

Where Is the Promise of His Appearing?

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of remembering God's promises and not growing weary in waiting for the second coming, which will be a day of judgment, destruction of the ungodly, and reward of the righteous.

Duration: 26:34

Scripture: Malachi 4:1, Matthew 6:33, 2 Peter 1:19, 2 Peter 3:1-4, 2 Peter 3:8-10

Topics: "Second Coming"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the concept of time and how it relates to our experiences of joy and beauty. He suggests that when our lives are filled with these positive experiences, time seems to fly by. The speaker then draws a parallel to God's experience of time, suggesting that He is constantly engaged in the work of redemption and heaven, never bored or impatient. The sermon then shifts to the theme of God's promises and their power to help us overcome temptation and walk in righteousness. The speaker emphasizes the importance of holding onto these promises and trusting in them. Additionally, the denial of the second coming is addressed, with the speaker pointing to examples from the Bible, such as Noah and the flood, to argue that God has brought judgment in the past and may do so again if wickedness becomes intolerable. The sermon concludes by highlighting the influence of desires on our theology and the need to align our desires with God's will.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.DesiringGod.org. 2 Peter, chapter 3, verses 1 through 10. This is now the second letter that I have written to you, beloved, and in both of them I have aroused your sincere mind by way of reminder that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandments of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

First of all, you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation. They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and the earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.

In the second chapter of this letter, Peter has given us a very graphic description of the sexual licentiousness of the false teachers, their love of money, and their rejection of authority by which they are denying the Master who bought them. And he warns very vividly that if the churches into which these false teachers have come are enticed out of the way of righteousness, so that they abandon the Lord and the holy commandment, that in the final judgment it will go worse for them than if they had never known the way or heard the gospel. It's a very sobering word for people who sit under gospel preaching and yet do not give themselves wholly over to Christ.

Then in chapter 3, which is what we move to today, Peter returns in part to the theme of chapter 1, namely, that God has given us precious and great promises so that if we hold them in front of us and trust them and believe them, then there will be a power, a divine power, that flows into our lives to enable us to overcome temptation and maintain our walk along the way of righteousness into his eternal kingdom. You can see that, for example, most clearly, the connection between the promises which are kindling hope and the godliness which is kindled by hope in verses 13 and 14 of chapter 3. Let's read those together so that you can see the connection that's being preserved from chapter 1. It says, According to his promise, There's the great and precious promise which, if we believe, we have hope. In other words, and motivates us for peace and purity in the present world.

But, here's the thing that he has to deal with in chapter 3. If the promises of the second coming and the glorious new world of righteousness and peace that will come with him is going to have that powerful effect upon us, we've got to really believe it's going to happen. But the false teachers don't. And they are infiltrating the church and they are saying, in effect, this notion of a bodily glorious second coming with a great upheaval and transformation of all things and the judgment of the wicked and the reward of the righteous is all a myth.

Now, I think we can reconstruct what they were thinking something like this. They're probably in the same group with Hymenaeus and Philetus. Remember those names from 2 Timothy 2.17 and 18? Paul said, Hymenaeus and Philetus taught that the resurrection of believers was over.

It had passed already. And what they meant was, there won't be a bodily resurrection. There has been a spiritual resurrection and that's all there will be.

And here again we can see these people twisting the teachings of Paul because Paul said, didn't he? Colossians 2. You were buried with him through baptism in which you were also raised with him through faith. So the false teachers say, well now, since Paul taught that we have already been raised with Christ and it's clear that we are like we are, then the only resurrection that we will experience and that Christ experienced was a spiritual reawakening and therefore all this notion of a bodily second coming of Christ is based on a cleverly devised myth. And with the sweeping away of the bodily return of Christ, you sweep away the judgment for things done in the body and in that way the teachers procure for themselves a remarkably coherent theological basis for their indifference to sexual morality.

It all hangs together. You just sweep the body out of moral consideration. It doesn't matter.

The only resurrection that counts has already happened. There is not going to be any bodily return. The only thing that matters is what you do in your spirit and in your mind the body is indifferent except insofar as you can use the body to demonstrate by defiance that moral sexual restrictions are neither here nor there, which is what they were encouraging the young believers to do.

Now, this denial of the second coming in glory and physically was already anticipated by Peter. He already has it in view in chapter 1, remember, verse 16, where he says, We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Meaning, we know that when Jesus comes, he will come in a glorified body and deal with people in their bodies for what they have done in their body for we have seen his transfigured glorified body on the Mount of Transfiguration in a preview of the second coming of Christ. And we know that's his intention. He told us and he illustrated it on that mountain.

