

Why and How We Wait

Advent: Hope, Peace, Love, Joy

2 Peter 3:8-15

Pastor Jordan Krahn

December 10, 2017

Good morning First Free! My name is Jordan Krahn. I'm the high school pastor. I just wanted to take a moment to say "thank you" to my church. I get to lead a class on Sundays teaching the Bible to our students. And I get to lead an amazing team of leaders that invest in our students. Our Student Ministries leaders work hard at discipling students in discussion groups, Bible studies, and through teaching the Word of God. And parents, we're blessed that we get to support you. We love getting to strengthen your ministry as the primary disciple-makers of your students. First Free, every year God is saving our students. And every year God is changing the lives of our students. What a job this church has called me to!

Today we're going to continue studying the return of Jesus. So the question many of you have as we continue looking at Jesus' second coming is, "Why are we looking at Jesus' return? Shouldn't we be preaching on baby Jesus? And when are we going to hear about the three wise guys?" Well there's a good reason we're looking at the return of Jesus. The first reason is that historically there's church tradition for this. Traditionally the church has looked forward and backward. The first two Sundays during Advent look forward to Christ's second coming. And traditionally the second two Sundays look back at his first coming. The second reason we're looking at Christ's return is this: Because at Christ's birth it was all part of the plan. Jesus was born not just to die, rise, and ascend to the Father. Jesus was born with the plan to return a second time to judge. Jesus came in humility. And this was with the intention to return as a glorious and reigning king. So Jesus' first coming should make us think of his second coming. And today, we will consider Jesus' return and its implications for our lives.

First Free, Jesus' return is promised. His kingdom will come. God's people will spend eternity in heaven. Those who reject God will spend eternity in hell. Jesus will come and wipe away every tear from every eye. In this future kingdom there will be no more sin. No more sickness. No more death. We will see God face-to-face. Peace will reign. The dwelling place of God will be with man. We will get to enjoy life as it was meant to be in this new heaven and earth. But if this is God's good plan, why hasn't Jesus returned yet? Where is Jesus? That brings us to our text for today.

We see Peter dealing with certain "scoffers" in the church. The scoffers were saying: "It's been a few dozen years and Jesus hasn't returned. Jesus hasn't judged evil. Jesus hasn't brought in a new heaven and earth." False teachers were mocking the second coming of Jesus. And so the false teachers thought they were free to live how they wanted. Scoffers were saying: "Where is Jesus? Why hasn't he returned?" And today it's been a couple thousand years since Jesus ascended. And scoffers continue to mock the return of Jesus. We wonder: Maybe what the atheists claim is right. Maybe Jesus isn't returning and was a liar after all. Maybe what the deists say is right. Maybe God is like the absent father who was never involved in our world. Even we as Christians ask: "Why hasn't Jesus returned yet? Where is he?"

I want to take a moment to pause before we continue. And I want to make a confession. I've neglected to care about the return of Jesus for most of my adult life. Growing up in this church I remember hearing a lot about Jesus' return. During my elementary and middle school years the *Left*

Behind series was at its peak. If you don't know, the *Left Behind* series is a fictionalized look at the return of Jesus. These books were intended to encourage us to think of Jesus' return. But for many in my generation it had the opposite effect. Many in my generation thought we've talked about Jesus' return in a silly way. We felt that the Christian's eternal hope was turned into cheap entertainment. Because of this, deep down I believed I shouldn't think of Christ's return. My heart assumed that thoughtful and intellectual Christians shouldn't think of Jesus coming back. But the return of Christ is for all Christians to care about. We must not disregard it. Yes, we long for that day. And though it seems to be delayed, Jesus' return is certain and life changing.

2 Peter 3:8-15¹

⁸*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* ⁹*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* ¹⁰*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, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.* ¹¹*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,* ¹²*waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!* ¹³*But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.* ¹⁴*Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.* ¹⁵*And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

I'm going to pray a traditional Advent prayer before we dive into our text this morning. It is from the Book of Common Prayer.

