

Week 11 - What's the Hold-up? - 2Peter 3:8-10

Scripture Reading: Psalm 90:1-17

Introduction

Have you ever considered just how bad we are at making predictions?

How about the prediction made by William Orton, president of Western Union, who said, "This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication." - Have you sent a telegram lately?

Or this one made by Dr. Dionysius Lardner who claimed in 1830, "Rail travel at high speed is not possible because passengers, unable to breathe, would die of asphyxia."

The venerable Albert Einstein failed in his 1932 prediction that "There is not the slightest indication that nuclear energy will ever be obtainable."

Darryl Zanuck, co-founder of 20th Century Fox predicted in 1946 that "Television won't last because people will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night."

Then there is this doozy: Thomas Watson who was president of IBM in 1943 said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

Dick Rowe, executive in charge of evaluating new talent for Decca Records in 1962 said of the Beatles, "Not to mince words, Mr. Epstein, but we don't like your boys' sound. Groups are out; four piece groups with guitars particularly are finished."

Even I once made the bold prediction that I would not even think about getting married before I turned 30 - I was 20 when I made that prediction not knowing I would meet Kathy two weeks later and would be married within the year

There is a reason you never see the headline proclaiming "Psychic wins lottery!" - We stink at making predictions

And that includes when it comes to making predictions concerning the Lord's return

There have been countless examples of people who believed so strongly that the Lord would return on a certain date that they quit their jobs, sold their possessions, and even jumped off of roofs in anticipation - only to be proven wrong

And, as we have seen in previous weeks, the false teachers of Peter's day were capitalizing on the Lord's delay and making the most foolish prediction by far in claiming that he wasn't coming at all

Just like with most false predictions, their logic was based on current observation and the belief that things would continue as they were presently

They claimed that things had been going on in the same way for a very long time and surely that was evidence against the reality of Christ's return and the judgment that would come with it

And things haven't changed for the better now that roughly 2,000 years have passed since Christ ascended to heaven promising to return

If anything, the passage of so much time has led to even more mocking and scoffing concerning the Lord's return

Some of the lists of failed end-times prophecies I found even begin with saying the Jesus falsely predicted his swift return within the lifetimes of some of those who were then present

Of course, those claims are based on obvious misinterpretations of Jesus' words and they may well fall into what we saw Peter categorize as deliberate ignorance on the part of those making them

As we now turn to the passage under consideration this morning (2Peter 3:8-10), I want you to notice that it begins with the word, "but"

And, just as I have told you that the word "for" tells you to look for an explanation, the word "but" indicates a contrast is being introduced

Having dealt with the false argument of the scoffers, Peter now offers instruction concerning the Lord's return as he provides his readers with the information they need regarding the perceived delay in the Lord's much-anticipated return

Please follow along in your Bible as I read verses 8-10 [**2Peter 3:8-10**] as we begin our study

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. 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. 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.

Remember, Peter said in verse 5 that the false teachers were deliberately overlooking historical fact in order to propose that Christ wasn't going to return

Now he offers a contrast to the behavior of the false teachers by instructing his readers not to overlook one fact

And we see that fact in verse 8 - God reckons time differently than we do

I. God reckons time differently than we do

The scoffers are attempting to make the argument that God either didn't mean what he said or that he didn't mean what the people believed he meant, or that he is inept or asleep at the switch

So Peter's goal here is to make sure that his readers don't overlook this critical truth

We can deduce that the false teachers must have been having some success in causing doubt in the church because the command that Peter issues is in the present imperative form meaning he was forbidding the continuance of something that was already going on within the church

The people were forgetting truth and were in danger of falling into error so Peter commands them, "Stop overlooking this critical fact! God doesn't see time in the same way as we do."

That shouldn't come as a surprise to us but we need to be reminded of it

I was trying to figure out how to illustrate the fact that God views time differently than we do and I hit upon how we reckon time differently at different times in our lives

Think back to when we were kids

Summer seemed to go on forever but now entire years seem to go by in a flash

I remember, as a kid, realizing that I would be 42 years old in the year 2,000 and thinking that I would be positively ancient

Then I blinked and I had been *married* for 42 years - see what I mean?