Therefore, we have the prophetic word made more sure and we ought to hold it out in front of us like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the day star rises in our hearts. Remember chapter 1. Now, in chapter 3, he goes at it tooth and nail. That was just kind of a little defense operation for the time being.

Now, head on, he deals with the issue of the denial of the second coming. So let's see how he does it. In verses 1 and 2 of chapter 3, he says, and this is almost a repeat of verse 13 of chapter 1, that he wants to remind them so that they have kind of a sincere and lively memory of what the prophets predicted and what the Lord Jesus commanded.

Now, what did he mean when he said the prophets predicted and the Lord commanded? I think probably when he spoke of the prophets predicting, he had prophecies in mind like Malachi 4.1, which says, Behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and evildoers will be stubble. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings, and you shall go forth leaping like lambs from the stall. He says, remember the predictions of the prophets.

It's going to be like that. And then, remember the commandment of our Lord. Now, what did he mean there? Well, if you go back, for example, to Matthew 24, there's a whole string of commandments relating to the second coming.

Probably he meant something like Matthew 24.42, Watch therefore, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming. So Peter's desire is to reawaken memory of all that the prophets predicted about the second coming and what the Lord himself had commanded about readiness for it. Now, in verses 3 and 4, he introduces these false teachers again.

Now, don't get mixed up by noting that he's saying, in the last days they will come, as if he's talking about the 20th century, not the first century. He is talking about the 20th century, but also the first century. It was the same way in chapter 2. He used the future tense to say, they're coming, they're coming, but when you go right on and read, it's clear they're here.

In other words, the very appearance of the false teachers is a prophetic fulfillment that the last days have arrived. That's the way all the New Testament talks. The last days came with Jesus Christ, when the Holy Spirit was outpoured.

We're in the last times, and therefore there emerge spirits of antichrist, as 1 John says, and false teachers, as Peter says, and he deals with them head on and gives us tremendous help, I think, in how to deal with the same sorts of arguments that are being brought forth today. In verse 4, Peter lets them make their case. They say, Where's the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation, period.

That's their case right there. They stop. Now, that is an amazingly modern argument against the second coming.

Basically, what it says is the laws of nature are constant. They do not get interrupted by supernatural interventions. And that's the basic presupposition of most contemporary science.

The sun has come up and gone down, seasons have turned in their courses, tides have risen and fallen for thousands of years without the slightest alteration. Therefore, there is no reason that we should have any probable expectation that it should be otherwise. That's a real modern argument.

We must expect that this constancy will go on into the future, and any thought that the skies might be rolled up like a scroll and that the earth might be purged with a fiery judgment at the coming of the Son of Man is just utterly unimaginable and not worthy of too much consideration. And there are hundreds of theologians and pastors in the churches today who say there will be no physical bodily second coming for this very reason. I brought along a commentary here, First and Second Thessalonians by Ernest Best, Professor of Theology, University in Scotland.

And at the back, I can show you some sentences afterwards if you want. An essay on the second coming in which he duplicates the false teacher's argument almost to the word and says that we do not expect and cannot expect a physical second coming because science has shown us that things have always been the same. So it's very, very contemporary.

Now, Peter's response is threefold, and we'll just look at his three arguments very briefly. The first one is in chapter 3, verses 5 through 7. Let's read those verses. They deliberately ignore this fact that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth formed out of water and by means of water through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

But by that same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. The first thing the false teachers ignore is that God made the world by His word and that the order of nature that they look upon as so ultimate and so fixed hangs on the word of God and that it is not reasonable to presume that the order of nature is any more fixed and constant than that God must always say the same thing all the time. The laws of nature are the relentless whisperings of the Almighty and if God chooses to raise His voice the cataclysm will come.

And this notion that there is some kind of autonomy to the world and God is off here like a clockmaker who's wound it up and just set it out there is totally unbiblical. We hang moment by moment on the word of God and therefore we should not think it unlikely that if God should take a notion to speak a new word the nature would stay the same. And the other thing that they ignore is that in fact things haven't always been the same.

He goes back just like He did in chapter 2 verse 5 to Noah and the flood and He argues that there was a time when God looking down on this world got so fed up with wickedness that He did alter the course of

nature. He did bring great judgment on the earth and wipe out, it says, the world of ungodly men. And if so then on what basis do we presume He shall not bring judgment again if wickedness comes to a point where He finds it intolerable.

