

Title: **The Promise of Christ's Coming (Part 3)**

Passage: **2 Peter 3:8-9**

Theme: **Understand the prophetic presumption of the pessimists in light of the promise of God's perfect patience.**

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{Read Passage}

The 19th c. Danish theologian/philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, tells a parable of a theater where a variety show is proceeding. Each show is more fantastic than the last, and is applauded by the audience.

Suddenly the theater manager appears. Apologizing for the interruption, he declares that the theater is on fire, and he begs his patrons to leave in an orderly fashion. The audience thinks this is the most amusing turn of the evening, and cheer thunderously. The manager again implores them to leave the burning building, and he is again applauded vigorously. At last he can do no more. The fire raced through the whole building and the fun-loving audience with it. “And so,” concluded Kierkegaard, “will our age, I sometimes think, go down in fiery destruction to the applause of a crowded house of cheering spectators.” [cited in Helm]

I don't know about t/applause part, but he did get the fiery destruction right ==> v. 7 ==> v. 10.

In between those 2 vv. (7|10) we have vv. 8-9.

The Promise of Christ's Coming (Part 3)

Understand the prophetic presumption of the pessimists in light of the promise of God's perfect patience.

The scoffers, mockers of Peter's day (our own) accused God of procrastination. Peter tells us that t/delay in t/Parousia isn't a matter of procrastination, but of God's perfect patience.

We must understand the prophetic presumption of the pessimists in light of the promise of God's perfect patience.

I. A Two-Part Accusation (3-4)

A. Where is the Promise of His Coming? (4a)

B. The Basis for Their Argument: Uniformitarianism (4b)

A theological U. ==>

"For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have from the beginning of creation."

Why t/delay in X's coming // judgment?

II. A Three-Fold Answer (5-9)

A. An Answer that Looks Back to the Past (5-6)

For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God,

In looking back to t/past, Peter points out that ==>

1. God is the Only Eternal Sovereign Creator (5a)

a. He is eternal

(1 of His NCAs) - He has no beginning, no ending // T/uncaused cause of all things // simply IS.

b. He is sovereign

God in complete control of everything at all times. In His sov. rule He providentially cares for all of creation ==>

Matt 6:26 "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. **Are you not worth much more than they?"**

30 "But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, **will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?"**

The false teachers were promoting Uniformitarianism & Peter counters w/Providentialism: God is eternal // sovereign.

AND Creator ==>

2. God Created the Earth by His Word with Water (5b)

God spoke t/world's into existence by t/breath of His mouth. He took a formless and void earth & His Spirit moved over the surface of the waters (Gen. 1:2).

God created light // An expanse in t/midst of t/waters (liveable atmosphere).

And He separated t/waters, parting them by His divine decree & gathering them together that t/dry land would appear.

He created man, woman, all of plant and animal life.

"By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps 33:6)

3. God Destroyed the Earth by His Word with Water (6)

through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

In creation, God was taking that which was in process and looked chaotic, making it orderly & able to sustain life.

Genesis 7 – it goes into reverse. Judgment. A catastrophic flood that stands as one of t/key events in t/history of creation whereby God acted in such a direct & obvious way – totally contrary to t/uniformitarianism that t/false teachers were proposing in saying that everything in life & creation remains t/same.

You can only imagine what that race of people thought when it began to rain, probably for t/first time. *"Well, this is interesting. What do you think it means?"*

Cataclysmic event. We get our word "Cataclysm" from this Grk word for flooded κατακλυζω.

"Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have from the beginning of creation."

16th c. German Reformer Martin Luther ==>

The darkness grows thicker around us, and godly servants of the Most High become rarer and more rare. Impiety and licentiousness are rampant throughout the world, and we live like pigs, like wild beasts, devoid of all reason. But a voice will soon be heard thundering forth: `Behold, the bridegroom cometh!' God will not be able to bear this

wicked world much longer, but will come, with the dreadful day, and chastise the scorners of his Word."

