

Know the Future

2 Peter 3:10-12

I have a picture in my office of a lion and a lamb lying down together. I **often ask friends what they think this picture symbolizes. The responses have been varied, but two themes are most common.** Both of these themes connect to 2 Peter 3.

Some see this picture as a presentation of the **peace** that will preside over the earth after Jesus returns. Isaiah 11 describes the harmony of the Millennial reign of Christ with these words.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. (Isa 11:6 NIV)

Think of that! What a reversal of the curse! Wolves, leopards and lions will be so docile that a little child will grab them by the fur and lead them along the fields with no danger whatsoever.

The second theme that this picture presents to the viewer connects more directly to the theme of 2 Peter 3.. Many see in this picture **a presentation of Jesus both in His mildness and His might.** . . both in His tenderness and His toughness, both in His sacrifice for sin and His sovereign right to rule, both in His ministry of mercy and of judgment. Jesus is the gentle Lamb of Calvary who came the first time in human weakness, and Jesus is also the fierce Lion of Judah who will come the second time in divine omnipotence. **Jesus is both lamblike and lionlike in His character.** We misunderstand who Jesus is if we think of Him only as a Lamb, or only as a Lion. **He is both!**

Modern Christianity tends to err on the side of Jesus as a lamb. Often Jesus is presented as being so mild that no one need ever fear Him. We hear such sentiments as, *“Jesus would not judge anyone.”* or *“Jesus is gentle and mild, He would not punish us harshly for our sin.”* **Such presentations deny the biblical description of Jesus as the conquering King who utterly defeats those who oppose Him and who rules the world with power.**

The Bible teaches that one day Jesus will judge everyone. He will accept only those who repent of their sin and believe on Him unto eternal life. Listen to Jesus’ own words recorded in John 5

For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:22-24 ESV)

2 Peter 3 calls attention to Jesus as a Mighty Judge. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Here is a very graphic and powerful description of the triumph of Jesus over all that is broken in the last day.

As noted last week, the Second Coming of the Messiah is **no obscure doctrine** in the Bible, but is central to scriptures message of Good News. A total of 1527 passages in the OT refer to the second coming of the Messiah. Approximately 8000 verses in the NT refer to this grand event. For every reference in the Bible to the First Coming of the Messiah, there are 8 references to the Second Coming. Jesus Himself mentions his second coming 21 times, and we are exhorted to ready ourselves for this event over 50 times. This is a major theme throughout the Bible. And it is a thrill to consider that future day this morning.

Main Idea: Jesus is coming soon. Stay awake for it!!! When Jesus returns He will put an end to all that is wrong with our present world and He will make all things new.

Peter tells us plainly that in the last days, scoffers will with scoffing. We should expect scoffers to confront us. These mockers will say, “Where is the promise of Jesus’ coming? Jesus promised that He would bring God’s kingdom to earth. Yet He is not here now and God’s kingdom clearly has not yet come. So if Jesus is going to come as He said He would, where is he?”

Peter knows that many in the church will be tempted toward unbelief by these scoffers. Some will be dislodged from faith in Jesus and from the salvation that is found in Him. So Peter strengthens our hope in Jesus’ return through three means: 1. He gives us reasons to believe in Jesus’ return. 2. He reports what will happen to the earth when Jesus returns. 3. He presses us to respond to God in holy living right now.

Reasons to believe in Jesus’ return

1. The Eternal God promises it.

“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.”(2 Peter 3:8 [ESV](#))

God reminds us that He does not mark time like we do. And the reason that God does not mark time the way we do is because He is eternal. We had a day of beginning, but God does not. Reach with your mind as far back into the past as you can fathom and God is there.

What does eternity do with time? We know what longevity does with time. If you are around people over 50 years of age for very long, you will find them making strange comments about time. They will say things like, *“Where did the last 10 years go.”* Or *“I can’t believe my kids are already grown.”* Or *“I never thought I would be this old.”*

Why do older people say things like that about time? I think it is because our perception of time is influenced by how much we have experienced. So for a six year old, a birthday party that a month away seems so distant because they have only experienced 72 months in their short lives. But for a 60 year-old man, a birthday that is a month away seems so near because we have experienced 720 of them.

If time seems to go faster as WE get older, how does our eternal God experience time? He is outside of time as One who created it.

