

God's Patience

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad they can't have it, which means that God has something to say to everyone in His Word.

He has something to say to people who have been Christians their entire lives. He has something to say to those who have been Christians only for a short time, and He has something to say to people who would not consider themselves Christians, people who have doubts or questions or objections to Christianity, and so it's for that reason that we turn every week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing our series in 2 Peter, and you'll remember that 2 Peter is a letter written by a man named Peter. He writes it to a church somewhere in the Roman Empire in the 60s A.D., and He writes it with one hope, one desire, that these people would grow.

We know that's His desire because that's how He both begins and ends the letter, and He wants them to grow in two ways. He wants them to grow in grace, and He wants them to grow in knowledge.

We've been discussing the false teachers since chapter 2 who are threatening both knowledge and grace, and last week we looked at a question that we're going to continue this week.

[1 : 3 6] It's the question that we receive in chapter 3, verses 3 and 4. These false teachers, these scoffers, are asking, why hasn't Jesus returned yet? And since He hasn't returned yet, should we not doubt that He will ever return?

They're denying a variety of things in this book. Remember, they deny the authority of the Bible. They deny the reality that Jesus is coming again. They use the denial of both of those to encourage people to live in sin, to celebrate sin.

And so last week we looked at that question, why should we believe that Jesus is coming again? And we believe it because of the signs. And we had four signs. The first and foundational one is that we believe in the Bible.

We believe that God's Word is our ultimate authority. It is the match that lights. And that was our foundation for the other signs. The sign that God created the world.

He's so powerful. And so, of course, He's going to be able to come back again. The sign that He judged the world at the time of Noah. And so, of course, He's going to be able to judge the world again. And then finally, the fourth sign that He is, in fact, coming back.

[2 : 4 5] We turn again to that question this week. And Peter is going to give us some new answers to that question. Some people believe the answers last week were answers directed to the scoffers, the false teachers.

And that these answers this week are directed to Christians, people who believe in the Bible, but still need assurance that Jesus is, in fact, returning to this world.

Now, I'll warn you as we come to this passage. We're in chapter 3, by the way, starting at verse 8. We have some heavy sledding ahead of us. So, there's some big theological topics we're going to have to cover. To make sure we don't get off track, we're going to have a strategy heading in.

And our strategy is this. We're going to focus primarily on verses 8 and 9, because those are the verses that answer our question about Jesus' return. We are going to touch on verse 10. I am not going to talk about it in detail, not because we're going to avoid it, but because we want to do it full justice next week.

So, we'll look carefully at verses 8 and 9, a little bit at verse 10. I haven't completely decided yet, but I think we're probably going to spend two weeks in 10 through 14, first focusing on Jesus' return, and then second focusing on our lives of holiness.

[3 : 53] With that, as we turn now together to God's word, we are in 2 Peter chapter 3, starting at verse 8, and I invite you to turn with me. You can turn in your worship guide, or in your Bible, or in your phone.

No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5, tells us that every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

And so, that's why we read now, starting at verse 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.

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.

Verse 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.

[5 : 01] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again, that you have given us your word as a gift, that you are a good father, and so you haven't left us alone as orphans in a merciless universe, but instead you speak to us.

And so we simply ask this morning that you would do that, you would speak to us in your word. You'd speak us words of encouragement, and you'd speak us words of challenge, and most of all, you would remind us of the grace that you offer in your Son and our Savior, in whose name we pray, the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Growing up, I was a huge fan of the TV show The West Wing. I grew up right outside Washington, D.C., and so I had a lot of exposure to politics, and I loved the fun of the show, the wonderful banter that they had, and it was known for the camera angles, the walk and talk that the show is famous for, and of course now people look back to The West Wing with longing because it was an idealistic show, and it showed us what politics could potentially be, and as our country becomes more and more divisive, the world that The West Wing portrayed seems farther and farther away.

If you're familiar with the show, you know the character, Leo McGarry, who for most of the show is the chief of staff to the president, but when we get to season seven, Leo actually has the chance to run for vice president, and so as he's running, he has a media consultant helping him to deal with the press, and his consultant reminds him, if you receive a question, and you don't like the question, one of your options is just to reject the premise of the question.

Just decide you disagree with everything they've assumed before they asked it. And of course I could give you a few examples of that today. I could walk up to you and I could ask you, what did you eat for breakfast?

[7 : 01] What's my premise? My premise is that you ate breakfast. You could tell me, I didn't eat breakfast. You've rejected the premise of my question. I could ask you, what is your favorite kind of bread?

My premise, you eat bread. You could tell me, you know what, I reject the premise of your question. I'm gluten free. That is what Peter does here for these people as they ask about why Jesus has not come back.

Where is the promise of his coming? Verses three and four, Peter rejects the premise of his question. Your premise is this, it has been a long time since Jesus went up to heaven.

But you know what? I reject the assumption that it's been a long time. I reject your definition of long. Why? Because verse eight, God has a different view and experience of time than you do.

His relationship with time is very different. Now this raises all kinds of philosophical, theological questions about God and time.

[8 : 01] We are not gonna resolve all of those this morning. And in fact, when we get to questions like this, we are in very deep waters. And so it's important that we're very careful about the way we talk about it and what we articulate.

