

## “Do All Things Just Continue?”

2 Peter 3:3-14

November 15, 2020

SERMON 1951

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Our sermon text is from 2 Peter 3:4, scoffers are saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Peter in today’s Epistle acknowledges that there will be scoffers. He is not talking about any of the members of the congregation. He is specifically speaking of those unbelievers outside of the congregation who are making fun of the Christian’s belief that their Lord will return on the Last Day and the world will come to an end. By their scoffing at our belief, it has led some of the members of the congregation to question or doubt these articles of the faith. The words in today’s Epistle are designed to answer the charge of these scoffers and to shore up the believers’ faith.

St. Peter begins by quoting the words of the scoffers’ **two-fold complaint**. **The first part** of the complaint is “**Where is the promise of His coming?**” So your Lord promised that He would return, did he? Where is he? It’s been quite a while since you say he ascended into heaven. Didn’t he say that he was coming soon? Wouldn’t he have returned by now?

At the time of Peter’s epistle, it had been approximately 35 years since Christ’s ascension. The early Christian church thought that their Lord would return in their lifetime. In fact, through His death and resurrection, every Old Testament prophesy had been fulfilled. Jesus could have returned that soon, if He had wanted. Nothing would have prevented Him. But as it turns out He didn’t. As year after year passed, more and more of the elderly Christians died. The words of these scoffers made the Christians question their mistaken ideas about Christ’s return in their lifetime. More than that, It made them question His return at all.

We might think it that it was silly that they were worried after only 35 years. Today, we stand at the point of almost 2000 years and Christ hasn’t returned yet. On the one hand, we might tell them to have a little patience. On the other hand, this scoffer’s complaint would seem to have even more validity today with what seems like a long time. Either way, whether 35 years or longer, it is a long time, from my perspective. If I take a trip to Oregon or Florida and don’t come back for 3.5 weeks you would definitely be wondering. So what about 35 weeks or 35 years?

**The second part** of the complaint is this, “**For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.**” You Christians keep saying that there is going to be an end. You act as if the Sun and moon and all the stars, will fall out of the sky. But they just keep coming up and going down as always. You act as if there will be signs on the earth with the roaring of the seas, but nothing has

changed. Everything just continues on as it has since the creation of the world. There is not going to be any end and Jesus is not coming back.

Their complaint seems to ring true for us, as well. The seasons just keep on turning from Summer to Fall to Winter to Spring. The generations continue to pass. One generation dies away and another generation marries and has kids. It does seem like everything remains the same. Even the supporters of climate change have trouble showing anything but consistency within small variations. It's hard to be alarmed when it all looks and feels the same. Though every generation makes big claims that for them it has never happened this way before, we begin to wonder. Is it just the boasting of a mistaken memory? We have heard them say before, "Every day we walked to school through the snow uphill both ways."

Before we answer these scoffers' complaints, which dispute the Last Day and Second Coming of Christ, St. Peter does let us know **the motivation of these scoffers**. Once again, these are not Christian congregational members that are scoffing, but unbelievers. St. Peter says in verse 3, "...that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts...." These scoffers are not impartially studying the Scriptures in order to determine the truth. These scoffers have a dog in the race. **They are leading immoral lives following their own sinful desires**. They lust after another's spouse and act upon. They covet another's property and seek to get it either by stealing or by a way which only appears right.

It would definitely be to their favor to make sure that our Lord does not return to find them living sinful lives. If this world is all there is, then eat, drink and be merry. You might as well do whatever you lust after, since the evolution of this world is just the result of chance. If there is no judgment day, what a great opportunity for them to fully live according to their own desires without restriction or consequence.

When St. Peter responds in verse 5, he shows us **the minds of these scoffers**. Peter says, "For this they willfully forget: that by the Word of God...." Yes, the scoffers know the facts, full well. It is not that the scoffers need to be informed about the how God created the world or that He will bring this world to an end. **They already know it, and they "willfully forget" it!**

It is in their best interest to forget that God made the world in six normal days. If they acknowledge a Creator, they will have to be His creature and thus responsible to Him for their actions. They can't claim everything to be the same, if they remember the world was created around 4,000 B.C. They can't claim that everything is the same, if they remember that all God's creatures were destroyed by a world-wide flood, and then repopulated. They deliberately forget those things, so that they can deny that God is going to bring this world to an end and judge all nations.

