue. And so you can't seem to think about anything else other than when's it going to end, when's it going to end, when is it going to be over? And you seem to be waiting for one thing and one thing in particular, and that is when will it be over? And it doesn't seem to matter what happens, you know, now. You're just waiting for it to be over. And so you then begin to question whether or not it's going to be over soon. Now, if you add that to the fact that Jesus is meant to be coming back, well, he is coming back, but you're anticipating Jesus coming back, but he hasn't come back. Well, of course, when you put those two together, you want to escape this world, which is never God's intention. It's always to renew the world and to put you back on it into a new heavens and a new earth. And then you're waiting for Jesus, but Jesus hasn't come. It's easy to get to this age and stage in the church and think that you've been waiting 2,000 years for the return of Christ.

But we haven't, have we? It's even tempting to think that these Christians here in Peter expected the Lord Jesus Christ to return in their own lifetime. But I don't think that's true either, is it? I don't think we're led to believe that the Christians in the early church actually believed that Christ would return in their own lifetime. I think there's quite a lot of things to suggest quite the opposite.

So what if it is the case that these Christians here are not expecting Jesus to return in their lifetime, but are actually quite confident that He's going to return far further into the future?

[11 : 25] Well, if you just hold that thought in your head just for a moment, you then begin to ask different questions about how you're going to live your Christian life. Because now you have to live it with the mindset that this is going to continue and Jesus isn't actually going to come back in my lifetime to spare me from it. Now you have to come up with a whole new list of how to live in a difficult world and follow Jesus. Just ponder the thought that these early Christians, and may even you be one of them, may actually be living in a time in which Christ is not going to return. Because there have been many, many generations for whom that is actually being the case. How many generations of Christians have lived and have died without any return of Jesus? And I think we almost have to stop and consider the possibility. I think that that seems to be what Peter is writing this third chapter for.

Now every believer knew at the same time that Jesus Christ could return tomorrow or tonight, but the reason for that was really to promote in them what kind of people should you be?

You know, people who were to live in the right kind of way and think in the right kind of way. And so Christians often have different thoughts about what Jesus will do when he comes, when will he turn up.

In fact, didn't we have a guy a couple of years ago that actually predicted the date twice and got it wrong? You know, you do end up with these people.

But the point here this evening is quite a simple one. That there is a time for everything and everything has its time. That's Peter's overwhelming theme, I think. That there is a time for everything and everything has its time.

[13 : 40] So just look with me quickly at verse 9. Peter speaks about the patience of the Lord. In verse 9 and in verse 15 he says, count the patience of the Lord as salvation.

Well, that requires an issue of time. Patience is the passing of time in which you have to be patient in. Okay, if it happened tomorrow, you wouldn't have to be patient that long.

So count the patience of the Lord as salvation. And so the time that passes is there. The scoffers say that the world has been the same ever since creation. Verses 4 and 5. Again, that's another issue of time.

Look at all these years and nothing's happened. You know, and if you go into the future, nothing's going to happen in the future. Well, that's an issue of time. The believers are told to wait.

Verse 12 and in verse 14. Well, waiting, you do that in time. Time passes as you wait. Then in verses 8 and 9, you've got the Lord's perspective on time.

[14 : 40] And that is, a thousand years is a day, and a day is a thousand years to the Lord. Well, that's an issue of time, or rather how God or the Lord Jesus Christ considers time to be from his perspective.

And so time seems to be a big part of everything that Peter actually wants to say here. It seems to be a fairly big part of what he wants the believer to understand about time.

Now, I don't know if you've spent any time thinking about time. But that's exactly what Peter seems to want the believer to do here.

So how does he explain this? What's the explanation? What does it all mean? Well, first notice that there are three different groups of people involved. In verses 2 to 7, we have the prophets who proclaim that the Lord would return in the future, but have then died.

We then have the scoffers who are saying, well, where is he? And they're still around. And then, of course, we have the Christians who are living, having to remember the promises that God has made, but then at the same time live in a world where scoffers saying, God, who believes in God?

