

The Day of the Lord Will Come

II Peter 3:9-13

The last time we studied II Peter 3 together we looked at the first 8 verses in this chapter and we saw that we are to be stirred up by the Word of God, as verse 1 tells us. God works through His Word to firmly establish our faith and prepare us to stand for Christ.

In verses 3 and 4 we are given a warning about scoffers. Verse 3 tells us that in these last days there will be scoffers. Verse 4 warns us that one of the main points where scoffers will attack is the doctrine of the Lord's return. They will mock the promise of the Lord's return. They will say, "It has been a long time. Everything continues just like it always has. Jesus isn't coming back."

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the apostle Peter refutes naturalistic arguments of the scoffers using the creation and the flood as examples of God's intervention in His creation.

Verse 8 closes that section by reminding us that God is eternal. He is not a creature like us. He is the Creator. We are bound by time. God exists outside of the constraints of time. One day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day.

This passage goes on to assure us of the certainty of the Lord's return. Today we will study verses 9-13. In verse 9 we are reminded that the Lord's promise is

certain. In verse 10 we are reminded that the Lord's judgment will come suddenly. In verses 11-13 we are reminded of our responsibilities in light of the Lord's return.

I. The Lord's Promise is Certain

Verse 9 begins, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." Again, the promise that is being discussed in this passage is the promise of the Lord's return. This was the promise the scoffers will attack, as verses 3 and 4 warn us. This is the promise of great hope for the Christian as we look forward to our reward. This is the promise of great terror for the wicked and unbelieving as they will face the ultimate judgment of God. The promise of our Lord's return is the promise being discussed in this passage.

This verse assures us that the Lord is not slack. This word "slack" means "to delay" or "to tarry." There are no delays on God's schedule. If you have ever travelled you may have looked at a schedule that showed when airplanes or trains or busses were supposed to be leaving or arriving. If everything is running as it should, everyone can come and go at the scheduled times. But if something unexpected happens, then there will be delays. God's plans are not like airline schedules. God doesn't face unexpected obstacles in the keeping of His promises. He can't be delayed. He accomplishes everything He sets out to accomplish and He

accomplishes it exactly when He plans for it to be accomplished. He does not delay in keeping His promises.

Nor does He tarry, in any negative way, in the keeping of His promises. To tarry means to stay longer than you intended or take longer getting somewhere than you intended to take. God does not tarry in that sense. He does all things at the perfect time. All He has promised He will bring to pass, and He does not tarry in keeping His promises.

This verse says the Lord is not slack “as some men count slackness.” Some people look at the length of time that has passed between the promises of God being made, and those promises being fulfilled and they count this as slackness on the part of God. If we think that God is taking too long, does this make God slack? As if He met with unexpected obstacles which delayed His plans? Or maybe He is just tarrying, taking longer than He originally planned.

God forbid. Don't belittle God through your impatience. Let God be true and every man a liar. Let God be perfect and every man mistaken.

Yet it is true, from our perspective, that a long time has passed between God's promise and its fulfillment. We know the Lord is not slack, but why has He given us so much time? This verse gives us the answer.

The Lord is not slack, He is longsuffering. The long length of time between the Lord's promised return and the fulfillment of that promise is not a blot upon the character of God, it is a jewel in His crown. This long length of time doesn't show

God to be slack, it shows God to be longsuffering. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* says this about the word longsuffering: "Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger, and is associated with mercy, and is used of God."

God is long suffering. He does not move hastily in anger. He does not bring retribution or revenge out of an anger outburst. Remember what God said to Job in Job 41:11, "Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine." God is longsuffering. This verse goes on to name an object of God's longsuffering.

To whom is God longsuffering? This verse says: "To us." God's people. God has ordained this length of time in the best possible way to promote our salvation. As the people of God, we long for our Lord's return, but every day that the Lord suffers this sinful world to go on, we should rejoice. This is a display of God's mercy and love. He has given us another day of mercy when we deserved only judgment. This mercy should move the lost to repentance and it should move Christians to worship God and evangelize the lost. God is longsuffering to us.

This verse goes on and says that the Lord is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." This short phrase reveals three important truths: the path to salvation, God's love for humanity, and the Gospel call for all people to repent and believe.

