

## God's Slowness

2 Peter 3:3-14 (ESV)

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Word of God for today is from the Epistle lesson, from the second letter of St Peter.

Let us pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Waiting can serve as an easy way to forget. Promising your young child that they can return to the toy aisle after all the grocery shopping is done might be good enough to divert their attention and memory. Yet, we notice our forgetfulness and overlooking abounds unless we're remembering something very dear to us. What should be important is the promises of God, the promises awaiting fulfillment. That is what has been taught from the very beginning. The judgment day of Christ is the last thing ready to be completed. The punishment of evil and the reward of good needs to occur. Is God too slow in bringing this to an end? Did he forget about us? Will he actually do it?

God is not slow to fulfill his promises as some think of as "slow." Some take "slow" to mean that God has lied; there is no judgment day. But, we know that what God says, he will do. Yet, the long span between those two things, prophesying and fulfilling, leaves room for doubt. There will be some, seeing all this time between God's speaking and God's acting, that think, "**Where is the promise of his coming?**", which means "God is weak. He didn't really mean that there will be a final judgment." They, captivated by their own desires and pleasures which seem to go unnoticed by the Almighty God, dream up this delusion of a carefree, inconsequential life. Whatever they do receives no punishments, no discipline. For them, the world keeps on turning; days come and go. They think they escaped. They think, "**all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.**"

The evil and wicked men of the earth certainly thought this in the times of Noah. God was grief-stricken at the monstrosity which man produced: every thought of man's heart was only evil continually. Man didn't care. He continued the murdering, stealing, and committing adultery. Even though Noah was proclaiming an imminent, catastrophic deluge (a complete destruction by water), by building this humongous boat to save God's chosen ones, all of mankind kept on living like life was "same-old, same-old." People were getting married, starting families, enjoying feasts; all until the ark door shut, and their only salvation was cut off. Although things seemed normal, judgment day appeared out of nowhere.

Those that think like the men at the time of Noah miss these clear examples of God's judgment: the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Canaanites, and even God's holy city Jerusalem. He does not tolerate wickedness forever. When his wrath bubbles over, the wicked will drink the cup down to the dregs. The flood was a magnificent example of judgment: hundreds of millions of men were wiped away while only one family survived. Sodom and Gomorrah vanished in the twinkling of an eye for all their wickedness, even though Abraham and Lot pleaded with these men. The Canaanites were driven out of the promised land and were killed because of the abominations they committed, even burning up their children as a sacrifice. Jerusalem was leveled to the ground for crucifying the Lord Jesus and rejecting the apostles. All were warned. All had time. All were punished, pointing to that future final judgment.

The promise held before our eyes is the appearance of Jesus Christ, as it says, **“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved.”** He will come to judge the living and the dead. He will separate between the sheep and the goats after he sits on his throne. This appearance will come suddenly, out of nowhere. He will not call ahead of time, setting up an appointment with your secretary. No, he will come as a thief. He will come when you least expect it. It will be a surprise. While Jesus' appearance is a welcome and joyful sight for you, it will not be so for all. All of creation is held up by the word of Jesus, being kept for destruction. Just as the earth was prepared for the destruction through the flood, so . Flames on flame shall ravage earth. Everything will be burned up; nothing will remain of this creation. The details with which St Peter speaks are vivid. The very fiber of creation, the things which are necessary to exist, will be gone, turned to ashes. It's not just that God will knock down the tower made out of legos, making it fall apart, which can then be put back together again. No, he will take that lego tower and burn the pieces until they vanish.

Included with the destruction of the things through which we exist, is the destruction of all evil works and ungodly people; it says, **“and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed”**. God meant this extra time, this long wait before he appears, to be used for repentance. He meant it for man to turn back to godliness. Yet, these men who mock God waste this time. They fill the earth with their evil works; they build houses made of sticks which can be burned up, instead of building with stone which will withstand the fire. The sticks with which they build are the works of ungodliness: sensuality, greed, drunkenness, debauchery, disobedience, laziness, carelessness, corrupting speech. The stone they should have used would be works of godliness: humility, brotherly love, patience, joy, sacrifice, blamelessness, purity, zeal. They should have seen God's slowness, and become quick to renounce their misdoing. Sadly, they overlooked the opportunity.

These men who think God is “slow,” do get something right. Though God is not slow because he is weak or a liar, he is “slow” in fulfilling his promises because of love. **“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness, but is**

**patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance”**. There are many ways God shows his love for the unlovable. Yet, this is an important way: he loves by being patient. O, this love of God which suffers the pain and grief of seeing so much evil done! He does not exact vengeance immediately (although he has every right). He waits; and waits; and waits. He does not give up on his son who left him. He does not lock the door of his estate. Every day he goes out, stares a long way off, watching the path his prodigal son took to leave, expecting, hoping to see his son return. He awaits that day: through every year, month, day, second, and moment.

It is hard for us to understand this patience of God because we see time differently than he does. Man’s life is one of brevity. While seventy to a hundred years may seem like a long time, it is nothing to God. God is not in time. He created time. He stands outside of time. **“One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day”**. So, while we wait thousands upon thousands of years for our Lord Jesus to return, it is not the same kind of waiting for God. Our groans and grumblings of God’s delay only make sense from our perspective. He is able to wait much more than we can.

God is slow not only because he can wait but also because he wants to wait. When God waits, there is more opportunity for people to repent. There is more time for the forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. There is more time for one generation to hand off God’s truth to another generation. There is more time for those who are lapsed to return; more and more and more. God could have put the sickle to the harvest at the first sight of produce. Yet, he wants to have the biggest harvest possible. God does not want anyone, *anyone* to perish. He wants all people to be saved; all people to confess their sins and receive forgiveness; all people to confess Jesus Christ as Lord. If doubts arise as to why God would allow such and such to happen, or why he doesn’t return sooner, let this be the answer you always return to: God wants to save more people from perishing.

God has given you time. He has made you wait. This waiting cannot be like the waiting of those evil men. It cannot be filled with worthless lives which will be burned up and forgotten. No, it must be filled with what endures, with what remains. It says, **“what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord”**. What is it that will remain after destruction of the heavens and the earth? The children of God and their way of life. God has prepared a new heavens and a new earth, one which far surpasses what we have inhabited since the fall of Adam and Eve. It is a place full of righteousness and justice, love and faithfulness, beauty and warmth. Build what will remain there. Instead of letting the fires of destruction purify your deeds, let the fire of God’s Word purify your thoughts and actions. It will be a lot less painful. This all comes from an awareness of what God has promised. You know he will fulfill his Word. You know he will judge evil. So, look forward to that day; look forward and pray for it. Just as you may pray that Jesus would come, be your guest, and bless your meals, join with

the whole church on earth as she prays day-in and day-out, “Come quickly Lord Jesus!” Be expectant, be looking. Our Lord will come at any moment.

Some promises will cling to your heart no matter how long you might wait for its fulfillment: your father returning home from work, a text response from your crush, a reward for a job well done. How much more should you cling to the appearance of your Savior Jesus Christ! Do not stumble over God’s slowness. It is for your benefit, and for the benefit of all people. Though God will have the final word over evil, he wants his love to abound; it does, and it will. Amen.