Peter is meditating upon Psalm 90 when he says, *“that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”* Listen to what Moses says about God in Psalm 90:

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 . . . For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.” (Psalm 90:1-2, 4 [ESV](#))

Moses writes this at the end of his life. His sister Miriam has recently died. Then his brother Aaron dies. **Moses was most aware that there is nothing permanent or certain about this life.** It is as shifting sand and a blowing wind. Yet when he looks to God he knows that the LORD is a fixed mark, never moving, never changing, never diminishing, never failing. God is grandly eternal. . . Moses finds a calm in God as he considers this perfection of God, even though his life is in crushing chaos.

The **Hebrew word** for “dwelling place” may also be translated “refuge”.

God is a perpetual refuge and security to his people. God was Moses' "safe space" in the face of the fleeting nature of time. God's eternity comforts him as he experiences the losses and ordeals that time bring to his life.

So Peter says that when we think about Jesus' promise to return, we must not think that He is late or delayed or unclear in His fulfillment of any promise. **God is never delayed and is always on time.** And we CERTAINLY must not believe the scoffers who say that it is foolish to wait for the return of Jesus because if He was ever going to return, He would have already done it.

Truth: Because God is eternal, His promises never expire. We can count on Him to fulfill every promise according to His perfect schedule.

"The LORD of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand," (Isaiah 14:24 [ESV](#))

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8 [ESV](#))

2. The Merciful God purposes it.

"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." (2 Peter 3:9 [ESV](#))

The purpose of God's delay is to keep the door of the ark open one more day. The mission of the church is bound up to His return. Some assert that Jesus taught that He guaranteed His disciples that He would return within the lifetime of the disciples. We do not have time to go through all the passages, but this is not true. Yes, He called His disciples to live with the view of expecting Him to return in their lifetime. And He calls us to do the same. But look at Acts 1 with me.

"He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God." (Acts 1:3 [ESV](#))

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority." (Acts 1:6-7 [ESV](#))

Notice that Jesus does not rebuke them for the question. Nor does He say that He will NOT restore the Kingdom to Israel. This is a question that flows rightly

from the 40 days of teaching that Jesus gave to His disciples. But notice what Jesus says next:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:8-9 *ESV*)*

Question: Why did Jesus NOT bring the kingdom immediately. Answer: So that the church would communicate the mercy of the LORD to scoffers, to unbelievers, to Gentiles, to everyone in every place.

God calls us to be ambassadors for Christ, telling everyone of the mercy of God in waiting before He comes to judge the world in righteousness. The door remains open. The mission of the church relies on this delay. **For this reason, we must not think of unbelievers as our enemies. We do not curse them for the folly of their morality, their politics, their scoffing, their hatred of God.** We think of unbelievers as our audience . . . the people to whom God send us with a message!

Noah did that! He preached all the way to the day that God shut the door of the ark. When the door of God’s salvation closes, the door of God’s judgment opens. When the rain of God’s judgment begins to fall, it will be too late to get into the ark. God is waiting one more day for more sinners to be rescued from the judgment that is coming.

Application: Let us pray that God would give us merciful hearts and open doors to share the Good News of the mercy of the LORD.

At the cross we see the righteousness and mercy of God wed together. God’s righteousness demands the punishment of the cross to satisfy sin’s punishment. God’s mercy lovingly offers the suffering Son as the hope of forgiveness and deliverance. We are only prepared for Jesus’ second appearing when we receive the benefit of Jesus’ first appearing.

If this truth grabbed hold of our heart, we would see our world differently . . . we would see people with Jesus’ eyes of mercy. This truth would change us into a church of effective evangelists.

When Dwight L. Moody was in London during one of his famous evangelistic tours, three British pastors visited him. They wanted to know how this uneducated American who butchered the King's English could be so effective in winning throngs of people to Christ. Moody took the three men to the window of his hotel room and asked each in turn what he saw. One by one, the men described the people in the park below. Then Moody looked out the window and tears began rolling down his cheeks. ""What do you see, Mr. Moody?" asked one of the men.

""I see countless thousands of souls that will one day spend eternity in hell if they do not find the Savior.""

Friends, that was Moody's secret. He saw people as moving toward God's final judgment where others saw people as strolling in a park. How do you see people?

