

# 1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!  
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the  
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and  
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith  
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.  
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

## **The Day Of The Lord**

**February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**2 Peter 3:1-13**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 2 Peter 3:1; that's on page 1019 in your pew Bibles. You remember last week that Peter was warning his people about the dangerous threat represented by the false teachers that were on the loose inside the congregation. These people – these scoffers - didn't believe that Jesus was coming back, they didn't believe in the final judgment and they didn't believe that holiness was possible – or even necessary for a true believer. “Just believe in Jesus and live however you like” – that was the basic message, and Peter had a very stern warning for them. He said that they were headed for hell and WOE to anyone foolish enough to follow along after them.

Now here in chapter 3 he continues on with that theme. Here he is telling us that these false teachers have either forgotten or are wilfully suppressing things that they know to be true so as to provide COVER for their wicked and immoral lifestyles. That's what is really going on here Peter says, and there is no good reason for anyone to be taken in by their nonsense. We know what the Bible says – we know what was predicted in the Old Testament; what was said by Jesus and what is being said even now by the Apostles. So Peter is reviewing some of those things and providing some very useful pastoral counsel for them moving forward. We'll read the text and then examine it according to those categories.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, 3 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 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.” 5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 7 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

8 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. 9 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. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, 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.

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 3:1–13 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Even though there is an obvious thematic connection between chapter 2 and chapter 3 there is a noticeable shift in tone. Chapter 2 was very heavy. It was, as I said last Sunday, one of the most severe warnings in all of Holy Scripture and so here Peter dials back just a little bit. Like a good pastor – or a good parent – he knows that you cannot constantly apply that kind of pressure.

Sometimes you have to raise your voice, but then sometimes you have to lower your voice and here we see him doing that. Here he takes on the tone of a loving parent. He calls them his beloved. My dear children, my beloved friends – listen to me – and then he begins to explain that all of what is happening to them – the persecutions he warned them about in the first letter and these false teachers that he’s been warning them about here – all of this was foretold in Holy Scripture – all of this was predicted by Jesus.

Jesus said you would be persecuted. He said:

they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. (Matthew 24:9 ESV)

Jesus said that! He said we’d be hated by the world culture, he said we would face tribulation and even DEATH as a result of our faith in him.

Jesus said that!!!

And Jesus said that false teachers would worm their way into the church.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”  
(Matthew 7:15 ESV)

Jesus said that too!

So everything Peter has said goes back to stuff that he had learned from Jesus himself. There is nothing new here. We are going to face pressure from the outside – and we are going to face pressure on the inside. The first letter was warning you about the former and this letter is warning you about the latter. I’m not trying to frighten you here; I’m just trying to help you.

I’m trying to help you avoid the devastating error of these scoffers. These scoffers – these false teacher are people who SUPPRESS and DENY the truth SO AS to live however they want. The Old Testament talked about that – Jesus talked about that – and the Apostles talk about that.

Again, we remember that in part Peter is trying to rescue the teaching of the Apostle Paul from the distortion and abuse of these false teachers. So he’s trying to show continuity here with the other Apostles – and Paul had talked about this too. He said:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (Romans 1:18 ESV)

So – everyone is on the same page here – the OT, Jesus, and the Apostles – everyone is saying that there are going to be – that there are – false teachers and scoffers, who WILLFULLY FORGET things they know to be true SO THAT they can live however they want. The Scriptures TEACH THAT – Old Testament and New – so there is no good reason to be taken in by their nonsense.

And now he begins to remind them of what these false teachers have been working so hard to forget.

### **What The False Teachers Are “Forgetting”:**

He says first of all, that they have chosen to forget:

## 1. That Jesus promised a long delay

Look at verse 4:

They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:4 ESV)

This is so predictable, Peter says. False prophets have ALWAYS said this kind of stuff. Back in the Old Testament whenever God promised a future judgment there would be people saying:

‘The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing’ (Ezekiel 12:22 ESV)

That’s what the false prophets always said in the Old Testament and that’s exactly what these scoffers are saying now.

But they’ve forgotten something very important.

They’ve forgotten that JESUS HIMSELF SAID THAT THERE WOULD BE A LONG DELAY.

Do you remember that?

Do you remember the parable of the wise and wicked servants? At the start of the parable Jesus talks about a Master who went away for an unspecified period of time and who left his servants in charge of his affairs. The wise servant stays busy and engaged with the tasks to which he has been assigned. But then Jesus talks about the wicked servant in verse Luke 12:45. He says:

But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. (Luke 12:45–46 ESV)

So Jesus talked about this very thing! He said he was going away for an UNSPECIFIED PERIOD OF TIME. And he warned about WICKED SERVANTS who would take his DELAY as an opportunity for neglect and self-indulgence. And he said that such servants would be CUT IN PIECES and assigned a place with the unfaithful.

