

2nd Sunday of Advent – Prepare for the Coming  
(2 Peter 3:3-14)

Turn to 2 Peter 3. At a simple level, the Bible is a particular view of human history. Every history book says what the writer thinks are the important events during a certain time and place. The Bible does this.

The Bible tells the big story of human history, and says which are the important events. It not only says which are the important events, but explains what the events mean, and what the results were. This includes crucial events that have not happened yet.

The NT Scripture for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent is from 2 Peter 3, which is about Christ's second coming. But Peter says a lot about human history here, past as well as future.

Scoffers introduced (2 Peter 3:3-4) *Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."*

Peter says these people will come in the last days. In Jude, which describes the very same people, they were already present. 2 Peter is mostly about these false teachers, warning the churches about.

They act as if they are believers. They know about the "coming" that was promised. In 2 Peter 2:1 it says they "deny the sovereign Lord that bought them." These people have decided that God will not end human history after all.

It has been too long. Nothing has changed since the beginning of creation. And this teaching went along with "following their own evil desires." They taught that there will be no judgment day at the end, no end at all, so it does not matter how we live.

The Flood and the Future (3:5-7) - *But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. <sup>6</sup> By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. <sup>7</sup> By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

The scoffers used actual human history, empirical evidence, to show that there will be no coming and no judgment. Their evidence was that life on earth has always gone on as it now is. Based on the evidence of the past, they said, no future coming.

But Peter pointed out something that these people already knew about: the flood. God created heaven and formed earth by his word. The world at that time was deluged and destroyed, flooded and destroyed.

Peter divides history into two parts here, in a sober way. First part: God created heaven and earth, and then with water destroyed that world and the awful people in it.

Second part: We are now living in the earth that began after the flood, and this present earth is reserved for a judgement by fire and the destruction of the ungodly people in it.

Peter used actual human history as well, to correct this false teaching. Everything has *not* gone on the same since the beginning of creation.

Interlude: 2 Peter 2 – God rescues his people – Peter uses frightening language in our text, and I think he does so deliberately. False teachers are saying there are no consequences for bad behaviour, and Peter wants to make clear: yes, there are!

But what about God’s children? What will happen to them when God sends fire? Peter wrote about that earlier in this letter, and we should read that now: 2 Peter 2:5.

*2 Peter 2:5-9 - If God did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; <sup>6</sup> if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; <sup>7</sup> and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless <sup>8</sup> (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— <sup>9</sup> if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.*

The key line here is the last one, in v9: *The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgement.* God has shown this in the past, and will show it again in the coming fire judgement.

When God destroyed the first world with the flood, he rescued his people. When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, he again rescued Lot and his daughters. At that time others were urged to flee as well, but did not believe the warning.

Peter does not know how God will rescue his people in the future, or if he knows he’s not saying, but Peter does know that God can send wide judgment and rescue his people, and Peter knows this will happen again at the final judgment of fire. Back to 2 Peter 3.

Peter now deals with another problem: how long the final judgment is taking to arrive. Things have indeed gone on the same for a long time. The scoffers are right about that.

Why the long delay in final judgment? (vv8-9) *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

There are two explanations here. One reason for the long time is that time is very different to the Lord. To the Lord, one of our days can seem like a thousand years.

There's a thought. Once in a while we have a day that seems like it will never end. God sometimes experiences time like that as well.

And, to the Lord a thousand years can seem like a day. God measures time differently, says Peter, and we need to take that into account.

That's the first answer to how long it is taking. The second answer is that the Lord is *patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

The Lord is patient with YOU. This letter was read aloud in churches. The *scoffers* were there, listening to this. And in 2 Peter 2:14 and 18 Peter said that weak believers and new believers would follow the false teaching. They also are the YOU that God waited for.

There were people in the churches that were living as if there would not be any consequences for sin. God delayed Christ's return so that these people would turn from their disobedient living, and repent, so that God's rescue would include them as well.

This is *not* about believers who struggle with sin. All believers struggle with sin. That's why the Lord's Prayer says that Christ's disciples need to ask forgiveness every day.

The Lord's patiently delaying his return is not for them, because that kind of sin will always happen. God's people will need to say the Lord's Prayer right up to the day the Lord returns, and they will be praying it.

What I mean is that believers will need to be asking God to forgive them their sins right to the day the Lord returns, *and that is not a problem!!* The Lord patiently delays his return, but not for such people.

The patiently delayed return is for people in the church who say, "we can live however we please, and there are no consequences for our sin," and these people actually live that way. THOSE are the people whom God wants to repent instead of perish. He is patient with you.

The Lord will surprise – v10 - *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.*

The day of the Lord will come like a thief. This is an image Jesus himself used. When Jesus described his return in the Gospels, his emphasis was not on signs, but on complete surprise. That was the Lord's emphasis. No one will expect it.

When the Lord taught about this, he had the same emphasis that Peter will get to next: live so that you're ready. Live as a follower every single day.

The faithful and the wicked will be equally surprised. Thieves are careful to show up when they are not expected. The Lord's return will be like that. Live faithfully.