There are all kinds of theories for why time seems as elastic as it does but the point is we shouldn't be surprised that God sees time differently than we do because we view time differently at different times

All we have to measure time against is time itself - we tend to see time in relation to time and the only time we truly "know" is the time of our own existence and the passage of time has a profound effect on us

But God is unaffected by time as he stands above and outside of time and views time against the backdrop of eternity. God created man to live forever and we are immortal in the sense that our spirits will live on either in heaven or hell - we won't have an end but we had a beginning

God, though, is eternal and he has no beginning as well as no end and God dwells in eternity

We even have a flawed understanding of eternity because we tend to view eternity as time extended on forever in both directions when eternity is actually above and apart from time as we know and experience it

This might well blow your mind but time as we know it didn't exist until **Genesis 1:1** when "*In the beginning...*" God began to create the heavens and the earth - until that moment, there was only God and nothing else - not even time

Still, Peter isn't revealing some hard and fast rule here by which we can calculate the timing of events according to a formula as some have tried to do

He is simply using a thousand years to represent a very long time and a day to represent a short time

Peter's point is that the divine perspective regarding time is different from our human perspective and a period that may appear to be prolonged by human standards is actually brief according to God's calculation and vice versa

The criteria for "rapid" and "slow" are different for God than they are for us

We see Peter make this precise argument in the first part of verse 9 which says [**2Peter 3:9a**]:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness...

God is always right on time so there has to be a reason why the Son's return has been delayed for so long

And we see Peter reveal that reason in the last half of verse 9

Notice that there is another instance of the word "but" and "but" indicates a contrast [**2Peter 3:9**]

*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.*

II. God is patiently allowing for repentance

The word Peter uses here for "patient" means "to have a long fuse" or to be "longsuffering, slow to anger, slow to punish"

Patience is the exhibition of self-restraint in the face of provocation

One of God's attributes is mercy and patience is one way of demonstrating mercy

As I've told you before, I'm glad God is patient and merciful because I need a good measure of those qualities directed my way

In his first letter, Peter referred to the days of Noah when he wrote [**1Peter 3:20**] about waiting patiently for people to repent while Noah prepared the ark

Remember that the false teachers were willfully ignoring the fact of God's past judgment by way of the universal flood of Genesis so, of course, they wouldn't be considering the patience God demonstrated before that judgment

However, in that instance, God pronounced judgment on the earth and then waited for up to 100 years before carrying it out

At the time Peter wrote this letter, Jesus had been gone for about 30 years

And now it's been close to 2,000 years and still has not brought his final judgment - what a supreme act of patience

God's patience causes us no small amount of mental conflict doesn't it?

On the one hand we look around ourselves and we wonder why God allows the evil that exists and seems to be accelerating

We are witnesses to what were once private sins becoming public sins and what were once personal sins becoming institutional, national, and in some cases, global sins

The moral degeneracy of society at large is staggering as people thumb their noses at God and thoroughly violate his law

So we earnestly desire to pray, "Lord, come quickly!"

But then we look at the lost around us - some of them are our co-workers, our neighbors, our friends, and even our family members and our hearts tell us to seek the Lord's delay

We earnestly desire for the Lord to extend his mercy for a while yet so that those we know and love might come to repentance before the time for repentance is over

And we look into the mirror of self-examination and we see that our hearts aren't as we might wish them to be and we desire adequate time to recognize and remove the sin that lingers there

I believe both aspects of "repentance" are applicable in Peter's statement even if this last one isn't his primary focus

After all, Paul spoke of God's desire for all to be saved in **1Timothy 2:4**

And the prophet Joel foreshadowed the long-anticipated Day of the Lord that Israel was looking forward to as a time when the nations would be punished and Israel would be returned to her former glory

Yet Joel indicated that God would not only punish the nations but also the unfaithful among the people of Israel

And in **Joel 2:13** he urged:

Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love

So there's a tension between the two desires of our hearts - between wanting God's judgment to finally fall and for it to be delayed just a while longer

We desire to see God redeem this world fully and to finally be out of not only the punishment and power of sin but also the very presence of sin

Yet we also want there to be adequate time for people to abandon their sinful deeds, to turn to God, and to begin to do works that show evidence of repentance

And in that we're in line with what God desires

It's interesting that the very trait of God that causes him to wait for the false teachers to repent is what they twist to say God is impotent, indolent, or insensate but he isn't coming again and there will be no judgment

But God's patience also has another aspect in that it provides us time to do the work he has left for us to do

In Romans 10, Paul writes beginning in verse 13 [**Romans 10:13-15**]

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Since God's desire is that no one would be condemned, and since the Lord left us with the commission to spread the gospel, it's our responsibility to work to bring everyone to repentance

God is waiting patiently but that doesn't mean he is waiting idly and through his Holy Spirit he is actively reaching out and convicting hearts to bring people to salvation

And it should be our desire to work to fulfill God's desire and reward his patience

Because his patience won't last forever as we see in **Numbers 14:18** –

The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.