That dreadful day (only be dreadful for t/mockers, not for believers) is where Peter turns next, part 2 of his answer ==>

B. An Answer that Looks Forward to the Future (7)

But the present heavens and the earth by the same word are being stored up for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

What happened in t/past was a forerunner in miniature of what will happen in the future.

But the present heavens and the earth . . .

That is, in contrast to t/world that existed before t/flood.

by the same word

by the word of the living God (cf. vv. 5-6).

are being stored up for fire,

judgment.

. . . being kept for *the day of judgment* and destruction of ungodly men.

Peter will return to this theme in v. 10.

II. ... Three-Fold Answer (5-9)

A. An Answer that Looks Back to the Past (5-6)

B. An Answer that Looks Forward to the Future (7)

Thirdly (brings us to vv. 8-9)==>

C. An Answer that Looks Heavenward to the Promise (8-9)

1. Time Itself was Created by God who Providentially Rules Over it

Time as we know it is not eternal (sounds like a contra.). Time as we know it is part of God's creation. As part of His creation He rules over it and uses it as He pleases to His glory.

Peter puts great emphasis on this ==>

But do not let this one thing escape your notice, beloved . . .

Peter turns away from t/false teachers for a moment to address "the beloved" (God's precious elect remnant). cf. 3:1,14,17.

a. He uses the same word in addressing the beloved that he used in verse 5 of the mockers

(1) Verb $\lambda\alpha\nu\theta\alpha\nu\omega$ = to escape one's notice

In v. 5 - it escapes their notice that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God,

Here:

But do not let this one thing escape your notice, beloved . . .

In v. 5 t/verb is in t/present tense (something that continues to happen). Here it's an imperative / command.

Technical term: Impv. of prohibition.

But do not let this one thing escape your notice, beloved . . .

Do not forget this one thing!

What one thing?

. . . that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

God Created Time and God Providentially Rules Over Time.

b. Background ==> Psalm 90 (turn there)

Psa. 90 begins the 4th part of the book of Psalms. This is likely t/oldest Psalm, having been written by Moses.

Superscription tells us that this is "A Prayer of Moses the man of God."

Jewish Targum (interpretive paraphrase of t/OT) ==>

“a prayer which Moses the prophet of the Lord prayed, when the people of the house of Israel sinned in the wilderness.”

I quoted part of this last week in connection to God's eternity. If you look at vv. 1-6 as a whole, it's easy to see that Peter had this Psalm in mind as he wrote chapter 3 of his 2nd epistle. We see many of t/same elements: God's act in creating / His eternal nature / How his eternal nature contrasts w/time as we see it.

(1) Verses 1-2

1 LORD, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were born, Or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.

Contrast between God who is eternal // sovereign LORD who created & man who was created in God's image.

(2) Verse 3

Thou dost turn man back into dust, And dost say, “Return, O children of men.”

(4) Verse 4

For a thousand years in Thy sight Are like yesterday when it passes by,
Or as a watch in the night.

(a) 1000 yrs. to God are like "yesterday"

Not just "yesterday" but "yesterday when it passes by" (idea - not just a day but a moment).

(b) Or as a "watch in the night" ==>

The night in Jewish antiquity was divided into 4 parts, 3 hrs. ea. (Matt. 14:25).

Another way of saying that 1000 yrs to God is as 3 hrs. in t/night while you are sleeping. You go to bed at 11:00, you fall asleep at midnight & sleep soundly until 3:00. You wake up, look at t/clock and 3 hrs. have gone by . . . like that!

Someone could have been in t/living room & almost finished t/1939 film, "Gone with the Wind." (Not quite. The movie was almost 4 hours long, but you get t/point).

(5) Verses 5-6

5 Thou hast swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew.⁶ In the morning it flourishes, and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades, and withers away.

(a) Remember 1 Peter 1:24-25?

Peter contrasts t/WOG that endures forever w/the creation that is here today, gone tomorrow.