St. Peter's reply includes more than a simple deliberate forgetting of the accounts of the creation and the flood. St. Peter goes to the heart of the matter. **They, the scoffers, deliberately forget the Word!** Listen again to verse 5, "For this they willfully forget: that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water." St. Peter's point is that **the Word of God brought about the creation** of the world. God said, "Let there be... and there was." In verse 6, **the Word of God brought about the flood** which destroyed everything that lived on the face of the earth

which was not in Noah's ark. It is that same Word of God which is going to bring an end to this world as we know it. And it is the Promise-filled Word of God that Jesus is going to keep when He returns as our King.

Having unmasked the motivation and mind of the scoffers, St. Peter returns his congregation's members focus to the Word of God. **The Word of God is right and sure.** The One who kept His word in the beginning, will return at the end of time. The One who kept His Word to save Noah and his family by an ark, will return at the end of time. St. Peter explains that we dare not forget the Word of God. Our Lord Jesus has given us a promise to return on the Last Day and take us to be with Him. He will keep that promise.

Yes, we know that there have been those who have died before Christ returned. Their death will not put them at a disadvantage. When Christ returns, those who have died will rise from the dead and those who are still alive will be changed. Last week's Epistle already explained all that.

In this week's Epistle **having mentioned the deliberate forgetfulness of the scoffers**, St. Peter tells **the believers**, "**Do not to forget.**" St. Peter says in v.8, "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness..." (v.8). The scoffers deliberately forget, but you, Christians, do not forget that our Lord does not reckon time as we do. We are bound by time. Our judgment of a long or short period is based on the longevity of our lifetime. Our Lord is timeless. He is outside of time. For Him, both a thousand years and one day are about the same.

**Having mentioned the motivation of the scoffers**, St. Peter show us **the Lord's motivation.** St. Peter calls us believers, "beloved." **First of all the Lord's motivation is His love for us.** He created heaven and earth so that he might place us in it. He continues to use creation to preserve our lives. Second, the Lord saved Noah the preacher of righteousness and his believing family. God will not treat the righteous the same as the wicked. Third, the Lord loves us so much that He will return in order to save us from His justice, the destruction of the wicked.

Beloved, because of His great love, the Lord will keep His promise. **The second motivation of the Lord is faithfulness.** St. Peter says that the Lord is not a slacker in regard to His promises. Jesus is not even one day late. The Lord is faithful and He will do what He has says. On the Last Day, the Lord will gather all believers in His Son Jesus Christ and declare that they are His sheep. In order that you might understand the forgiveness which he has imparted, the Lord will not bring up even one of the believer's sins on judgment day. St. Peter assures us saying, "The day of the Lord will come!"

You may say that it has been too long, but that is not so from our Lord's perspective. Having mentioned the mind of the scoffers, St. Peter tells us what is going through God's mind. As for the mind of the Lord, St. Peter says in verse 9, "... but {He} is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (v.9). There is a good reason that Jesus didn't return during the lifetime of the apostles. There is a good reason that he hasn't returned even yet. Our Lord is holding off the Last Day and He is from our perspective "delaying" His own return, **in order to give unbelievers time to repent and come to faith.**

Once our Lord returns, the day of grace will have passed. By His not returning during the past 2000 years, there have been many who have come to faith through the preaching of the Word of God. You have come to faith and so have I. O thanks be to God for His love and faithfulness. God's patience waited so that He might save as many as possible.

He knows that on judgment day those scoffers and all unbelievers will be called goats and placed on His left. They rejected the preaching of the Word. They did not trust in our Lord's suffering and death for the forgiveness of sins. They accused our Lord of being a slacker and forgetting His promise. They were convinced that the world would just continue as it is endlessly. Our Lord does not desire the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his evil way and live.

The conclusion to St. Peter's defense of Christ's return and the Last Day is found in verse 11, "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, **what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness....**" Our loving and faithful Lord has saved us freely by His grace. Our response is to hear the Word of God and trust in it, so that we give thanks with our lips and life. St. Peter says that we are to live "in holy conduct and godliness." Like our Lord we are to exhibit love and faithfulness to others. We are to pray for the scoffers and our enemies that they might come to repentance. We ought to be patient and long-suffering toward all sinners.

Through faith in Christ we have what the scoffers don't. Verse 14 says, "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless." Once again, take note that we are called God's beloved. Having received His Word and trusted in His promise of forgiveness, **we have peace!** "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." There is a reason that not even one sin of a believer mentioned on judgment day. As St. Peter says, the sheep are "without spot and blameless." They are forgiven through faith in Christ, and live accordance with Christ's promise.