*The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.*

We don't usually connect the Lord's return with fire, but that's mentioned in other Scriptures as well. John the Baptist thought that the things Peter connects to the second coming of Christ were going to happen at Christ's first coming.

John said "*Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance*" (Mt 3:7-8). John knew that a great rage from God was going to be poured out on earth, and that only those who repented would be rescued.

John also said, "*Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire*" (Mt 3:10). John also said, "*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*" (Mt 3:11). Everyone gets baptized, either with the Spirit, or with fire.

John also said, "*He will gather his wheat into the barn and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*" (Mt 3:12).

Paul writes this: *This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels* (2 Thess. 1:7). This fire is not how we usually picture the Lord's return, but it occurs in other places than just 2 Peter 3.

This all comes from the OT: Zephaniah 1:18 - *Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath." In the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.* See also Zeph. 3:8 - *I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger.*

Is Peter using scare tactics here? Yes, he is. I cannot see anyway to avoid it. If one only uses scare tactics to move people toward God, there is a problem. The Bible deliberately frightens people who ignore God, in order to motive them to repent.

BUT, that is not the normal posture of the Bible, at all. Overall it is a minor method of God. The Bible's normal way of calling people to God is to show people how kind and merciful God has been to other sinful people who have turned to God. That's the normal way. But that's not the only way the Scripture calls people.

If your house is on fire in the middle of the night, the very best thing that could happen to you is that your neighbour wakes you up with the frightening news that your house is on fire. That's what a good neighbour would do – it would be a kindness.

Application and hope (vv11-13) - *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives<sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.<sup>13</sup> But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*

*Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.*

Purpose of Prophecy: Peter does something here that can hardly be overemphasized – the Bible speaks about the future ONLY to shape our present lives. WE are curious about the future, what will happen and when will it happen.

Biblical writers could hardly care less about that curiosity. They want only to encourage us right now to live like children of God. The Bible warns of coming judgment so that God's people will live in God's ways NOW. And the Bible promises unbelievably good things from God in the future so that God's people will be encouraged NOW.

That's why it is so hard to put together a coherent picture of the final events. They DON'T CARE if we can put together a coherent picture of final events. The Bible's writers want us to be faithful NOW, and hopeful and optimistic NOW.

From the OT prophets to the end of Revelation, that is the one and only purpose of Biblical prophecy. That's why it is hard to sort out. Sorting it out does not matter.

I have never been to a "prophecy seminar," but I have heard of them. It seems to me that the only legitimate prophecy seminar would amount to a revival meeting, doing exactly what Peter does here, an urgent call to live holy and godly lives.

This is what God is doing today, here, now. By this Scripture, the God who we sang to a few minutes ago, who is still present with us, urges us to live holy and godly *lives*.

*As you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming* (v12). If we were not going to be rescued from this fire, we'd not look forward to it. But we look forward to it because of what it will bring.

Peter actually speaks of three worlds in our text. The first world began with creation by God's word, and ended with the flood. The second world began after the flood, and will end in fire when the Lord returns. But then there is new heaven and earth, a third world, and that will be an excellent place for us and all God's people.

What does this mean, that we can "speed its coming?" By what Peter just wrote this can mean only one thing. He said in v9 that God was delaying the End because he was being patient with those who read this who need to repent.

If people are living as if how we live does not matter, they should repent, and if such people repented, there would be no reason for delay. It would speed the Lord's return. (This leaves some questions unanswered in my mind, but I can't see another way to take *speed its coming*.)

Peter applies his teaching in two ways. One, we should live holy and godly lives, and two, we can look forward to the new heaven and earth where righteousness lives.

For ordinary, common believers then and now, children of God like us, people with a fair amount of trouble and confusion in our lives as we try to live like Christ's followers, for this kind of ordinary common believer Peter sees this as nothing but good news.

A great change is right now sneaking up on us like a thief. Life will be going on as always, Jesus said, people will be eating and drinking and getting married and carrying on in the ordinary ways, just like in Noah's day, and all of a sudden it's over.

The Lord will come with mighty angels and with fire, as Paul said in 2 Thessalonians, this world that we know will be destroyed with fervent fire, and there will be a new heaven and earth where righteousness is at home. For us that will be the best day ever.

Final call- v14- *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

The goal is not to live as if this day will come this week. It could, but it might not. The goal is to live so that whether it happens this week OR not for many years, either way we're ready.

If I knew the Lord would return this week, I would ignore basic things necessary for ongoing life, things that I would not ignore if the day of God was delayed for many years.

We are called to live ready for the Lord's surprise return, but also to live responsibly toward ongoing human life. But, we live so that sooner is better.

So we live KNOWING that this day of God will most certainly happen, we live so that if it happens this week we are ready because we are right now living faithfully before God and we are at peace with him. And, we live so that if the day of God does not come for years we're ready for that as well.

Whether it happens this week OR not for many years, either way we're ready. BUT, live so that sooner is better.

I'll close with a short conversation between Jesus and John right at the end of Revelation.

Jesus to John: *"Yes, I am coming soon."* John to Jesus: *"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."*

Amen.