Peter quotes from Isa. 40:6-8 - but t/thought runs parallel to this Psalm.

Isaiah Passage speaks of the faithfulness of God's promises & Peter takes this passage in Isaiah & applies it to the faithfulness and nature of God's Word – the "imperishable seed" through which we live.

24a For, **“ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS . . .**

"All flesh" = "all of humanity" == "all of humanity" is like grass."
Grass in general, or hay. That which lasts for a season and then is gone.

24b . . . **AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS.**

"her glory" refers to the "glory of men" - Success/prestige/power.
All of that in God's eyes is like the flower of grass.

Some of us are plain old grass (hay), a few are flowers (stand outs). In t/end it doesn't really matter ==>

24c . . . **THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,**

Whether it's grass (all men in general) or the flower (those men who are prominent/celebrities) they all alike wither and fade away.

i. This is humanity in miniature

The life cycle of plants is relatively short and is more visible and obvious than the life cycle of humans. Cf. the leaves of the trees here. They bud in the spring, they unfold and bloom, reach full maturity in the summer. Then fall comes. They begin to wither (they get age spots). They turn brown, die, and fall off. They dissolve into t/dirt and are forever gone.

The cycle beings in the spring with brand new leaves. That's a preview in miniature of what our lives are like.

Verse 12 (Psalm 90:12) **So teach us to number our days, hat we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.**

Psalm 39:4 (David) **Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the extent of my days, Let me know how transient I am.**

(b) Have to confess - this is something that I'm almost obsessed with
I find t/passing of time, aging, watching others age & die very thought provoking.

i. As I've described it before
It's like we're all on this long conveyer belt. It moves at a steady rate (that's time) & like time it can't be stopped.

You see children born & it's like they just popped up over there. The belt slowly moves along & they get older & you think about t/time when you were that age.

But now you're on this part of t/conveyer belt. You look to t/other side where there are people older than you & you see them drop off t/end in death. As each one drops off you keep moving closer and closer to that same end.

The older you get t/more you realize that progression.

Suddenly you're not at the beginning any more.

I came to t/realization a few years ago that I wasn't as young as I thought I was. BTIM - I would find myself talking to someone who I was sure was older than me only to find out that they weren't. I had to adjust my perspective on myself.

Like attending my 30th HS reunion a few mos. ago. After t/first day I wanted to return wearing a T-Shirt that read, "Do I look as old as the rest of these people?"

Some of you may be old enough to remember those candy machines that worked like that. The freshest candy bars were in t/back. You put in your quarter and w/the pull of a handle t/oldest one, t/one in t/very front is pushed off mechanically, by t/force of gravity it drops into t/bin and the rest of them move forward one.

You watch your parents get older and turn into senior citizens (if God grants them length of days).

You see relatives age and pass away. There goes my grandmother!
There goes my uncle!

Not that it's entirely consistent. Some fall off t/end at 70, some at 90. There are those who get pushed off in the middle of the ride unexpectedly - they die young.

You realize that some day soon, by God's grace, you will be over here. To your left are a whole bunch of young people (gee, I was over there not that long ago). To your right . . . there aren't many left.

Can ask most anyone who's lived a long life (80, 90, 100 yrs old) & that person will tell you that their life is a blur, it has passed by that fast.

If a 90 year old man can say that, what is 1000 years to eternal God?

As John Piper observes ==>

The older we get the faster it seems to go. How many older people say, "It just seems like yesterday I was in school." "It just seems like yesterday we got married." "It just seems like yesterday the kids were young." And not only age, but joy makes us experience time like God. If you are bored at a program, it seems to drag on forever. But if you go on a vacation for a couple weeks and have a terrific time, you come to the end and say, "It seems like we just got here." Every moment was rich and full of unself-conscious life (like a thousand moments packed into one) and you were so taken up in the joy and beauty and love of those weeks that you never paused to be self-conscious about the passing of time. And at the end of those weeks, it was like yesterday that you arrived. When Jesus comes back and stands on this earth to make it his own, he will say, "It just seems like yesterday that I was here." O people, do not be deceived. It is no argument against Christ's second coming that 1,950 years have passed since his departure. From God's experience of time it is as though Christ arrived at his right hand the day before yesterday. [John Piper, sermon in 2 Peter, retrieved from soundofgrace.com/piper82/060682m.htm]

(c) A study in contrasts . . .