If the false teachers were not so blinded by their own desires notice in verse 4 it says that they are being led along by their own desires. Our theology is often very much in the grips of our desires. Desires are so basic they incline us to want to believe certain things.

If these men were not so blinded by their desires they'd see that it's just utter folly to deny that there could be a future cataclysm just because the sun has risen for so many thousands of times in its normal course. It's an illogical conclusion. That's the first response.

The second response comes in verse 8. Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day. Now, you can see right off what he's responding to here. Clearly, behind the false teacher's skepticism is this notion.

Couldn't, great Peter, it's been so long you don't really think after all this time that it's going to happen. Now, Peter was writing maybe 30, 40 years after Jesus had left. They had expected the second coming so soon that 40 years seemed like a long time.

This argument clearly has all the more force today if it had any force at all then. You don't really believe, Piper, after 1,950 years. It's really... Now, Peter's response to that is to say in God's way of viewing the world it hasn't been very long.

That's a simple thing, what he says. With him, a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. Now, I don't think that it is a Biblical notion to put God outside of time.

That's a real popular notion. I don't find any Biblical evidence for saying that God is outside time. Rather, I think that God is immortal, He never ages, He never forgets anything, He sees the future perfectly, and He is never bored.

And in all those ways, He's different from us and therefore His experience of time is radically different from our experience of time. But not so different that we don't have experiences of time that are a little bit like God's experience. For example, all you who are growing older have said probably a dozen times, My, time moves so much faster now.

How many older people have you heard say, It just seems like yesterday we were in school. It just seems like yesterday we got married. It just seems like yesterday that the kids were little and they're big.

Time just compressing, as it were, into an instance in our experience. And not just age makes us experience time a little bit like God, but joy does too. If you go to a program, a lecture, and it is dreadfully boring, what do you say? It will never end.

It seems like it lasted forever. But, if this summer you take a vacation, two weeks, you only get two weeks, and you go, and it's just packed with fun, great things, every minute is good, and you come to the end, what do you say? It seems like we just got here. Isn't that a lesson for us that when our lives are filled with joy and unselfconscious experience of beauty and love and people, that we come to the ends of those periods and we kind of shake our heads and say, where was time? Because we weren't thinking about it.

It just went by like that. And I think that that's the way God experiences time. He is so happily, joyfully, fully engaged in the work of redemption and in the joyful work of heaven with His angels and with His Son, He is never bored, and therefore never saying, oh, when will this history ever be over? And when Jesus comes back and stands on this earth, you know what He's going to say? It just seems like yesterday I was here.

Now, if that's true, Peter says it is, then beware, lest you fall for the argument that it's been 1950 years. You don't really think that the promise still holds, do you? I mean, the final response of Peter to this argument is in verse 9, and with this we'll conclude. The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness.

That's an interesting phrase. There are different kinds of slowness. But, here's the way to interpret His perceived slowness.

He is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Now, the Apostle Paul, in Romans 11.25, refers to the full number of the Gentiles who must come in before the Kingdom of God closes the door. And therefore, the way to interpret the delay of the Son of Man for 1950 years is as an act of mercy and patience until the flock comes in.

And these false teachers are committing an unbelievable act of irony. Picture this. They are taking the time that God gives to them for repentance, they turn it back on God, throw it at Him as an argument against His reliability.

Isn't that amazing? I think when the end comes and Jesus establishes His throne of judgment and the unrepentant of Peter's day and our day stand before Him, it is going to be an unanswerable indictment when Jesus asks them, why did you take the time I gave you to repent and turn it into an argument of unbelief? And there will be total silence and shame. But I hope not among us. I hope not among us.

The Lord is good to us today to give us 2 Peter. This is an amazingly modern chapter. And I want us to not grow weary as a congregation.

They were already growing weary 1900 years ago. We need to read the ministry that Peter and the writer to the Hebrews had among those congregations that were growing weary, take them to our hearts and affirm He is coming. That He delays is for your repentance.

He wants you to repent. If the world order rests on the word of God, then He can and He will bring the cataclysm. And we ought not let any of the arguments of the false teachers trip us up even if we hear them in some modern dress as we do in theological schools as well as in the secular world.

For those who repent, that day is going to be one of glory, honor, and immortality. And I think we should rejoice in it. without permission.

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