

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Adult Bible Class
2 Peter 3:1-8
February 7, 2021

Now that we have a bit of an understanding of the nature of false teachers generally and a bit more insight to their tactics in the churches Peter founded, we will turn our attention to the particular false teaching they brought to the congregations. For the first time he refers to the readers as the “beloved” highlighting again the deep pastoral care he has for them. They are near and dear to his heart which is why he does not mince words when it comes to the errors of those who are harassing the flock with false teaching. Out of that loving, pastoral heart he stirs up the minds of the believers to the Word of God.

Will the End Ever Come? - 2 Peter 2:2-4

“Scoffers will come,” Peter says. In this particular case they will mock the slowness of Christ to return.

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.” 2 Peter 3:4

We learned in Chapter 2 that these false teachers preached a freedom from moral restraint. Now we know why they were not too concerned about people’s behaviour. If Jesus isn’t coming right away, or maybe not even coming at all, why does it matter how we live? They enticed the congregation in the same way that a babysitter might be enticed to throw a party while the parents of the children in their care are away, because the parents are going to be out very late. What is the harm of having some fun, especially since we will have time to get everything cleaned up before the parents get home?

The congregations on Peter’s care were not the first to make such an error. To some degree this was also the error of the Corinthian congregation with whom Paul exchanges correspondence. They interpreted freedom in the Gospel as freedom to live as their (sinful) hearts desired. In that case this led to any number of abhorrent problems such as, factions within the church, sexual immorality, lawsuits among Christians, abuse of the Lord’s Supper and other tragic errors.

The Falsehood Exposed- 2 Peter 3:5-8

The false teachers are deliberately forgetting some very important Biblical teachings:

- The world has been here for an exceptionally long time.
- God intervenes in his world.
- God’s timing and our timing for Divine interventions are not the same.

To support the first two points Peter points us back to the days of Genesis 1-11, a time before time, in a certain sense.¹ God created the world, flooded the world and restored the world. All of this happened according to God’s timing and not according to human schedules or interpretations. Just as the early

¹ It is not until the time of Abraham that we are able to say with any real degree of certainty how long ago biblical events took place. Abraham is generally thought to have been born in mid-2100’s BC. However, before that all dates are very approximate and dependant upon interpretive theories and assumptions.

chapters of the earth's history unfolded in God's time, so also the closing chapters will happen at the time of God's choosing and not according to our schedule.

Be on Your Guard Against False Teaching -- Today

The subject of the return of Christ has long been the focus of many false teachings. In our own day there are those who reject the notion of a second coming. Most often they also suggest that all are under God's grace and the real mission of the church is to work for the establishment of the Kingdom of God among us here and now through the elimination of poverty, social justice, and solving other socio-political problems. While no one can deny that the church has a huge role to play in making this world a better place to live, we do so knowing that the earth in its present form is passing away and that there is an urgency to proclaim the Gospel of Christ not just in our actions but verbally to the hearts of those who do not believe.

At the other end of the spectrum (and perhaps for conservative Christians, the more tempting teaching) is to be unduly fascinated by the return of Christ thinking that we have a role to play in hastening the Lord's return. Over the last 150 years in North America a very particular false understanding of the Lord's return has arisen called "dispensational premillennialism." This teaching was basically unknown until the late 1800's, but has since gained a huge following, including some of North America's best known preachers and teachers, including Billy Graham, Tim LaHaye, Charles Stanley and a host of radio and TV preachers. While each has their own spin on things, they all hold that:

- There are seven dispensations throughout human history. Dispensationalism teaches that God has worked in different ways in different eras of history. Dispensationalism often taught that the various dispensations involved a test for mankind, a failure, and then a judgment. This then would be followed by another dispensation.
- A rapture of the church in which the church will be snatched to heaven before a coming seven-year Tribulation Period. This involves the idea that the church will be raptured or snatched to heaven before a coming seven-year tribulation period. This tribulation or Day of the Lord includes God's judgment on an unbelieving world. It will also involve God bringing Israel to salvation. Dispensationalists believe that 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and Revelation 3:10 reveal that the church is promised physical rescue from this period of divine wrath. They also believe that 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 describes the rapture event.
- The country Israel remains significant in God's purposes and will be so in the future. The promise to Abraham included the land of Canaan which would be his forever. Because of this the land and nation of Israel are always central to God's will. Not only did God promise a Messiah through whom the earth would be blessed, but He promised a land which would be the religious centre of the earth. As a result, the reestablishment of the secular nation of Israel following World War 2 and the capture of the old city of Jerusalem in the Six Day War of 1967 are critical to the fulfillment of the promise to restore the land of Israel to its former glory. Israel as a corporate entity will believe in Jesus around the time of His second coming to earth This will lead to a reversal of the "times of the Gentiles" in which Gentile powers dominate Israel and its land and it will lead to greater blessings for the world.

In our next session we will focus upon Peter's teaching regarding the second coming, which presents a much different picture than either of the views presented above.