The contrast in 1 Peter 1 is the brevity of human life as compared to the eternity of God's Word (connection to our salvation in vv. 23,25)

THE GRASS WITHERS AND THE FLOWER FADES BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD REMAINS FOREVER.

Here in Psa. 90, Moses contrasts t/brevity of human life to t/eternity of God Himself (*from everlasting to everlasting you are God*)

As we go back to our text, we'll see that Peter contrasts t/eternity of God w/the impatience of human expectations (as it relates to t/promise of X's coming).

c. Side note: Look into the theory of black holes as they relate to time

In keeping w/Einstein's theory of Relativity from what we can tell there are black holes in space (really not black) where t/gravitational pull is so great that light traveling at 186,000 miles per second cannot escape from them (since light cannot escape, they are called black holes).

There's a whole time-gravity thing going on where the stronger t/gravitational pull as it relates to a mass (such as earth) t/more slowly time passes. That was demonstrated w/2 clocks, one on the ground and one at the top of a 75' tower. But, as I understand it, once you pass t/event horizon of a black hole time begins to slow down to nothing. And if you were able to escape t/black hole, you'd basically be traveling ahead in time. (Wormholes and warp travel)

Fascinating subject that is testimony to how unfathomable God is; that t/more we learn t/more creation testifies to His greatness.

C. An Answer that Looks Heavenward to the Promise (8-9)

1. Time Itself was Created by God who Providentially Rules Over it

But do not let this one thing escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

2. God is not Procrastinating; He is Patient! (9)

a. His patience relates to His promise

The Lord is not slow about His promise . . .

(1) What's the promise?

Goes back to v. 4 {cite} — ahead to verse 13 {cite and summarize}

(a) Promise is always received by grace through faith ALONE

Related to grace; not according to the law, but received by faith in God the promise-giver and promise-keeper.

Romans 4:14 **For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;**

16 **For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace**

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness,

Clearly a reference to the false teachers.

a. His patience relates to His promise

b. His promise relates to His people

Here's the heart of these 2 vv. =>

... but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.

(1) Clarify 2 things:

1) Perish means to be eternally lost in hell (same word used in John 3:16 – ἀπολλυμι) – also used in John 10:28 in contrast to eternal life [**I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish**]

2) to come to repentance means to be saved from hell and given eternal life. (Acts 11:18 = "**repentance that leads to life**" / 2 Tim. 2:25 "**repentance that leads to t/knowledge of t/truth**")

We are talking about eternal matters: heaven & hell.

(2) There are basically 4 views on how to interpret this

(a) Universal Salvation View

God doesn't will for any to perish means that everyone will be saved in the end.

William Barclay envisions the hope of universalism here when he writes: Ever and again there shines in Scripture the glint of the larger hope. We are not forbidden to believe that somehow and some time the God who loves the world will bring the whole world to himself. [Barclay, 343]

Amazing statement to make, not only in light of t/rest of Scripture, but also in light of t/context (v. 7).

(b) Arminian / Free-Will View

God doesn't will for any to perish means that He desires the salvation of all, and has made every provision for them, but they must hear the Gospel and believe of their own free choice.

(c) Calvinist / Sovereign Election View (actually views x2)

i. There is the secret vs. revealed will of God view

(2 wills in God view).

... **not *wishing* for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.** describes God's revealed will. God takes no pleasure in t/death of t/wicked, but that he should turn from his evil ways & life (Ezek. 18:32). However, His secret will is to choose some for salvation, not all.

Sounds like theological double-talk, but it really isn't. There is biblical precedent for t/idea that God's will is complex.