Reasons to believe in Jesus' return

Report about Jesus' return

1. The Day will descend like a thief.

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief," (2 Peter 3:10 [ESV](#))

One day early in our marriage, Kimberly and I had a thief break into our house and steal our TV, a camera, some bedding that Kimberly handcrafted and perhaps most painful of all . . . my Chicago Bears cap. When Kimberly came home that day and saw the door of our house kicked in, she did not think to herself, "Oh . . . I forget that today was the day we scheduled the thief to come." She was so surprised by it that she walked in to the house in a stunned fashion . . . not even thinking that the thief might still be in the house. Thankfully, he was not. But she was a bit dazed at first. It was broad daylight and she had only been away from the house for an hour or so. The thief came suddenly and at a time we did not expect.

Peter is repeating Jesus when he speaks of this day coming like a thief.

Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. 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.” (Matthew 24:40-44 [ESV](#))

Paul also repeats Jesus in his description of the day when our LORD returns.

“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4 [ESV](#))

Application: The LORD Jesus is coming at a time and moment that we do not expect. Let us stay awake for it!

“(“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”)” (Revelation 16:15 [ESV](#))

Question: Hold on, I thought that the day of Jesus’ return is a good day. Why is this day compared to something bad like the coming of a thief?

Answer: For those in Christ, this day will be one of joy and worship. For those outside of Christ, this day will be one of judgment and sorrow.

The great preacher G. Campbell Morgan wrote this: *“To me the second coming is the perpetual light on the path which makes the present bearable. I never lay my head on my pillow without thinking that, maybe before the morning breaks, the final morning may have dawned. I never begin my work without thinking that perhaps He may interrupt my work and begin His own.”* When I read that this week, I prayed, “Oh Lord, help me to live like this!” What a huge difference it would make if I did.

Responses to Jesus’s promise to return any time now: Believe Him!

1. Let the return of Jesus be part of your daily expectation. Lord, is today the Day?
2. Let the return of Jesus be part of your daily prayer. “Thy kingdom come!”
3. Let the return of Jesus be part of your daily conversation with other believers. Maranatha!
4. Let the return of Jesus be part of your witness.

2. The Day will dissolve like a fire.

Before we read verse 10, it might help to give a very brief explanation of the Day of the LORD. The Day of the Lord is not a 24 hour event. This term refers to the events and plans that God has to bring the present age to an end. This Day begins with the Rapture of the Church when Jesus returns in the air for His people, followed by the Tribulation, followed by the coming of Jesus to the earth when Jesus returns to sit on the throne of David and establish His kingdom for 1000 years, followed by the last battle and the destruction of the present heavens and earth and the beginning of the new heavens and earth. Verse 10 takes us to the very last part of the Day of the LORD.

Peter turns our attention to the wrath of God that will be unleashed upon sin and upon this present world in that day. He is speaking to believers who have been listening to scoffers. **The scoffers have been having an effect upon the church of doubt, of unbelief, of lackadaisicalness. The church is not living in anticipation of the end of this world.** And as the result, they were in danger of becoming “worldly”.

What does it mean to be “worldly”? It means that we place value on the things of this world out of proportion to their real value. AND we do not place value on eternal materials that are aligned with their real value.

God does not say that we should not mourn the loss of earthly things. If we have a beloved pet that dies, it is not wrong to cry. If we have a beloved house that burns, it is not wrong to sorrow over it. If we have a beloved country that crumbles, it is not wrong to mourn. If we have a healthy body that is perishing, it is not wrong to be sad. **BUT . . . we should live life in view that these are all temporary. We should not place the kind of value on them where we despair when temporary things perish. We must not place our HOPE in anything that is in this world.**

Peter reminds us that all creation has been corrupted by sin and that at the end of the age, Jesus will bring an end to the created order and THEN make all things new. The old will pass away.

*“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.**” (2 Peter 3:10 [ESV](#))*

*Since all these things are **thus to be dissolved** 2 Peter 3:11a*

*because of which **the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!** 2 Peter 3:12*

Have you ever experienced a huge fire? I have been at bonfires that reached 20-30 feet in the air. They are awesome. Often loud, popping, crackling, intense and consuming. I have never been near a forest fire. People who have been endangered by forest fires describe them as terrifying, swift, devastating.

Peter's description of Jesus' return reminds me of what I read about the effects of a nuclear bomb exploding. It is hard to imagine what it was like for the people living in Hiroshima or Nagasaki in August of 1945. I pray the earth does not experience that again. **But the fire at the end of time is more than a huge bonfire . . . more than a massive forest fire . . . more than a nuclear bomb.** This is worldwide fire . . . encompassing the heavens and the earth. You look up and see fire. You look down and see fire. You look around and everywhere . . . fire. Fire that dissolves creation.