Jesus said this – and the false teachers in Peter’s day were trying very hard to forget it.

Secondly, Peter is saying that these scoffers are trying hard to forget:

## **2. That things can change very quickly**

Look at the second half of verse 4; they say:

“For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”  
(2 Peter 3:4 ESV)

Scholars debate here whether or not these people are advocating for the eternity of the universe. You’ve probably heard me say before that philosophers generally agree that in order for anything to exist, something has to have existed forever that has the power of life within itself. There are only two coherent options for that eternal life giving something: The universe and God. Many ancient Greeks and Romans believed that the universe was eternal and had the power of life within itself. They believed that the universe gave birth to gods and people alike. So in much of pagan religion, the gods had a beginning but the universe did not. By the way, that is what Hinduism believes as well. So that is one COHERENT option. The other coherent option is that God has existed forever and has the power of life within himself. That is the view taught in the Bible – in the very first verse of the Bible:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

Now its always tricky trying to reconstruct everything going on behind a conversation that we are only hearing one side of - but as I said, many scholars think that is exactly what is going on here. At the very least – and this point isn’t debated – these scoffers are arguing AGAINST any sort of Divine intervention in the world.

They are espousing a sort of naturalistic theory of uniformitarianism. That’s a big fancy term that is still used in modern biology and geology classes. It just means that the world does not experience any BIG CATAclysmic CHANGES. It is the idea that everything we see in the universe is best explained by slow, gradual changes over an incredibly long period of time.

Sound familiar?

That is the foundational premise of modern evolutionary theory. Modern evolutionary theory doesn't like cataclysm. It doesn't like BIG BANGS or RAPID CHANGES and it certainly does not like the idea of DIVINE INTERVENTION. Modern evolutionary theory says that everything we see in the world is best explained by slow, gradual changes over an incredibly long period of time.

That's exactly what these people are saying – in primitive form obviously.

They are saying that the world is going to keep on keeping on. There isn't going to be a cataclysmic RETURN. There isn't going to be a world changing earthquake or any kind of great tribulation – that is the stuff of fairy tales. So go back to sleep. Shhhhhhhhh. Don't worry. When you wake up tomorrow everything will be exactly the same.

The devil has been selling that lie for a very long time indeed.

But there are two things – two facts - that the false teachers are trying very hard to suppress. First of all they are suppressing or forgetting the very obvious FACT of CREATION.

GOD CREATED THIS WORLD with a CATAclysmic INTERVENTION. He SPOKE and the universe EXPLODED INTO BEING. It was no gradual process. It was a BIG BANG OF DIVINE PROPORTIONS.

And the second thing they are forgetting or suppressing is the flood. That was a pretty cataclysmic intervention. It changed the face of this world as we know it and it SCRAPED and SCRUBBED the world free of sinful defilement and contamination.

And that leads us to the third thing that these scoffers have been trying hard to forget and that is:

### **3. That God is a God of judgment**

They've been saying that Jesus isn't coming back. They've been saying that there won't be a final judgment. They've been saying that God just isn't like that. But they are forgetting that God is like that. He showed us that he was like that by sending a cataclysmic flood upon the earth.

Look at verse 5:

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. (2 Peter 3:5–6 ESV)

If the flood proves anything it is that God is a God of salvation AND judgment.

How can you overlook that?

Is God a God of salvation? Is God a God of grace? Absolutely! He told Noah to make an ark. He kept the door open for a very long time. He invited everybody in. He was patient. But then his patience came to an end. That's what the Bible says. It says that the invitation went out far and wide and 8 people respond to it – Noah and his family:

And the LORD shut him in. (Genesis 7:16 ESV)

The Lord closed the door.

The Lord sent the waters.

And everyone outside the ark perished forever.

That's what the Bible says and you would be wise NOT TO FORGET IT.

The scoffers – the false teachers – they are trying hard to forget it. They want to forget a lot of what the Bible says so that they can live however they want.

Do not be like them.

### **What Peter Wants Them To Remember:**

Peter is pleading with his people to remember the things that they've been taught. The emphasis shifts in verse 8 now to some positive reminding. He begins to teach them again, tenderly, pastorally but with some urgency too. The first thing he says is that:

## **1. There is a purpose in the patience of the Lord**

Look at verses 8-9:

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. 9 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 3:8-9 ESV)

Don't forget, my dear friends, that there is no human analogy for the Divine sense of time. We live very short lives. We are but a vapour. And God is ETERNAL IN THE HEAVENS. He sees the whole board and he is playing a LONG GAME. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – he is the God who works out purposes over MULTIPLE GENERATIONS. He is the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end – therefore DELAY is a relative term. DELAY has to be measured against the ETERNITY OF GOD. And that changes things. This DELAY, brothers and sisters has a very particular reason – this delay is about the patience and the mercy of God.

