

# Sermon 19, What Scoffers Miss, 2 Peter 3:4-7

Read Genesis 1

**Proposition:** Scoffers overlook the role of water and God's word in creation and flood, and fire and God's Word in the coming judgment.

- I. How Scoffers Justify Themselves, v. 4
  - A. They Ask Where Jesus Is
  - B. They Assert that Nothing Has Changed Since Creation
- II. What Scoffers' Self-Justification Leads them to Overlook, vv. 5-7
  - A. Water and the Word Brought About the Heavens and the Earth, v. 5
  - B. Water and the Word Destroyed the Then World, v. 6
  - C. The Word Preserves the Present World for Judgment by Fire, v. 7

## Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, last week we saw a warning against scoffers and a challenge to know Christ as Lord and Savior rather than to live according to our own desires. This week, Peter provides more information on the scoffers, and more information on Christ as Lord and Savior. The scoffers are people who justify themselves by overlooking the role of water and the word in creation and the flood. Christ, though, is the one who created and judged by water and the word, and who will judge by His word and fire on judgment day. Once again, the text poses to us the question of who we're going to trust. Is it going to be Christ, or the scoffers?

### I. How Scoffers Justify Themselves, v. 4

We begin by looking at how the scoffers justify themselves. They do it with two questions that they regard as basically unanswerable. These questions will shut down a Christian every time.

#### A. They Ask Where Jesus Is

The first one is simply, "Where is Jesus?"

The Christian answer, one we all know, is that He is at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. To which the skeptic can say, "In other words, I can't see Him. You can't show Him to me. You can believe whatever you want about Heaven because you've never been there and neither has anyone else. Your claim is nonsense because it can't be falsified."

The Christian can respond "He promised to come back and show Himself to the whole world. You'll see in time."

But the scoffer simply says again, "Where is this 'coming' He promised?" If Jesus is really coming, where is He? He hasn't come. He isn't here. And I would suggest to you that the best way to explain that obvious, undeniable fact, is that a dead Jewish man from the first century is never going to come back. He's a pile of dust in a grave somewhere. That's it. Dead people don't come back with the clouds.

Brothers and sisters, that's the scoffers' first question. Where is Jesus? Why can't I see Him?

Notice what their hidden assumptions are. They assume that if Jesus is real, then He will be perfectly obvious to them. They will be able to detect Him and His providential rule over all creation with the tools they already have and the ideologies they already believe. The problem with this assumption is that we would not expect the all-powerful Lord of the Universe to show Himself to any scoffer who doesn't believe in Him. Imagine someone saying "I don't believe that Donald Trump really exists. I think he's a being made up by Republicans to gain political power." Would the real Donald Trump drop everything to meet that person and convince him that he really is the POTUS? Of course not. Cranks are just cranks. But we'll get there. Peter provides three good reasons to believe that Jesus is real and scoffers are wrong. But before we look at them, we have to look at the other question scoffers ask — or better, the other statement they make.

### **B. They Assert that Nothing Has Changed Since Creation**

Basically, this is an assertion that nothing has changed since creation. Presumably, by "the fathers" they mean the Old Testament patriarchs. Indeed, whoever we think they mean by "the fathers," it's clear enough that they are convinced that nothing has really changed since creation. Now, if they believe in creation they clearly believe that God in some sense has the power to intervene in Earth's destiny. And these are presumably the false teachers of ch. 2, who were in the church in some sense. Nonetheless, it's best not to push this statement of "creation" too hard. Evolutionists today can speak of "creatures" without thereby committing themselves to the idea that God created those animals. Their basic point is that nothing is going to change. Today, we call this idea uniformitarianism. It essentially says that we can retroject the present into the past and project the present into the future — e.g., we can see how much hydrogen is in the sun, how quickly the sun burns hydrogen, and thereby calculate when the sun came into existence and when it will burn out. Such calculations all depend on the notion that the rate of consumption is constant, or at least predictable. And same with this argument of the scoffers. They want it to be true that judgment isn't coming. They want it to be true that the world will just roll on, same as always, forever and ever.