[15 : 56] Jesus? You don't really think that Jesus is coming back, do you? And so what do you say to people who speak to you like that? Come on.

You don't really believe that Jesus Christ is going to come back, do you? Well, Peter knows that he's living in the last days. The Christians that he is writing to know that they are living in the last days.

And if they're living in the last days, then guess what? We are as well. We've been living in the last days ever since Pentecost, where it's first mentioned.

So Jesus will come, but where is he? We've been waiting a long time, or have we actually been waiting a long time?

Nothing is happening, the scoffers say. It doesn't look like your God is actually doing anything about this world, and Jesus hasn't returned. Where is he?

[16 : 59] It's been the same since creation. The world hasn't changed, and it doesn't look like it's going to change. And yet Peter says that these people who say such things either say it because they have to overlook huge amounts of Scripture.

You know, they forget that God created the world and the heavens and the earth, and he destroyed it once with water. He will destroy it again with fire. They have to overlook all of that. But then you've got a whole load of other people that just don't believe anything in the Bible anyway.

And so they overlook the biggest event that God ever accomplished, and that is the sending of his Son and his life and his death and his resurrection. That has to be overlooked in order to really maintain a view that says God hasn't done anything.

You have to completely forget about the cross and resurrection if you're going to say the world hasn't changed or that God hasn't done anything.

You have to dismiss so much. And the people here just seem to be overlooking, deliberately, willingly overlooking, the kind of events that God took hold of in the past.

[18 : 12] And so the answer to people who overlook these true things, verse 8 and 9, according to Peter, is this verse from Psalm 90.

That with the Lord one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. God is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness.

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God is not slow to fulfill his promise. God is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness. God is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness. And we go to chapter 12 in 12 in 12 in 12, and we go to Pamela Éxon, and we go to Newton. And we go to guard down to Susan's parents in Preston. And we stay there, and we try and get a couple hours sleep early evening. And then we leave at about midnight, and we drive through the night, and then we get to Cornwall at some time in the morning.

Eight and a half hours later, nine hours later. If you total it all up, it's about 13 and a half hours. And so I said to my mom, who couldn't really understand the concept of time, this is the best way to think about it.

[19 : 35] time passes differently for different people in different situations. That is, you go to bed at 11 o'clock at night, or perhaps even earlier, you wake up in the morning, and to you, time has passed as an instant. You went to bed one day, you woke up the next day, and we're there. But for us traveling, we get to experience the length of each second and minute and hour, and are we there yet? And are we there yet? And so time, you experience time completely differently. And so this idea of some people counting God to be slow, well, it's entirely a matter of their perspective.

You know, some of us say, well, that was over quickly, or my week's holiday went really quick, and somebody else says, I thought it went really slow. It's very, very hard for us to agree on how fast time actually goes, even though we know that there are 60 seconds in a minute and 60 minutes in an hour. Because the way we feel about time passing is entirely different. And so Peter quotes Psalm 90, that to the Lord, a day is a thousand years, and a thousand years is a day.

But what does all this mean? Well, there's a couple of things you need to stop and think about every time you read the word future in the Bible. And so here's a couple of things to remember.

When Jesus is speaking in the New Testament to his disciples, and he's saying, this will happen in the future, and that will happen in the future, we need to stop. And then we need to ask this very simple question. Whose future?

Their future, which is now my past, and your past, or everybody's future? Just because Jesus uses the word future in the New Testament, he doesn't necessarily mean our future. He could have meant the people's immediate future that he was speaking to.