Some weighty theologians have held to this view (or variations of it).
Louis Berkhof - Wayne Grudem - others.

John Calvin (who I think was a Calvinist) ==>

But it may be asked, If God wishes none to perish, why is it that so many do perish? To this my answer is, that no mention is here made of the hidden purpose of God, according to which the reprobate are doomed to their own ruin, but only of his will as made known to us in the gospel. For God there stretches forth his hand without a difference to all, but lays hold only of those, to lead them to himself, whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world.

John Piper, summarizing the thought of Jonathan Edwards ==>

Putting it in my own words, Edwards said that the infinite complexity of the divine mind is such that God has the capacity to look at the world through two lenses. He can look through a narrow lens or through a wide- angle lens. When God looks at a painful or wicked event through his narrow lens, he sees the tragedy or the sin for what it is in itself and he is angered and grieved. "I do not delight in the death of anyone, says the Lord God" (Ezek. 18:32). But when God looks at a painful or wicked event through his wide- angle lens, he sees the tragedy or the sin in relation to everything leading up to it and everything flowing out from it. He sees it in all the connections and effects that form a pattern or mosaic stretching into eternity. This mosaic, with all its (good and evil) parts he does delight in (Ps. 115:3). [Piper, Grace of God; the Bondage of the Will, 1:126]

I have no doubt that this is true. I do have some doubt that this is what Peter is saying here.

ii. Gathering of the Elect View

If you take note of the key words in vv. 7 & 8 I think they paint a picture that Peter is not referring to all men w/o exception, but specif. to t/elect, to all who will believe.

{Note "you" and "beloved" in v. 8 & "you" "any" and "all" in v. 9}

Peter writes to believers. He's writing to t/CH. And He's in effect saying, "*Listen, I know there are those out there wondering why God's judgement is slow in coming. There are mockers saying, 'yeah, God's coming to judge. JC is returning. You Xns have been saying that for years!' But listen, God is patient toward you, beloved. He's patient toward **you**. Not one of Christ's sheep will be lost. That may take 2 thousand years to accomplish. But a 1000 yrs. is to a day to God."*

View that also has some weighty historic precedent.

Bede the Venerable, a monastic who died in 735 ==>

Given that in God's eyes all time is the same, it is impossible for him to delay his promise, for in any case he already predestined it before the foundation of the world. The only reason it has not yet arrived is that he needs time to gather in all the elect, whom he also predestined before time began. Hence we read in the Apocalypse that the souls of the martyrs long day and night for the coming of the day of judgment and resurrection and have heard that they must wait yet a little while until the full complement of their fellow servants and brothers is reached. [Bede, *On 2 Peter*, as cited in ACCS, 159]

One of my favorite contemporary preachers, Dr. J. Steven Lawson

The elect will certainly come to repentance and faith in Christ. As a result, the Lord seemingly is delaying the time of His return so that all the elect will be saved . . . God is longsuffering toward sinners, providing time for the elect to be saved. He has set the time of the return of Christ to provide sufficient time for those chosen to come to repentance. That is to say, God is not willing for any of His elect to perish. All His chosen ones *will* be called to repent and believe.

[J. Steven Lawson, *Foundations of Grace*, 334-35]

James M. Boice writes ==>

2 Peter 3:9 is not talking about the salvation of all men and women, but only of the elect. The issue is Christ's return, and Peter is explaining that God has delayed it, not out of indifference to us and what we may be suffering, but because He wants to bring to repentance all whom He has determined in advance will be gathered in. If Christ should come now, there would be generations of yet unborn people, containing generations of Christians yet to come, who would not be in heaven. Therefore, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting [any of His elect ones] to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. [cited by Lawson, Ibid.]

I could also quote John MacArthur; James White; Robert Raymond; John Owen.

(3) Let me ask you this:

What if God came in judgment to finalize all things back in t/first century? What if, some 2000 years ago verse 7 was realized {cite}? Where would you be? You who believe? You would never have been born. You would never have come to saving faith because there would be no saving faith & no sacrificial lamb, to come to!