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and the comfort of your Holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Our big idea for this morning is: Jesus' return is certain and life changing. And here's what we'll see in 2 Peter. We're going to see two things about the timing of Jesus' return, and one thing about how we are to wait.

JESUS IS WAITING TO ALLOW REPENTANCE.

The first thing we see about Jesus' timing is: Jesus is waiting to return to allow repentance (vv. 8-9). The false teachers mocked Jesus' return. They said Jesus isn't returning. They dismissed our eternal hope. But Peter here makes things clear. Jesus is coming, but not yet. Jesus is waiting. He's waiting to return. He's waiting to judge. Jesus is waiting to restore.

Peter starts focusing on the nature of God in verse 8 to explain Christ's delay. Peter tells us that God sees time differently than we do. "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." God is eternal. And God does not experience time as we do. We can't interpret God's timing by human standards. What seems like ages to us is merely a blip to him. God is

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

working on his own time. First Free, Jesus' return is right on schedule. Yes, we long for Christ's return. But we trust God's timing when Jesus does not return on our timing. His return is certain!

Peter then shifts to look at the character of God in verse 9. God is "patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." Peter tells us that God is patiently waiting to allow repentance. God is deeply concerned for human beings. God wants people to repent before it is too late.

So repent! Turn to our patient God. I want to reemphasize what Josh said last week. If you have yet to trust in Jesus, then this is your application point. In Luke 15, God is portrayed as a father patiently longing for his son to come home. God patiently longs for you to come in humility. God longs for you to say like the prodigal son: "I will arise and go to my Father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" Will you return to our patient Father? God will run to you. God will embrace you. The Father puts on you robes of Jesus' righteousness. God the Father will throw a party where angels rejoice. If only you would come home. So come home! Some of us are thinking: "But I can wait. I can become a Christian someday when I'm older." There's a reason we can't wait. And that's Peter's next point.

JESUS WILL RETURN UNEXPECTEDLY.

Peter looks at Jesus' timing again. Peter wants us to know that Jesus will return unexpectedly. Take a look at verse 10: "But the day of the Lord will come like thief." We see that the timing of Jesus' return will be sudden like a thief. Now Holly and I had our cars into a few weeks ago. And there was no "heads up" from the thieves. The thief didn't leave a written notice beforehand. The whole thieving enterprise would utterly fail if a warning was required. This is why Peter uses the imagery of a thief. No one knows when thieves are coming. Thieves are quite unexpected. Thief imagery means that human history could come to an end at any time.

Some will ask: "Don't we have a little bit of a warning before Jesus comes? Didn't Jesus give us signs to know when he'd come?" It's true that Jesus gave signs of his return. We saw these signs last week in Luke 21. There are many terrifying signs that point to Jesus' return. Jesus said that there would be earthquakes and famine. Jesus said before his return there would be political upheaval, false messiahs, persecution, and worldwide gospel proclamation. But these things don't actually give us a timetable. Earthquakes and famine happen all the time. These signs have happened since Christ's ascension. These signs are a reminder that Jesus is coming like a thief. These signs don't tell us when. These signs remind us that Christ's return is certain.

Now the Bible says Jesus' return is unexpected. But instead, we tend to focus on timing. We try to figure it out with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. We study timelines in Revelation, Ezekiel, and Daniel trying to figure out God's timing. Some of us talk of blood moons, trumpets, seals, and other signs trying to pinpoint Jesus' return. But Jesus will return one day when it's unexpected. The problem isn't that we've taken Jesus' return too seriously. In trying to discern timing we've taken the wrong thing too seriously. And therefore we haven't taken Jesus' return seriously enough. Jesus' return as a thief should move us to life change. Not theological speculation on timing.

JESUS' RETURN SHOULD MOVE US TO HOLINESS.

