

Sermon: A Strategy for the Lord's Return

Text: II Peter 3

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Introduction: **II Peter 3:1-2 (NIV)** ¹Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. ²I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

The opening verses (vv. 1-2) in chapter 3 serve as both an introduction to the material Peter wants to share and a repetition of what he has already told his readers even in his previous letter. Peter wants them to wake up to the importance of “wholesome thinking.” Plato used the phrase in the sense of “pure reason” that was uncontaminated by the seductive influence of the senses (see Green, p. 134).

The Apostle Peter insists that to protect oneself against a seductive world one needs to recall the O.T. prophets' words, those words of his, and the other apostles of Jesus. These words were Scripture and would help provide life in the midst of a distractive, dying world.

Why was Peter so keen on reminding the church of their need to live holy, righteous lives? He wanted them to know of the Lord's return and how they should prepare. The Church needed a strategy for action. This strategy required them to:

I. Be Aware of Scoffers (vv. 3-7).

II Peter 3:3-7 (NIV) ³First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” ⁵But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

A. Scoffers will come.

1. providing a bad moral example (v. 3)

One only has to look at TV sitcoms, Hollywood icons, or popular musicians many of which have no shame, to see behavior that many try to emulate.

Look at the way many of these people dress, talk, and act. We see and hear actors of questionable moral reputation giving us counsel on how to find God and happiness from new-agers like Oprah, to Madonna a follower most recently of Cabbala, or Tom Cruise and John Travolta's fascination with Scientology. What is God's world coming to when *those* are the people we look to for wisdom.

Everywhere I look I see and hear characters in various forms of media making fun of Jesus, faith, and those who call themselves Christian.

2. planting seeds of doubt (v. 4)

There are people everywhere mocking faith and making fun of things they know nothing about. How many of you saw the Grammy's last Sunday evening and listened to Kid Rock's version of the gospel?

"Rock N Roll Jesus"

Turn me up in the headphones

Been alotta cheap talk but I rock still
From the streets of Shanghai back to Knoxville
Sittin' high on a mountain top holdin' shop spreadin' the good news
Been alotta false prophets and quick hits
And a lot of unAmerican bull.....
But the time has come to settle and the devil's gonna make u choose

And just like a cold wind blowin' can u feel me comin' for u
Just like a freight train rollin' packed tight full of rhythm and blues

Testify
It's a Rock revival
Don't need a suit
Ya don't need a bible
Get up and dance
I'm gonna set you free yeah
Testify
It's all sex, drugs, rock n roll
A soul sensation that you can't control
And you can see I practice what I preach
I'm your rock n roll Jesus
Yes I am

Been alotta bling bling but it ain't real
And alotta new kings but I won't kneel
Sittin' high on a mountain top, holdin' shop singin' the raw dog blues
Like in old Mississippi's dirty cotton fields
Or in Detroit City's unforgotten wheels
It's the same song spinning but the same song's always been true

And I'm gonna take my roll cuz I ain't got nothin' to lose
And I'm gonna save your soul if it's really what you want me to do *[Repeat chorus]*

Get on your knees - I'm your rock n roll Jesus

“Anthropocentric hedonism always mocks at the idea of ultimate standards and a final division between saved and lost.” - Green, p. 138

These scoffers say, “well, where is he? He said he was coming back, did I miss it?”

B. Scoffers have deliberately forgotten God’s abilities.

1. creation (v. 5)

The heavens and the earth were created out of water and by water with simply a word. God spoke everything into existence. Talk about power and authority!

A person can say that the world is stable and unchanging, going on like it always has, but they are not in touch with reality and the possibility of cataclysmic change.

2. past judgment on sinners (v. 6)

These scoffers have convenient memories about how God punished those who led immoral lives in the past and ignored his commands. Almighty God created the world with water and punished the world with water after they refused to obey him. God is in complete control of everything that He created.

Listen to Jesus’ words:

Matthew 24:37-39 (NIV) ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

John Calvin said, “nature is not enough to support and maintain the world, but rather it contains the material for its own ruin whenever it may please God.” - Green, pp. 141-142

God has issued past judgments on man and there is the promise of:

3. future judgment on sinners (v. 7)

Future judgment is to be accompanied by fire. The concept of fire as punishment is as old as Sodom and Gomorrah. We find another example of this idea in the O.T.

Nahum 1:5-6 (NIV) ⁵The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. ⁶Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him.

We see it in intertestamental literature, the N.T. and even in contemporary literature and cartoons, but this no laughing matter. Hell will not be a place full of laughter.

It is my firm belief that the word translated *destruction* should not give anyone the idea of annihilation, but of separation and the loss of contact with God and anything good, pure and holy.

God is always going:

4. to keep his word

God has a track record we can consult. If God says it, it will happen, and He will ultimately protect his people.