First, it reveals the path to salvation. Again, this verse says God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Over against perishing this verse doesn't put life. This verse doesn't say, "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to life." It says God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Against perishing this verse presents repentance. Repentance is the first step on the path to life. You cannot come to God the Father unless you come with repentance. God will receive all who will repent of their sin and have faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Second, this verse reveals God's love for humanity. How wide is God's mercy? How deep is God's love? Read for yourself II Peter 3:9, "The Lord . . . is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

People often made a caricature of John Calvin in theological discussions because of disagreements with the branch of theology that bears his name, but listen to John Calvin's commentary on this verse: "So wonderful is [God's] love towards mankind, that he would have them all to be saved, and is of his own self prepared to bestow salvation on the lost.

That quote might not agree with what many people accuse John Calvin of teaching, but is in wonderfully agreement with this verse of Scripture. God's love toward mankind is indeed wonderful, it is magnificent, it is glorious, and it should move us to worship God who so loved the world.

Finally, it reveals the Gospel call for all men to repent and believe. One day the Lord will return. He promised that He would return, and He did not make that promise in vain. The Lord will return, and there will be a judgment. The righteous will enter into eternal reward, the wicked will enter into eternal punishment. The time that we have here on earth, today, is not because God is slack or forgetful of His promise. We have been given time to repent because God is longsuffering. He suffers the wickedness of mankind. People ask, “Why would a good God allow such terrible evil to exist in the world?” God suffers our wickedness to give us time to repent. He allows us to press on in our treason against Him that we might have time to repent. Don’t harden your heart to the mercy of God.

Who is responsible to repent and believe? To whom has God shown mercy? All mankind. All men are called to repent. If you are not a Christian, God calls you to repent. Turn from your sin and turn to Christ. Lay hold of the salvation that God has provided. God has given you time that you might be moved to repentance. Don’t assume upon the longsuffering character of God. He is longsuffering, but He is not eternally suffering. He will return. He will judge the earth. And when He returns it will be too late to repent. Today is the day of repentance, don’t assume that God will give you tomorrow.

If you are a Christian, learn from this verse that there is a universal gospel call. We are to share the gospel with every creature. All of mankind is called to repent and believe on Jesus Christ. We are commissioned to share the gospel of

Jesus Christ with the whole world. No exceptions. No caveats. There is a universal gospel call to repentance.

Before we go on to study verse 10, we need to address some of the questions that this verse brings up. Does this verse teach universal salvation, that all men will be saved? Does this verse teach that man's will can somehow subvert the will of God: God wills all men to be saved, but some men will not to be saved? And on and on we could go with these sort of questions.

Before we get bogged down with questions like this, we need to remember that II Peter 3:9 is not the totality of Scripture. We know from the totality of Scripture that many will perish. We know from the totality of Scripture that God is Sovereign. We know from the totality of Scripture that God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world according to the hidden counsels of His will. Again, II Peter 3:9 is not the totality of God's revelation. Where this verse says, "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," it is talking about God's will as it is made known to us in the gospel. The gospel calls all men every where to repent (Acts 17:30).

Verse 9 teaches us that the Lord's promise is certain. He is not slack. He is not forgetful. He is not delayed. He is not slow. He is longsuffering. To accuse God of failing to keep His promises is a terrible sin. Will you make God a liar? Don't mistake God's mercy for slackness. The promise of the Lord is certain. The day of the Lord will come.

II. The Lord's Judgment will Come Suddenly

Verse 10 begins, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." This phrase, "the day of the Lord," is a reference to His return. In the Old Testament this phrase "the day of the Lord," is used to refer to a time of divine intervention and judgment (Isaiah 13:6, Ezekiel 30:3, Joel 1:15). It is used similarly in other passages in the New Testament (Acts 2:20, I Thessalonians 5:2, II Thessalonians 2:2). It is synonymous with the return of the Lord.

Verse 10 says the day of the Lord "will come." This is an event that will certainly take place. God has appointed a day when He will return and judge the world, and He will keep His appointment. Matthew Henry commented on this verse, "Settle it therefore in your hearts that the day of the Lord will certainly come, and you shall certainly be called to give an account of all things done in the body, whether good or evil; and let your exact walking before God, and your frequent judging yourselves, evidence your firm belief of a future judgment."

This verse goes on to tell us that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. This is the same language Jesus used when He was talking to Peter and the other disciples in Luke 12. In Luke 12:39-40 Jesus says, "And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye

therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." A thief comes at night, when the home is dark and silent, when the occupants are asleep and no one is expecting him. So the Lord will return when mankind is secure and at ease, without any expectation or apprehension about the day of the Lord.

Remember the parable of the bridegroom and 10 virgins in Matthew 25. There were 5 wise and 5 foolish. But Matthew 25:5 tells us, "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." Even the wise were asleep when the bridegroom came. When men think it most unlikely, when we slumber and sleep, secure in our imagination that the day of the Lord is far off, then He will return. The further off the day of the Lord is in the minds of men, the nearer it comes in reality.