Finally, we are going to see how Jesus' return should affect our lives. We'll see that Jesus' return should move us to holiness (vv. 11-15). Peter is giving this big idea in this section: There's a tight relationship between eschatology and life-change. The return of Jesus changes lives. Jesus' certain coming should awaken our hearts to impact this world.

But before we jump into these verses I want to pause. I want to ask: "Do we ignore our eternal hope? Do we rarely think of heaven? Do we ever consider hell?" C. S. Lewis, in ²²*The World's Last Night*, compares Christian thinking on Jesus' return to a drunk on a horse. Lewis says there are two sides we fall off of this horse. One side we fall on is to exaggerate Christ's return. It's all we think about, study, and talk about. The result is that we ignore the rest of our faith. Or we ignore even basic faithfulness to Jesus. The second side of the horse we fall off of is to ignore Jesus' return entirely. That's the failure Peter is touching on here. We neglect it. We disregard it. But Jesus' return should affect our minds. His return should dramatically impact our hearts and lives. And that's what we'll turn to now.

In our passage Peter uses the word "diligence" to connect to the book's theme—growth in godliness. Take a look at verse 14 which says to "be diligent to be found by him without spot." I would encourage you to circle the words "be diligent" in your Bible. The words "be diligent" actually started the book of 2 Peter in chapter 1 verses 5, 10, and 15. For example, v. 1:5 says: "For this very reason, make every effort (or literally "be diligent") to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love." And so we see that diligence-to-holiness bookends 2 Peter at the beginning and end. And now Peter in chapter 3 connects our diligence-to-holiness with Jesus' return.

What is this holiness? Chapter 1 verse 5 shows us in detail the holiness we are called to. Holiness, generally speaking, means to be set apart from this world. We are to live separated from sin. We are to reflect the character of our holy God. And we typically think of someone displaying holiness as proud. Or those that display virtue are boring. Self-control isn't cool. But when you think of holiness look at the life of Jesus. Jesus is the only flawlessly holy person there's ever been. And Jesus' virtue was dynamic and attracted the world around him. Jesus' steadfastness was not boring. Jesus' godliness made crowds swarm around him. Rejects, prostitutes, drunks, terrorists, men, women, children, the sick, rich, and poor loved to be around Jesus' brotherly love. The dirty and despised experienced the love of Jesus. Jesus' holiness was wonderfully beautiful. And Jesus' holiness is what we are called to reflect.

In our passage Peter explains how the return of Jesus moves us to holiness. Peter gives a negative motivation to holiness. Peter looks at the coming judgment. Peter says that our holiness should be motivated by our temporary broken creation. Halfway through verses 10-11 say: "the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness." Peter wants us to know that there's going to be destruction to our material world. What happens to the temporary we've given our lives to? Gone. What happens to the foolish things we've worshipped? Burned. What happens to those who don't know Jesus? Judgment. And this moves us to holiness and godliness.

² C.S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960, 94-95.

But how does the destruction of our old creation motivate life change? How does the burning of our temporary idols move us to holiness? I want to apply this to those of us who work outside the home, but this is relevant no matter what your vocation is. At work, don't build your kingdom. Because your kingdom is going to get burned in the end. At your job, build Jesus' kingdom. Work hard as if you are working for Jesus. As if you want to show your love for Jesus through hard work. Take the blame when possible for co-workers, because Jesus took your blame on the cross. You might look bad, but your kingdom will burn. Seek to generously give credit to others more often. Credit could be used to build your kingdom, but Jesus gave you the undeserved credit of his righteousness. And so build Jesus' kingdom that will never burn. Roll up your sleeves to serve at work. Serve even when you aren't going to get credit for it. Because Jesus sees you laying your life down for others. And you are building Jesus' kingdom, not yours. Your kingdom is going to get burned. So reflect Christ at work. And live with an eternal perspective in your place of employment.