Are you hearing that brothers and sisters? You see, you have your salvation – you have had your opportunity to hear the Gospel and to be saved – but what about all those people in Tibet? What about all those people in Iran? What about all those people in North Korea? What about them? What about their opportunity? Is your persecution so unbearable; is your tribulation so unendurable that we should wrap this all up this evening so that we can march into glory while they descend into hell – is that what you want?

That isn't what God wants. This delay, brothers and sisters is about God being concerned for the lost people about this world. It's about keeping the door open before the FLOOD of judgment comes.

It's about love. It's about opportunity. It's about mission.

But, Peter goes on to remind them:

## **2. The Day of the Lord will come swiftly and without warning**

Just as it did in the days of Noah. Peter is saying this, again, because he heard Jesus saying it. Jesus said:

For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Matthew 24:37–39 ESV)

The scoffers are right in one sense, Peter says. The world will go on more or less the way it always has. People will eat and drink, they will get married and have parties RIGHT UP UNTIL THE END. And then completely unaware, the judgment of God will come RUSHING ON THEM LIKE A FLOOD.

Jesus WILL COME BACK and they won't be ready.

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:42 ESV)

That's what Jesus said – and so Peter says something very similar here.

### **3. Live every day in the light of final judgment**

Look at verse 11 and following; he says:

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! (2 Peter 3:11–12 ESV)

Jesus is coming! Maybe today, maybe tomorrow, maybe 10,000 years from now – we don't know but we need to live every day in light of his glorious and cataclysmic coming – that's what Peter is saying here.

He says 4 things about how we should be living. He says we should be living lives of holiness and godliness and we should be waiting for and hastening the day of God.

Holiness I think is pretty obvious. Peter is saying that we should not be doing what the false teachers are doing. We shouldn't be living lives of sensuality. We shouldn't be indulging the defiling lusts of the flesh. Keep your sexuality in bounds brothers and sisters.

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. (Proverbs 5:15 ESV)

That's Old Testament speak for "enjoy what God permits" and stay away from what God forbids. Enjoy your marriage. Enjoy your spouse. But you don't want to be in your neighbour's bed on the day that Jesus comes back to the earth.

You don't want to be in the strip club – you don't want to be looking at pornography – you don't want to be sleeping over at the boyfriend's house – you don't want to be crossing sexual boundaries – on the day that Jesus returns to the earth.

You want to be OUTSIDE of Sodom and you want to be INSIDE the ark – that's what he's saying here.

And you want to be living righteously. These are overlapping concepts obviously. Maybe the one has more to do with what you should be separate from and the other has more to do with what you want to be giving yourself too. We think of the parable of the sheep and the goats here. You want to be giving yourself TO service of the poor – particularly the poor among God's people – when Jesus comes back to the earth. That's the RIGHT way to prepare for the second coming.

And you want to be waiting. That seems to refer to "maintaining a hope in and a longing for the return of the Lord". The Apostle Paul spoke of that in 2 Timothy 4, he said:

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:8 ESV)

That seems to be what Peter is saying here. You want to be holy, you want to be righteous, and you want to be longing for the return of the Lord. And you want to be hastening that day also – what does that mean?

Most scholars agree that at least two things are in view here. Michael Green for example says::

"Evangelism is one way in which we can be said to hasten the coming of the Lord"<sup>1</sup>

That makes sense obviously, since Jesus said:

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 164.

this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14 ESV)

So mission and evangelism can be said to “hasten the Day of the Lord”. But so obviously can prayer. After all, Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom COME” so PRAYER in some sense SUMMONS the coming of the Lord in salvation and judgment. We see that clearly in the book of Revelation.

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. (Revelation 5:8 ESV)

In the Book of Revelation the climactic movements of God are unleashed upon the earth in response to the prayers of God’s people. So every time you pray “Thy kingdom come” you are bringing the Great Day of God’s purpose closer – you are HASTENING the Day of the Lord.

That’s what Peter says they ought to be doing.

God is delaying so that the message of the Gospel can be preached in every nation on planet earth – well then – we ought to be doing that, Peter says. We ought to be praying about that, Peter says. We ought to be calling on people to hide themselves in Christ so as to be saved from the wrath to come.

Come! Come unto Jesus and be saved!

That’s what the delay is for.

It’s not for sin – it’s not for self indulgence. It’s for LOVE. It’s for PATIENCE. It’s for MERCY. It’s for mission.

And it won’t last forever.

The Lord will return like a thief in the night and the world will be dissolved in FIRE. He will judge the living and the dead and all those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be shut out and cast out and in the dark away from God – forever.

And there will be a new heaven and a new earth and all those who have persevered to the end will be saved. They will see his face, they will hear his voice and they will enjoy his goodness forever.

That is the truth that you've been told before, Peter says. That's the message of the Bible – Old Testament and New and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.