In other words, God's dreadful judgment is certain

III. God's dreadful judgment is certain

What God promises will always come to pass

But, here's the thing, it will come to pass according to God's timeline; not ours

Look again at verse 10 [**2Peter 3:10**]

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.

The “Day of the Lord” is the future moment when God will appear, judge the inhabitants of the earth, and pour out his wrath against the unrepentant because of their sin

The Old Testament is peppered with references to the Day of the Lord - for example:

Isaiah 13:9 tells us:

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.

And **Jeremiah 46:10** says that the Day of the Lord will be:

... a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of their blood.

The prophet **Malachi [4:5]** describes the day as “great awesome” and the prophet **Joel [2:11]** asks “who can endure it?”

Those passages are just a very small sample of the Old Testament mentions of the Day of the Lord

The New Testament also has many references to the Day of the Lord and we are assured that it will also be a day of salvation for God’s people

However, Peter is focused on the terror of the event - the Bible is consistent in describing the dreadful nature of the Day of the Lord

Look again at the events Peter describes:

“The heavens will pass away with a roar”; “the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved”; “the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed”

The heavens and the earth that God created and presently sustains, that is to say the entire universe, will be destroyed by God before the new heavens and new earth are ushered in

I remember my father-in-law once dousing a brush pile with gasoline and then putting a big wad of newspaper on a garden rake which he ignited in order to set the brush pile on fire from a relatively safe distance

And when the burning paper came into contact with the gas fumes there was a huge roar as the whole pile was ignited in an instant

Imagine what it will sound like when everything we know and see is consumed in an instant by the fire of God’s wrath

And the suggestion that Peter makes is that God will conduct a type of “judicial inquiry” by which he will discover the deeds of humanity and will execute his judgment on the basis of what he reveals

The false teachers have sown doubt about the reality of the final judgment and Peter takes pains to show that no one will escape God’s wrath except for those who embrace the salvation God offers

Scripture is also consistent concerning the coming of that day as we see that it will come suddenly and without warning

Jesus taught that it is impossible to know when that day will come

Look with me at **Matthew 24:36** where Jesus taught:

Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only

Jesus was obviously speaking from the vantage of his human knowledge and not from the standpoint of his divine omniscience when he said he, at that time at least, didn’t know when the Day of the Lord would occur

And in the verses that follow he taught that the day would be like in the days of Noah when people were just going about their everyday business with no concern about the judgment that was coming

The lesson comes to its culmination in **Matthew 24:44** when Jesus says:

Therefore you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

It may have been that teaching session that informed Peter's use of the thief metaphor because Jesus referred to a thief coming in the night when he taught

However, the point is clear in both places - that which is unexpected calls for vigilance and continual preparedness

This week, we saw Hurricane Ian hit the state of Florida and there was a great deal of advanced preparation for it as soon as the computer models showed the track of the storm

Homes and businesses were boarded up against the strong winds and storm surge that was coming and millions were evacuated out of the path of danger

Millions more laid in supplies of food, water, and other essentials in anticipation of supply chains being disrupted

Emergency crews numbering in the tens of thousands were positioned along with their equipment on standby for restoring power and other services as quickly as possible once the storm was past

All of those preparations make perfect sense but the real question is why people don't take God's promise of a coming day of universal judgment just as seriously

I suppose it may well be for the same reason that some people were seen swimming in the storm surge - they simply don't believe the danger that faces them

Conclusion

As I pointed out at the beginning of the sermon, we have a terrible track record when it comes to predicting the future

But God doesn't - his record is spotless

His Word is filled with predictions that have taken place precisely as they were foretold - and often after centuries had passed

And he has told us what is going to happen - just not when it will happen

So, while we are to live in anticipation of the second coming and the judgment that will follow, it's foolish to spend time and effort in trying to predict when it will occur

What we know for certain is that we are closer to the second coming today than we were yesterday

And while it's difficult to look around at what is going on in this world and not wonder how long God will be patient, I am glad that he continues to tarry because we still have much to do

Remember, God has a time scheduled when his Son is coming back to judge - there is no doubt about it

Let's pray

Psalm 90:1-17 (page 496)

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!"

For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed.

You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants!

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.

Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!