

"THE DELAY IN HIS COMING"

2 Peter 3:1-9

Introduction:

Your attitude toward the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is revealing. It exposes your true attitude toward Him. Those who love Him love His appearing. They expectantly look forward to the day when He will come with a display of great victory. Those who have no place for Him in their lives are skeptical about any coming on His part, and if they consider it very seriously, are rather frightened by the possibility.

The expectancy of those earliest Christians was very intense. They earnestly prayed, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" It was the prayer and hope of their hearts. But the years went by, and He did not come. The worldly wise began to raise questions about His coming. What is the significance of the delay? Have those who believed on Him been deceived? Should they go on praying and preparing for His coming? Peter deals with these questions in a very helpful way. You should know how to respond to the scoffers once you have absorbed this passage. This passage should also quicken your expectancy of this promised appearance.

I. THE DELAY OF THE LORD'S COMING IS QUESTIONED BY THE WORLD.

We should not be surprised by the scoffers who question the delay. If we are surprised, it is because we do not know the Word of the Lord. From the very first the Christians were prepared for such a happening. Peter indicates that we should see two things in their questions.

First, their questions are sure sign of the last days. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" "The last days" is used in some places to refer to the whole period from the ascension of Christ back to heaven until His second return. However, it is used in other places to refer to a period of great difficulty for His people that will come right before the Second Coming. It could be interpreted either way here, or both. It is true that there have been such mockers ever since the earliest Christian period. But it also is true that we are correct in expecting a greater manifestation of such skepticism right before His return. This is just that kind of age. This is not the kind of age in which the Christian message will be readily received by everyone who hears it. Rather we are to expect opposition to the Christian proclamation right up to the coming of our Lord. The scoffers are a sure indication of the nature of this age.

Second, their questions are also a sure sign of their spiritual condition. Such questions come out of two things. First, those who raise such questions are busily engaged in indulging their own sinful desires. "Walking after their own lusts." They do not want the Lord to come. They have a definite bias against the very thought of His coming to judge the world. Above everything else they are trying to convince themselves that His delay means that He is not coming. Their problem is not intellectual or theological, it is moral! You cannot live a life of indulgence and expectancy of the Lord's coming at the same time. Indulgence just encourages skepticisms.

Third, their questions are also an expression of willful ignorance. "For this they are willingly ignorant of." They have not given themselves to the study of the evidence that is available. They have grabbed hold of some impressions that came their way and transformed them into skeptical questions. They have been short on research and study. They have found it more convenient to close their minds to what the Lord wants to say to them about this subject. I do not believe you can study this book, and become acquainted with what the Lord God has done and what He has promised to do, without coming away with a sure conviction that the Lord Jesus Christ is sure to come again. The skeptics are skeptics because they refuse to consider all of the evidence. This is a revelation of their true spiritual condition. They just do not

have a heart for the things of God. Their mind is made up against God.

II. THE DELAY OF THE LORD'S COMING IS EXPLAINED BY HIS NATURE.

From God's point of view there has been no delay in His coming. He never at any time gave any specific time at which He would come. Rather He just gave a firm promise that Jesus Christ would come to the earth a second time. In responding to the skeptics, Peter takes their objection seriously however. He focuses their attention upon the character of God Himself. If God has made a promise concerning the coming either His character or His power must be at stake.

First, Peter affirms that God is faithful to His word. "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished; but the heavens and earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." The Apostle reminds us of some sacred history so that we might know about the word of God. The power of the word of God was revealed in the creation. It was by the spoken word of God that the earth appeared out of the waters of the chaos by the word of God.

Later it was by the word of the same God that the earth was overflowed with water in judgment. This is a clear reference to the watery judgment that God sent in the day of Noah. The creation has not continued as it was from the beginning. There has already been one worldwide catastrophe in the affairs of men. So now by the word of the same God the earth is being treasured up for another world-wide catastrophe. This time the judgment will come as fire instead of water. The affairs of ungodly men will be brought to a screeching halt by the fiery judgment of God. The obvious purpose of this fiery judgment will be the purification of the earth. The fire of God's presence will burn out all of the dross and impurity.

Do you see what is at stake in the second coming of Christ? The primary thing that is at stake is the Word of God Himself. Has God promised something He cannot do? Has God promised something that He is unwilling to do? If you know our God, the answer is clear. To know God is to know that He is able and ready to keep His word. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one word of our God will fail. What God has promised, He will do!

Second, Peter affirms that God is eternal. "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." The Apostle is reflecting an insight that he found in Psalm 90:4. In the Psalm the eternity of God is held up in contrast to the brevity of man's life. There is no way to compare the two. Man is a creature of time, while God is the Creator of both. These skeptics were overlooking this truth about God. They were judging God by human standards. They were acting as though God lived by a clock and a calendar.

This great truth has many applications to the question before us. Man has to hurry about his work, because he has a limitation in ability. He can only do so much in a day. God has no such need of hurrying. He can do as much in a day as pleases him. He can do more in a day than man can do in a thousand years. All he needs is one of man's days, or any part of it to do what He wants to do.

Furthermore, man has to hurry because he has a limitation of time. Man has only so many days to do what he is going to do. As you become older you become more aware of the limitation placed on these days. None of us will ever have enough days to do all that we want to do. God has no such problem. He has all eternity. The sun never sets on Him. Night never comes to Him. With Him a thousand years is as one day. God must smile at our fretting about time. When you consider the eternity of God the delay has only to be for a "little while."

Third, the other explanation for the delay is found in the longsuffering of God. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness: but is longsuffering to usward,

not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." This really comes close to home. The more you know about God the more impressed you will become with His patience and longsuffering. God truly does not delight in judgment. Isaiah referred to judgment as the "strange work" of God. God does not desire to see men perish. He is ready and willing for all to come to repentance and find rescue from the judgment to come. This is why he has delayed His promise. He is not lazy nor indifferent--rather he is longsuffering to you.

Evidently Peter means to direct this word to the immoral skeptics who were mocking at the idea of a Second Coming. While they were using the delay in His coming as a basis for indulgence in sin, it has actually been given that they might repent.

Do you catch the force of this? Why has Jesus Christ not returned to the earth? Ultimately it is because of His desire to see as many of you prepare yourselves for that coming as possible. He delayed the flood upon the earth in the day of Noah for one hundred and twenty years to give men time to repent. He has delayed the second coming of our Lord for almost two thousand years. This could be a further indication of how much more severe this visitation will be when it does come. With the coming of this judgment, there will be no more opportunities for the family of man to find a place for God. This is the last days of man and the earth.

Conclusion:

Are you ready for His coming? What would constitute a state of readiness? From reading the New Testament I believe that nothing less than a truly expectant heart will do. Nothing less than a genuine love for the coming of the Lord will do. This fearful dread that some of us know will not do. Until we have truly come to the place that we deeply desire the coming of Jesus Christ, and express that desire in a prayer for His coming, we have not come to the proper place yet.

Are you ready? He has delayed until this point in time that you might prepare yourself and be ready. Do it now.