Verse 10 goes on to tell us of the destruction that will take place when the Lord returns. The destruction prophesied here reminds us once again that the scoffers in verse 4 are incorrect in their view of the world. They say that all things will continue just like they are. Nothing has changed since the beginning of time and nothing ever will change. This is simply not true. God created the world and one day God will judge the world. This verse describes the physical world at that time of judgment.

“The heavens will pass away with a great noise.” I Thessalonians 4:16 tells us that the Lord will descend from Heaven with a great shout. As if unable to bear the glory of the returning Lord and Creator, the heavens will pass away.

“The elements shall melt with fervent heat.” Remember, God has judged the world once already with water in the days of Noah. When He returns it will be a judgment of fire. There was a level of mercy shown by God in that first judgment, He spared Noah and his family, and the animals on the ark. There will be no boat or bunker that will be able to protect anybody during this judgment of fire. The only place of refuge, the only safety, the only salvation will be in Christ.

“The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” God will destroy not only the natural works of creation, but also the artificial. No works of man will stand in this judgment. All shall be burned up.

Look around you. When you get home, look at your house. Look at your car. Look at all the things you have and that you treasure and remember, the end of all these things is destruction in fire. They are passing away. And when they go, it will be sudden. Proverbs 23:5 says, “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.” Don’t spend your life storing up tinder here on earth, reserved for the fire of the day of the Lord. Spend yourself, spend your life storing up treasure in heaven.

The destruction of God’s creation demonstrates the sinfulness of sin. All of God’s creation has been marred by sin, and because of this it must be purged with

fire. Don't be deceived by sin. You cannot indulge yourself with that which God hates and expect no consequences. Sin corrupts all that it touches, and you cannot hold sin in your heart without it having a corrupting influence on you. We must be vigilant in our fight against sin. The destruction of this world by fire reminds us of the truly terrible nature of sin.

In verse 9 we were reminded that the Lord's promise is certain, He will return. In verse 10 we were reminded that the Lord's judgment will come suddenly. He will come like a thief in the night and this earth will pass away in fiery judgment.

III. Our Responsibilities in Light of the Lord's Return

This is the real meat of the passage for us. This is the application of all the wonderful truth we have been studying. The Bible calls us to action. As we grow in our knowledge of Scripture we should also grow in Christlikeness. If knowledge about the Word of God doesn't lead to an increase in personal godliness, we are no better off than we were without it. James exhorts us, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). These verses tell us what God wants us to do with the truth He has revealed to us about His promised return.

Verse 11 begins, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved." Again notice the certainty of the judgment to come. These things "shall be dissolved." It

is not merely a possibility. It is not a potential future. It is what will certainly come to pass. The judgment of God is certain. What God has given you in this world, hold with an open hand. Count it as already consumed.

Verse 11 continues, and asks, “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all in all holy conversation and godliness?” What manner of persons ought ye to be? This is a question that should move us toward self-examination. We should often examine ourselves and ask, “Am I living like a person who truly believes that the Lord will keep His promise? Does my life demonstrate that I believe this material world is reserved unto judgment? Do I live like someone who believes that I will stand before God, accountable for the deeds done in my body?” “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (II Corinthians 13:5a).

We should regularly examine ourselves, and root out any sin we find before it spreads and corrupts. Examine your life through the lens of Scripture and ask, “Am I living as God commands?”

What areas of our lives is God concerned about? Where should we be examining? Where should we be testing ourselves with Scripture? This verse says, “In all holy conversation and godliness.” God is concerned about every area of our lives.

“Conversation” isn't just our words, but all of our behavior toward and around other people. This same word was used in II Peter 2:7 where we are told that righteous Lot was “vexed with the filthy *conversation* of the wicked.”

Our behavior before others should manifest holiness. All of our interaction with others should be governed by the rule of holiness. Holiness is not concerned about our rights. Holiness is not concerned about our feelings. Holiness is not concerned about what they did to me. To be holy is to model ourselves after God. We need to apply the prayer of Jesus in the garden to all our interactions with fellow man, “Father . . . not mine will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42). Our conversation, our behavior, as Christians, should be holy.

This verse also says “godliness.” A “holy conversation” is godly behavior before our fellow man. Godliness is holy behavior before God. In every area of our lives, both public and private, we should have a deep reverence for God. May we ever be mindful that everything material in this world is passing away, but God is not passing away. When everything in creation is gone, God will continue on unchanged. Be devoted in service to God. Live as you were created: to know God, to worship God, glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. The revelation that this world is passing away should move us to grow in godliness.