### **II. What Scoffers' Self-Justification Leads them to Overlook, vv. 5-7**

But in wanting it to be true, they overlook three obvious things. In other words, though he's presented the voice of the skeptics, Peter is now going to provide a counter-argument. He starts with this accusation of cognitive bias. They want their view to be true, and this desire blinds them to the obvious.

We call this confirmation bias, and it's a well-known phenomenon these days. I want it to be true that no one notices my body odor; therefore, if no one mentions it I assume they can't smell it, even though I can smell it perfectly well myself. I want it to be true that my political party is correct, therefore I only read sources that agree with my party. I want it to be true that my theological position is correct, therefore I don't pay any attention when some theologian

presents a good argument against it. Brothers and sisters, we all do this to some extent. But the false teachers have a really bad case of it. They don't want to be judged for their evil teachings. Therefore, they pretend that they're not evil and that there will be no judgment. They overlook three important factors.

#### **A. Water and the Word Brought About the Heavens and the Earth, v. 5**

The first of these is that water and the word brought about the heavens and the earth. Now, obviously this is in two different senses. Water is not a co-agent of creation along with the word of God; rather, the waters of chaos were present as soon as God had created the heavens and the earth. First He made them, formless and void, and then He formed and filled them. In that initial moment when the earth was without form and empty of life, the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. The raw material of earth had already been created, but God only then began to shape it, to form it, to make it into the world we know today. Then, of course, as Genesis 1 goes on to say, after it had been formed, God filled it with life. But in any case, the earth stood forth out of water by the word of God, when God divided the waters from the waters. The earth was created formless, covered by the chaos waters, and passed through a period of time when it was submerged entirely in water. Only after God's work of forming and separating the waters was complete, by the agency of the God who spoke, did earth as we know it appear.

In this truth lies the destruction of the scoffers' simplistic worldview. They look at the present earth and cannot imagine it submerged in the waters of chaos, or being shaped by the word of the God who spoke and it was done. They don't get that. They completely overlook it, because they don't want God's judgment to happen. They don't want this to be our Father's world.

#### **B. Water and the Word Destroyed the Then World, v. 6**

They also overlook the truth that the word of God that shaped the world, and the water that originally submerged it, were also active in the great deluge. Noah's neighbors thought he was delusional (pun intended), but he's the one who had it right. Water and the word destroyed the world in Noah's day. God creates by the word and judges by the word, as Genesis 1 and Revelation 19 make all too clear. The Son of God is the Word personified, one with the Father and yet distinguished from the Father. You mess with Him at your peril.

#### **C. The Word Preserves the Present World for Judgment by Fire, v. 7**

Because you see, whether you can see Jesus or not, whether you believe in uniformitarianism or not, the truth of the matter is that His Word keeps the present-day heavens and earth in being until such time as the world will be judged by fire. One of the reasons that God preserves the world through His providential care is positive — He's giving time for repentance. We'll talk about that next week. But another reason that He preserves it is negative. He's keeping it around so that it can be judged. Part of why this world is so depressing is that it is in a holding pattern waiting until everything burns. The ungodly are running rampant right now, celebrating their victories right and left. But God will judge them in good time. He will not let them celebrate perversion and hold pride parades forever. He will return in the person of His Son, and when He

does, the world will burn. The ungodly will be judged for their ungodliness. It will happen. It's only a matter of time. Don't forget this, Peter says. Don't listen to the mockers. Christ will reveal Himself to them in due time. But until that time comes, wait. Listen. Trust. Water and word created the world and judged the world. Now the same powerful word of God waits until the fire comes.

So what do you want: to follow your own desires into the fire, having the world's respect and applause the whole time? Or to follow Christ the Word through oppression and mockery, even when you can't see Him, to dwelling in His house forever? The choice is clear. Respond to mockers with a full-throated defense of creation by the word of God and judgment by the word of God. And then pursue godliness. If you do these things, you will never stumble. Amen.