The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast . . . A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, . . . I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth." Zephaniah 1:14-18

Man is so proud of all he accomplishes. The cathedrals, the pyramids, the palaces, the gardens, the museums, the skyscrapers, the stadiums, the music halls, the corporations, the universities . . . all of it . . . wiped out. Utterly consumed.

And more . . . man looks at God's creation and decides to worship the creation rather than the Creator. Go to any location where God's creative majesty is on display and you will see people worshipping nature. Go to Yosemite or Sedona or the Grand Canyon or the Rockies. And you will find people exchanging the worship of the Creator for the worship of creation.

So much so that many think of Mother Nature . . . not as a metaphor but as a real goddess. **That the material universe is eternal, not the Creator. Peter reminds us on that final day . . . Mother Nature will be consumed by Father God.**

Application: Let us not tie our happiness or our glory to anything in this present world. All we see will be consumed by fire. Let us tie our happiness and our glory to the things that are eternal . . . the things that we cannot see.

Reasons to believe in Jesus' return

Report about Jesus' return

Responses to the certainty of Jesus' return

1. We wait for Him to come.

*"11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 **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! 13 But according to his promise **we are waiting** for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."* (2 Peter 3:11-13 [ESV](#))

What is this waiting? James helps us.

*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. **See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth**, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:7-8 [ESV](#))*

James points us to the farmer to understand the kind of waiting we are to apply.

The waiting of a farmer is not a nonchalant waiting, but is an energetic and expectant waiting. It is a waiting that longs for the harvest to finally arrive.

Illustration: This year a member of our church family took me, my daughter in law and three of our grandkids hunting for morels. Many who love morels wait with anticipation for the weather to be just right for the morels to begin to pop out of the ground. The right amount of rain, the right amount of sun, the right amount of temperature. **Then when the day approaches the waiting gets active.** Not sure when and so . . . go out and look. If you do not find any, you may think . . . not yet. Then go out a couple days later . . . search more. Not yet. Then one day . . . there they are!! That is the kind of waiting we are called to have in view of this promise.

What is the good of waiting for the coming of Jesus if we die without Him having yet come? Is not that a waste of time?

No!

1. First, the saints in heaven continue to wait. Revelation 6 describes martyred saints as asking, "How long O Lord before you will return and judge the earth?" Our waiting is not finished when we die. It continues.
2. Our future joy will be the more pronounced because we waited!
3. Our waiting protects us from being unready. It is a little like asking, why should I insure my house for fire damage if I do not ever have a fire. Answer: Because you are ready if you do!
4. Our waiting adds energy to our worship and strength to our faith.

2. We strive to live godly lives.

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

Peter uses this word translated "lives" often in his letters. Peter believes that sound doctrine always impacts practical living.

*1Peter 1:15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your **conduct**,*

*1Peter 2:12 Keep your **conduct** among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

*1Peter 3:1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the **conduct** of their wives, 1Peter 3:2 when they see your respectful and **pure conduct**.*

*1Peter 3:16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good **behavior** in Christ may be put to shame.*

*2Peter 3:11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in **lives** of holiness and godliness,"*

The **Peter principle** is a famous business theory that asserts that managers get promoted for their success at one level and then tend to rise in the company until they reach "a level of respective incompetence".

The Real Peter Principle: Believers tend to rise in godly living according to the degree of their hope in Jesus' return.

Conclusion: May we live our lives with a view to the end of all created things.
 May we live our lives with an anticipation of Jesus' return to make all things new.
 Maranatha!

Just before his death in 1981, writer William Saroyan phoned the Associated Press to make this observation: *""Everybody has got to die, but I have always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?""*

Many approach life and death the same way Saroyan approached it. They do everything that they can to keep from thinking about eternity. At the funeral of my wife's grandpa, I had the opportunity to talk with one of Kimberly's cousins. Ray does not believe in God, but he acknowledged to me that he is some ways wished he could share in the hope of heaven that I spoke about at the funeral. But he said, *"This is all there is. So I do not think about what will happen to me after I die, I only think about my life right now."* Now, one does not need to be an atheist to avoid the conscious thoughts about our own deaths. But friends, if the Lord does not return, we all will be confronted with this reality. We will not be able to ignore it. **And we will ask Saroyan's question, "Now what?"**