II Thessalonians 1:6-9 (NIV) ⁶God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

II. Be Patient with God's Timing (vv. 8-9).

II Peter 3:8-9 (NIV) ⁸But 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. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

A. God's timing is different (v. 8).

Verse 8 in our text is a quote from the psalms.

Psalms 90:4 (NIV) ⁴For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

This is simply the psalmist's way of saying God has the big picture and long view of things in mind. This is not a literal statement, but a figure of speech (simile). It certainly is not the key to unlocking when Jesus will come again.

The terminally ill person knows that time is a gift, not to be taken for granted. Yet, we are all terminally ill, we just may not know when we will die.

“Faith orients man to eternity, whereas scoffers remain children of time.” - Barnett quoted in Green, p. 147

I Peter 4:7 (NIV) ⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

That is the perspective we all need.

B. God wants mankind restored to Him (v. 9).

“Final doom is no more inevitable for our world than it was for Ninevah, if like the men of Ninevah, we humble ourselves and repent.” - Green, p. 145

Everything God has done, or will do, is to reestablish a relationship with his creation. He wants everyone to be saved no matter how unlikely some people’s chances may seem to be to us. God wants to go back to the “good old days” before the fall, before shame, sin and separation. He has done everything necessary to demonstrate his love and patience, and He awaits our response to his invitation.

Peter has no credibility with a world full of scoffers. His message is for the Church:
III. Be Prepared for a Sudden Coming (vv. 10-12).

II Peter 3:10-12 (NIV) ¹⁰But 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 in it will be laid bare. ¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as 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.

The scoffers were pointing out that nothing had happened like what was promised, but “delay does not mean non-fulfillment.” - Green, p. 148

The fact is:

A. God will come like a thief (v. 10a).

The second coming of Christ will be totally unexpected like a night-time visit from a burglar. It cannot be predicted with any certainty because Mark tells us that only the Father knows when Jesus will come back.

Mark 13:32-37 (NIV) ³²“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. ³⁵“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

The climax of history is coming, and we need to be ready.

B. Heaven and earth will disappear (v. 10bc., 12)

The idea of fire here removes everything from the earth other than God and man. We are left in a courtroom scene where there can be no pretense. Everything man has accumulated or done has been taken off the table. The only thing left is one's character and relationship with God. Hopefully before it is too late we all learn that people matter more than things.

And no matter what it seems, we will outlive the material world around us!

So it is that Peter urges Christians to:

C. Live holy lives (v. 11).

You see if there is no final judgment, then why not live without restraints. But there will be a final accounting!

There is a close connection between conduct and conviction. Rather than live according to God's rules, man tries to reinterpret what God said so he can do what he wants.

Barclay says that disbelief in the second coming of our Lord leads man down a path of hedonism (live for self), apathy (no direction or reason to live), and finally depression (why live at all). Without the truth, embodied in the second coming doctrine, that life is going somewhere, there is nothing left to live for. - see Green, p. 152

As Christians we have every reason to:

IV. Be Confident in the Future (vv. 13-16).

II Peter 3:13-16 (NIV) ¹³But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

A. We have a promised reward (vv. 13-14).

1. new heaven and earth (home of righteousness)

The end of time does not remove the earth and heaven, but renews them, and restores them to what they were meant to be: a place where righteousness dwells.

The word translated home in v. 13 (NIV) is really a verb like “dwells” in the NKJV. The word has the idea of permanence. No more tent-living for God’s people, only mansions.

**We have every reason to live with confidence about the future (no matter what happens)
2. providing we live responsibly.**

If we are living right, it will not matter when we die or when Jesus comes. The trouble is that too many are betting their lives and hoping it will not be today. But what if it is, today?

We are to make every effort to imitate Christ. He was spotless and blameless, just the opposite of the false teachers who were blots and blemishes (2:13).

We can insure our future:

B. By making sound decisions about teaching (vv. 15-16)

Don’t believe everything you hear! Check it against God’s word. Study God’s word. Pray for understanding of God’s word.

1. avoid ignorant and unstable people

False teachers do not submit their actions to the scrutiny of Scripture, they make Scripture the justification for what they want to do. - (s. Green, p. 160)

You need to chose wisely whom you listen to:

2. so as not to follow those who will be separated from God eternally.

We certainly do not want to fall from our secure position, become apostate, and shipwreck our faith. We need to be careful with what God has given us.

Conclusion: [II Peter 3:17-18 \(NIV\)](#) ¹⁷Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

There are three “g”-words you need to remember from Peter’s words: guard, grow, and glorify. Guard and grow are both imperatives. We are commanded to guard against being duped into believing falsehoods about salvation. We also must grow so we do not atrophy and die spiritually. “The Christian life, it has been said, is like riding a bicycle. Unless you keep moving, you fall off!” - Green, p. 163

We need to be careful in this world that we are not seduced into believing a lie by the devil and his army of followers. We need to be intentional about growing in our relationship with our Lord. We need to praise and glorify our Lord with our deeds and words because He alone can save us from the coming Judgment.