

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Adult Bible Class
2 Peter 3:8-18
February 21, 2021

The false teachers have suggested that the Lord may not be returning at all and therefore have encouraged the people of the churches to adopt an attitude of carelessness to obedience toward God. But they misinterpret the “slowness” of the Lord to return. It is not as if Christ has abandoned the creation or has forgotten about the promise to return, but the delay is so that God’s patience might be displayed. He wants all to come to repentance and faith!

God’s Patience 2 Peter 3:8-9

Psalm 90:1–4

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You return man to dust and say, “Return, O children of man!”
For a thousand years in your sight
are but as yesterday when it is past,
or as a watch in the night.

Psalm 90 was a prayer of Moses, a man who likely also struggled with God’s timing. Peter draws on this Psalm to remind the readers that our sense of time and God’s sense of time are different. Rather than doing things when we think they should happen; God has his own time, and it is his schedule we follow.

Though the word is not used here the concept Peter is exploring is “Kairos” a way of thinking of time that is different from the simple chronological passing of days, months, and years. “Kairos” is the decisive time, the time when God seizes the moment to do his will. Here are some Kairos moments in the Old Testament:

Genesis 6:13 And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Ezekiel 22:3 You shall say, Thus says the Lord God: A city that sheds blood in her midst, so that her time may come, and that makes idols to defile herself!

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

In the New Testament the idea of God's time is even more pronounced, often in relation to the promise of the Lord's return:

Mark 1:15 "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Luke 12:54–56 He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming.' And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

Failure to recognize God's timing can have devastating consequences:

Luke 19:43–44 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

The end of the age will come when, and only when, the Father determines it is time.

Mark 13:32 "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Until then God is patient, and we are to be patient. The Greek word to describe God's patience is a word that means "longsuffering." An example of that longsuffering is shown in the parable of the servant who is not able to pay the debt he owes to the king – Matthew 18:21-27

Rather than becoming frustrated with God's timing we are to see it as a gift. In the next paragraph we read: ***"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 ..." 2 Peter 3:15***

The Day of the Lord - 2 Peter 3:10-13

At the end of the age, the Lord will come like a thief. Jesus himself uses the same analogy to describe his return.

Matthew 24:42–44 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The point is not that Jesus' return is some sort of unethical event but serves to illustrate our vulnerability. Nothing makes us feel vulnerable quite like having something stolen from us.

As for the day itself, Peter tells us three things:

1. The heavens will pass away with a great noise.
2. The earth will be destroyed by fire.
3. The earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Peter here attempts to put human words on what will be an indescribable event. There is a hint of apocalyptic writing here, using what sound like frightening images to describe the Lord's return. The point is not to make us afraid of the Lord's return, but to highlight what is permanent and what is not. The earth and heavens as we know them are sustained by God's Word (2 Peter 3:5) and that Word will have the final say.

Likewise, we need not be terrorized by the laying bear of our lives. Peter has already made it clear that for the Christian the Day of the Lord will be a day when all that God has done in our lives will be made clear for all to see. At the beginning of the letter, he reminded the readers that their faith was on a par with the apostles, that they received divine power and that they participated in the divine nature. These things are not always obvious to us, let alone to the world. But on the last day this too will be revealed and in Christ, we await acquittal rather than condemnation.

Our lives reflect our hope! We live holy and godly lives, not to earn salvation, but because we share the divine power and nature. We look forward to the day of the Lord and engage in those things that "hasten" its coming.

The Day of the Lord will happen at God's time to be sure. However, our faith, as it is lived out in our lives, echoes the prayer given to us by Jesus, Himself: "Thy Kingdom Come." God is not manipulated by our actions, but our lives become a lived version of the prayer that is at the end of the Book of Revelation, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Strictly speaking we don't hasten the day, but we desire to hasten it and earnestly desire it.

Final Words 2 Peter 3: 14-18

“Therefore, beloved, ... “

With that transition Peter signals the approaching end of the letter. He reminds his hearers to live out their Baptismal calling to be the children of God. Through baptism we are “in Christ” and our union with him is shown in lives characterized by obedience and peace.

This is the same message they have heard from Paul, though his writings can be complex in places. This is not a criticism of Paul, but a simple statement of the truth (Peter was inspired to write these words too! 😊) Unlike those who twist and manipulate Scripture we strive to understand as much as we are able.

Finally, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We never outgrow our need for the Gospel. We return time and again to Calvary and the open tomb to see our Lord’s glory revealed in his sacrificial death on our behalf and in his glorious resurrection which conquers death so that we might live forever!