[21 : 49] But as we now read the Bible, we're reading it in the past. We're reading something that's happened in the past. So when Jesus speaks about the destruction of the temple, it's going to happen in their future, but it happened in our past. And so the word future needs a little bit of understanding. We have to stop, and we have to think, and ask yourself the question, well, what did Jesus actually mean by future? Lest we make any assumptions that when he said future, not only did he mean their future, but he meant our future as well. In some cases, he only meant their future, and he didn't mean our future. He meant actually our past. And so what are you, what are you supposed to understand when you read Peter, and he says to the Lord, one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years is his one day? Well, what Peter does here is he quotes Psalm 90 in the context of Psalm 90, and this is something else that it says, that God has been our dwelling place throughout all generations. That God has been our dwelling place throughout all generations, meaning this, that God has always dealt with every single believer since time began in his own life span, or span of life. That God himself is outside of time, that a generation is where you have people being born and people dying. And so that generation gets to experience God in their generation, but God gets to experience every believer in every generation. But God deals with every believer in their own lifetime, but he deals with every believer in their own lifetime. So God is constantly there throughout every single generation, even if the people aren't there throughout every single generation.

Do you understand this? And what this means is pretty simple. It's a pretty important part to see that if we stand or sit here this evening and say, but I've been waiting 2,000 years for the Lord to return. Well, no, you haven't. You haven't. I've only been waiting 28 years.

I didn't wait before I was saved, but I've been saved 28 years, and for the last 28 years I've been waiting for the Lord to return. The Lord hasn't returned for over 2,000 years, but I haven't been waiting that long. I've only been waiting 28. And you have only been waiting the length of time that you have been converted. We all get to experience Jesus and God in our own generation, in our own lifetime.

And so these scoffers who say, you see, what are we waiting for? We've been waiting a long time. Well, it's just not the case. They haven't been waiting a long time. They haven't been waiting any longer than anybody else, because we all live more or less roughly around about the same kind of ages. Some are shorter, some are longer. So God deals with us in our lifetime, and more importantly, and this is the thing to understand, God deals with the world in the world's lifetime. So God deals with you in your lifetime, and God deals with you in your lifetime, and God deals with the world in the amount of days that he has given to the world. So we're at different ages. I'm 40, and so God has been dealing with me for 40 years, 28 years as a believer, but God has been dealing with this world since the day it was created. And so God's interaction with the world in his interaction with me is entirely different in that sense. God relates to me and to you based on your own lifespan, but he relates to the world based on the number of days that he has given to the world until he returns. So to the Lord, a thousand years is like a day, and a day as a thousand years, because the two are different. And so did the early church really believe that Jesus would come back in their lifetime? Some might have done, but should they have believed it? I'm not so sure. I don't think Peter did. I don't think Paul did. I think they were confused about it at the beginning, but I think as they matured and understood more, and the Holy Spirit revealed more to them in order to write these letters, I think it seems to be fairly clear that perhaps they didn't actually believe that Jesus was going to return to them in their own lifetime, because they understood the mission that God had given them, that salvation was to go to the ends of the earth, and was to go to the ends of the earth through the church, and that took a lot of time.

It took a lot of time even to get out of Jerusalem before it went any further in the sense of it spreading dramatically, and that takes a lot of time. And so I think Peter alludes to this by saying that God is not wanting any to perish, and we have to stop and think, okay, but in whose generation?

[27 : 19] Is God not wanting any to perish in my generation, or in the generation to come? Or in what generation does God actually stop wanting people to perish? I know that you get the point. If we all live a lifespan, then in what generation is God not wanting any to perish? Is there still a hundred years years to come? It's a tough one to figure out. So God allows time, and the time that he allows is for people to come to repentance. But the interesting thing to note is that people can only come to repentance in their own lifetime. They can't come to repentance in 2,000 years, okay? They can only come to repentance in their own lifetime. Even though we've been waiting, or Christ hasn't returned for the last 2,000 years, and so there's been that time in which people can come to repentance. People haven't had 2,000 years to come to repentance. They've only had their own lifetime to come to repentance.

And that's what Peter wants to stress. And then he adds very quickly, but the day of the Lord will come, and when it does, it will come like a thief, suddenly and unexpectedly. And it's that feeling which creates the sense of immediacy. What creates the sense that the Lord could return any minute is the sense that the Lord could return any minute. Doesn't mean that he will, but that's why you are left with the feeling that it could be tonight, or it could be next year.