It's critical to understand that not only will our old broken creation burn, those who don't know Jesus will also receive the flames of God's judgment. Our friends face eternal separation from God without Jesus. Our family faces a future that's very terrifying apart from surrender. The people that we love will ask: "Why would a loving God send people to hell? Why doesn't God do something about hell?" We have good news to speak in that moment. We can tell them that God *has* done something to rescue. We can share that God has provided a way out of judgment. Our friends can turn from their sins. Our family can trust in Jesus. Everyone can freely come to the foot of the cross. We can share that Jesus took hell's pain there. We can tell them to believe in Jesus and receive heaven's beauty. First Free, we must see the world around us as receiving this judgment apart from Jesus.

And this coming judgment should move us to reflect the heart of God in this passage. Remember what Peter said in verse 15: "Count the patience of our Lord as salvation." God's patience to return is to see faith in Christ. Your heart for the lost and God's purpose for delay should be one and the same—to seek and save the lost. So First Free, go on missions trips to share Jesus! Give away your money to build Jesus' kingdom and store up for yourself treasures in this new eternal reality! Have bold gospel conversations with friends, so that they, too, might escape the coming judgment. Friends, sharing Christ is the one thing you can't do in heaven. The coming judgment ought to move us to share Jesus.

Next Peter gives us a positive motivation for life change. Peter says our holiness should be motivated by anticipating a sinless new creation. Verse 13 says: "We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." Peter is saying the sin the false teachers have pushed will be gone. Peter is saying that creation will be restored to how it was meant to be—without sin! There will be no more spot. No more blemish. Can you imagine the new heavens and new earth? Life as it was always meant to be! Pure joy. Walking with God. Can you imagine? No more security guards. No more abuse of women. No more cheating spouses. No more divorce lawyers. No more corrupt politicians. No more terrorist attacks plastered all over the news. No more secret struggles. No more lies. No more hate. Jesus is making all things new.

There are countless ways this new eternal reality should shape our here and now. And one way is that we should pursue what we will become. Unrighteousness will not be the norm forever. Just wait until you enter this sinless new creation! You thought you peaked in your 20s? Your peak is yet to come! Your best is you fully restored without sin! We hope for that coming day of no more sin! And we live a life of repentance as we wait. We pursue a life of holiness as we look forward to Christ's certain return.

One reaction is to say: “No more sin? I’ve also heard we’ll be singing worship songs forever? Am I playing a harp too? Sounds like hell!” Friends, this is creation restored. We’ll enjoy architecture without sin. We’ll feast without sin. We’ll explore without sin. We’ll work without sin. We’ll build without sin. We’ll enjoy great music without sin. We’ll climb mountains without sin. We’ll work on cars without sin. We’ll hunt without sin. We’ll enjoy all of the beauty of this world! And none of the brokenness of sin! You will be more alive in the new heaven and earth than you’ve ever been! And this is because there will be no more sin. So press on and pursue what you’re becoming.

First Free, Jesus’ return to judge and restore is certain and life changing. This Christmas, we must think more of the peace coming in heaven. Of course, remember God coming as a baby. But also remember judgment. Put beautiful Nativity scenes on display. But also be captivated by how Jesus will return and call us to account. Give awesome gifts to those you love. But also consider how God is giving us the gift of a new heaven and new earth of incredible beauty. Hope in that.

There’s a hymn we sing during Christmas that brings the first and second coming of Jesus together very beautifully. This hymn was written in 1744 by Charles Wesley. Wesley was looking at the orphans and class division around him in Great Britain. And Wesley began longing for Jesus to come and deal with sin, sickness, and death. In response, Wesley wrote the well-known Christmas hymn “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus” which we just sang last week. Wesley’s hymn famously looked back at Jesus’ first coming and birth. And in it there’s a prayer that Jesus will return to set things right. It goes like this: “Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee... Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.”

This song reflects Jesus’ final words in the book of Revelation. There, Jesus promises his return. In Revelation 22:20 Jesus says, “Surely I am coming soon.” To which John responds, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” He is coming like a thief. Are you ready? Are you living in light of eternal heaven, eternal hell.