Listen, I'm glad "God is patient." I'm forever grateful that He numbered me among His own and waited patiently until I was born & patiently endured with me & graciously brought to be saving faith.

(a) It's like Paul in Acts 18

He's in Corinth. There are threats against his life. He was fearful. God appears to him telling him, "Don't be afraid. Keep preaching t/Gospel. For I have many people in this city." What does He mean, "I have many people in this city?" The city is full of pagans.

What He means is that there's a number whom He is going to draw out from t/rest & save. Paul persevered. God blessed. And a CH was born.

(b) It's like Rev. 13:8 and 17:8

Both talk about those who's names were written in t/Lamb's book of life from B4 t/foundation of t/world. That is, there are those who were marked out for salv. B4 they were ever born. B4 creation. In t/eternal mind of God, your name was either written there or it was not.

And God has ordained that all whom He chose would come to faith within a certain period of time. From t/beginning of history w/Adam & Eve. to t/end that's yet future, God has been at work saving men from their sin.

And if we look out to t/future, we're not aware how much more time there is. But we know that God is saying to us, *"Keep proclaiming t/Gospel, for I still have many people around t/world that I have determined to save for my glory and their joy."*

"There was never a soul yet, that sincerely sought the Savior, who perished before He (God) found him. No, the gates of death shall never shut on you until the gates of grace have opened for you; until Christ has washed your sins away you shall never be baptized in Jordan's flood. Your life is secure, for this is God's constant plan: He keeps His own elect alive till the day of His grace, and then He takes them to Himself. And in as much as you know your need of a Savior, you are one of His, and you will never die until you have found Him." [C.H. Spurgeon]

2. God is not Procrastinating; He is Patient! (9)

a. His patience relates to His promise

b. His promise relates to His people

I want to take you back to mid-20th c. England. Some 75 years ago.

There was a businessman named William Thomas. He was a salesman — a Welshman — who sold fish door to door. One day several men at the local watering hole were drinking and talking. Suddenly William Thomas, who was having a pint himself, found himself listening to their conversation at the table next to him. They were talking about t/well-known preacher, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *"Yes," said one of the men to his friend, "I was there last Sunday night, and that preacher said nobody was hopeless. He said there as hope for everybody."*

Of the rest of the conversation, Thomas heard nothing, but arrested and completely sobered, he said to himself, *"If there's hope tor everybody there's hope for me. I'm going to that chapel myself to see what that man says."*

That first Sunday he walked to the opened gate of the railings that fenced the church, stood for some minutes, and then, his nerve failing him. turned and went home.

Throughout the wretched week he waited for the next Sunday evening to arrive, and somehow he reached the chapel only to hear singing. Faced with the realization that he was late, he once more turned away and went home.

The third Sunday evening came, and William Thomas was once again at the gate, wondering nervously what he should do next when one of the members of the congregation welcomed him with the words, *"Are you coming in? Come and sit with me."*

That night William Thomas passed from condemnation to life. He found, as Mrs. Lloyd-Jones would later relate: that *"he could understand the things that were being said, and he believed the gospel and his heart was flooded with a great peace."* Old things had passed away; old things had become new. [cited in Helm, 257-58]

Imagine with me what t/destiny of William Thomas had been if the Lord had said after that 1st or 2nd week, *"I'm done; I will return in judgment today."*

What if He had said that 100 years ago? Before you were ever born?

3:15 and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation . . .

If I may adapt the words to a popular gospel song

The look of love was on His face, Thorns were on His head.

The blood was on His scarlet robe, Stained a crimson red.

Though His eyes were on the crowd that day, He looked ahead in time,
For when He was on the Cross, [you were] on His mind.

He knew [you], yet He loved [you],

He whose glory makes the heavens shine.

So unworthy of such mercy.

Yet when He was on the Cross, [you were] on His mind."