Verse 12 says, “Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?” We should be looking for the day of God. We should be watching for and anticipating the day of God.

Think of the faithful few were looking for the Lord when He came the first time, born as a baby in Bethlehem. The wise men from the east, Simeon and Anna

in the temple: they knew the word of God and they were looking for the Messiah, the consolation of Israel. These few were ready when Jesus came the first time, and they had the privilege of being among the first to bend the knee in worship to Him.

We too have revelation about the coming of our Lord. We do not look for Him to come again as the consolation of Israel. He will not come again as the suffering Servant, but as the ruling and reigning King. He is coming back for us, His people. His return will be our greatest joy. When He returns all the promises will be fulfilled. We have so much to be looking forward to. Are we looking for the day of God?

This verse also says “hastening unto the coming of the day of God.” “Hasten:” this word means to “hurry” or to “urge on.” What is this verse teaching? Is there anything you or I can do to hurry the return of the Lord? In one sense, no. God has appointed the day of His return and nothing you or I can do will change that. And yet we are told to hasten, to hurry, to urge on.

This passage is once again reminding us that the Christian’s faith is an active faith. We are not to merely stand, gazing upward, looking for Jesus to return. We are to go and do what Jesus has told us to do. We are to go and be busy in the work God has given us.

We are the instruments God has ordained to accomplish the work that must be finished before He returns. As we pray for His coming, as we preach the Gospel, as we bring into the kingdom those whom the longsuffering God waits to

save, as we obey God's commands and are busy in His work, we hasten unto the coming of the day of God.

The Lord's return is set before us like the finish line of the Christian's race. When we see this finish line with eyes of faith fixed upon God's promises, we are not to stop running and gaze upon it. We are to "hasten unto" it. Lay aside every weight and run. Hasten unto the coming of the day of God.

If you need any more motivation look at how verse 12 ends, "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." This agrees with and restates what we have already studied in verses 10 and 11. Don't look to this world. Don't long for this world. Don't hasten unto this world.

"Remember Lot's wife" Luke 17:32. Don't look longingly at that which God intends to destroy. This world is reserved unto fire. Look to Christ. Long for Christ. Hasten unto Christ.

Verse 13 says, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." This world and all that is in it will be burned up. Nevertheless we look for new heavens and a new earth.

This "look" is the same word that was used in verse 12 where we are told to be "looking . . . for the day of God." We do not look forward to the destruction that will occur at the Lord's return. God takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11), and neither should we. We don't rejoice in destruction, we rejoice in salvation. We don't rejoice that the world will be destroyed, we

rejoice because the Lord will return and when He does, there will be new heavens and a new earth.

The creation of “new heavens and a new earth” stands in contrast to the destruction that will occur at the Lord’s return. The flood of Noah’s day washed the earth and partially cleansed it of sin, but the corruption returned. The fire of the Lord’s return will purify the earth, and the new heavens and new earth will be totally free from the curse of sin. The defining characteristic of the world today is sin. Sin has infected and corrupted everything.

This new earth will be characterized by righteousness. Righteousness will be its essential feature. There will be no sin. This means there will be nothing wrong. Nothing out of place. Nothing bad. Nothing corrupted. It will be the dwelling of righteousness.

The foundation of our hope is the promise of God. “According to His promise [we] look for new heavens and a new earth.” Matthew Henry commented, “To look for any thing which God has not promised is presumption; but if our expectations are according to the promise . . . we cannot meet with a disappointment; for he is faithful who has promised.”

The day of the Lord will come. The scoffers are wrong. God will keep His promise.

In verse 9 we were reminded that the Lord’s promise is certain, He will return.

In verse 10 we were reminded that the Lord's judgment will come suddenly. He will come like a thief in the night and this earth will pass away in fiery judgment.

In verses 11-13 we were reminded of our responsibilities as the Lord's people.

In light of the Lord's certain return we should often examine our lives to be sure we have a holy conversation before men and godliness before God. We should be looking for the Lord's return, longing to see our Master return. We should be hastening unto the coming of the day God, busy in all the work God has given us. This is how we hasten unto the Lord's return. And finally, we should be looking for and longing after new heavens and a new earth according to the promises of God. Not longing after this world where sin corrupts, but longing after that new world where righteousness will dwell.

The day of the Lord will come, and when He comes, will He find us faithful?