Or it could be in a couple of years' time. That's where the feeling comes from. Now, whether or not it's true is something entirely different, but the fact is, this is why we end up believing it could actually be in my lifetime, because of the truth that the Lord could return at any moment like a thief in the night. And so the Lord could come tonight, but the Lord could also come in 4,000 years' time.

Couldn't he? It's already been two. He could come tonight, but he could come in 4,000 years' time, because he is not wanting any to perish. So I don't wait any longer, neither do you, than the maximum of your converted life, or a little bit less. But what I do know is that the sense that the Lord could come back at any moment creates in you and creates in me this feeling of what shorter people should we be. It motivates us, it promotes us to think the right way and to live in the right way, because I don't think any of us want to be caught out in the moment.

And so in conclusion, we too have to live in an age with scoffers, constantly saying, nothing's changed. It hasn't changed for 2,000 years, or it hasn't changed for much longer.

[30 : 35] And yet, what God has actually done is he's given the world, indeed generations, time to repent and believe, and to see exactly what he's done in Christ Jesus. A scoffer by nature is one who's short-sighted and only lives for today. See, both the scoffer and the believer understand the same things about life, that we both have a limited number of days. But the scoffer doesn't believe that anything comes after those days as in eternity. But the believer believes in eternity. The scoffer says, you know, I have this amount of days, and so I'm going to enjoy them. But the believer says, I have this amount of days on earth, but there is an eternity to come after this. So what sort of people ought we to be? The scoffer is not rejecting the fact that we have to wait or that we got an X amount of days on earth. He's rejecting the sense that there is an eternity. So Peter concludes with these words, verse 18. Grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. The believer is to live in a world where he is to understand that God is a patient God, and that you are to grow in the knowledge and to grow up so that you can live an absolute stable life until Christ returns or until you go to be with him. Peter says that there are people in the world that can cause people in the church to lose their stability.

In fact, Jesus even says that, woe unto the person who causes one of these little ones to stumble. It would be better if that man hung a weight around his neck and threw himself into the sea.

Causing another believer to stumble in the way of saying, well, do what you like, the Lord's not going to return tonight, is the type of thing that undermines the stability that every believer needs to live in an age. We're enough people as it is. Don't follow God. Also, he says, remember that there is going to be a new heavens and a new earth, verse 13, and in that place righteousness dwells. I said last week, you don't get persecuted for worshipping Jesus. You get persecuted for not worshipping the world. You don't get persecuted for worshipping Jesus. Jesus even states that you don't get persecuted for worship. He says, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Okay, this is Christians, non-Christians that I meet and speak with have no problem with me going to church. They have no problem whatsoever with the fact that I worship the Lord Jesus Christ. What they have a problem with is the righteousness, the fact that I would dare say anything about what is right and what is wrong. We're not persecuted for worshipping Jesus, for singing and for praying. We're persecuted for righteousness' sake, and blessed are those who are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. So, Peter takes us people as we sit here and read his letter from thinking about ourself, from thinking about our own life and how long is it going to be, and I can't wait until it's over in our own situation to the purposes of God. And what sort of people are we to be if Jesus doesn't return tonight? And what sort of people are we to be if Jesus does return tonight? And so, how far away is eternity? I'll repeat what I said last week. Well, it's been the same as it's been ever since anyone was ever born. Okay? Meeting God has been the same distance away from everybody in every generation.

It's the span of your life. That's how long you've got before you come before God. It's the same for everyone. And so, how long have people got to come to repentance and belief in Jesus?

Well, the same amount of time, the span of your life. And so, in one sense, it really doesn't matter if the Lord comes back tonight or in 4,000 years' time or in 8,000 years' time. What matters is how you relate to God in the amount of days that he has given to you.

[35 : 39] Now, it's generally the case that whenever we think about the future, we love to think that it might be in our lifetime. But it might not. But we should all live. We should all live, according to Peter, with the thought that it could be. Because one day, guess what? It will. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.