We don't wanna say more than what the Bible says. We don't wanna get ourselves tied up into knots we can't untangle. And so I'm gonna rely this morning on one theologian who lists four different ways the Bible tells us that God's relationship to time is different than our relationship to time.

He tells us this, God's relation to time is very different from our own. For the biblical God transcends a number of limitations associated with our experience of temporality.

Now I'm gonna give you all four. You don't have to remember all of these because this verse only focuses on one of our differences with God. First of all, God does not experience what he calls the limitation of beginning and end.

We have a beginning and an end, God does not. God does not experience the limitation of change. As we experience time, we change throughout it. God does not. God does not experience the limitation of ignorance.

[9 : 07] God knows perfectly what to us are past, present, and future, seeing them in effect with equal vividness. He does see all events laid out before him as one can see an entire procession from a high vantage point.

I'm gonna read that last part again. He does see all events laid out before him as one can see an entire procession from a high vantage point. So we get a sense of God's experience of time.

He can see past, present, and future all at once. And then finally, this is the difference we're talking about this morning, the limitation of temporal frustration. In other words, as this theologian explains it, things don't happen too quickly for God and they don't happen too slowly for God.

They happen sometimes too quickly for us, sometimes too slowly for us. Everything happens perfectly for God according to his plan.

And so we must recognize God as Lord in time as well as Lord above time. God's relationship to time is different than ours.

[10 : 16] Peter rejects the premise of the question. It has been a long time only from your human, earthly perspective. It has not been a long time from God's perspective.

The point is this. As we come to the Bible with large and tough questions, we have to remember how finite and small and limited we are. There are things that appear difficult and challenging to us because, as the Psalms tell us, we are only dust.

And so we remember that as we come up against hard and difficult questions, feeling like it has been too long since Jesus left. God and his purposes are much greater than anything we can understand and see.

He sees all of time. We only see a portion. And so it's this fact that God is so much greater than us that causes some of our frustrations.

The limitation is not God's but ours. This is part of why we have trouble talking about certain theological concepts. Just think about this for a second. The Bible doesn't answer all of our questions.

[11 : 27] And even when it does, we have hard time understanding. The Trinity, for example. God is three persons in one. Why is that so hard to understand? Because there's nothing else that we experience that's three in one.

We don't have another point of reference. Not because God is limited, because we are limited. So that's why all illustrations about the Trinity fail. The Trinity is not like an egg, okay?

The egg is not three in one. There is no other thing that is three persons in one, so it's difficult for us to understand. Eternity, challenging for us to understand.

Not because God is limited, but because we are limited. We have no frame of reference for something that never ends and doesn't have a beginning. Why? Because we have a beginning and an end.

So the Bible does not tell us everything that we want to know. Even the things it tells us are difficult to understand. That is not God's fault. God's purposes, His plan, His designs are far greater and more wonderful than we can understand and imagine.

[12 : 34] We have to remember the greatness of God and the smallness of man when we come up against questions like this. Isaiah chapter 55 spells it out for us clearly. God tells them, My thoughts are not your thoughts.

Neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Deuteronomy 29, 29 tells us something similar. It says, The secret things belong to the Lord. God doesn't choose to reveal everything to us. We shouldn't expect Him to, right? You don't reveal everything about yourself to everyone.

Why would you expect God to be any different? And so God is so great, He has such a different perspective on the world that He does not see slowness in the same way that we do.

Remember in the book of Job, Job has all these complaints against God, and then in chapters 38 through 41, God comes back and in those three, four chapters, He basically says, I'm God, you're not.

[13 : 41] Who do you think you are? I am much higher than you are. There are things you cannot understand. And so that's Peter's first answer for us here about why Jesus hasn't come back.

He says basically this, You think it's been a long time. From God's perspective, it has not. His ways are higher than your ways as the heavens are above the earth.

Have some humility. Now we could come back at this point, right? And we could say, Okay, you've rejected the premise of my question.

However you define slowness, let's just take that word out, there's still been so many generations. Let's talk in terms of generations, right? So we won't argue about premises, we'll just say a fact.

There's been a lot of generations since Jesus has come. Why has He taken so many generations to return? This is where Peter gives us our second answer.

[14 : 47] It's not just that God has a different relationship with time. He rejects the premise again here in verse 9. God is not slow, He tells us, but patient.

He's not slow, He's patient. And we see this as a character of God throughout the Bible. It's often talked about as His forbearance.

God takes a long time before He brings judgment. That is part of what it means to be God. God delays, delays, He waits to give people a chance to repent.

He waits because He's patient. It's not that He's inactive. It's that His character is such that He wants people to have a chance to repent.

We're told this both in the New Testament and in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, in Romans chapter 2, verse 4, we're told this, Do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

[15 : 51] God is waiting for Jesus to return to allow people to repent. We're told this as well in descriptions of God's character in the Old Testament. Exodus 34, verse 6, tells us that God passed before Him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

And if you were with us last spring, near the end, you'll remember that we went through the book of Jonah. Jonah has a complaint against God. Chapter 4, verse 2, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?

That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Jonah was angry with God because he held back his judgment on Nineveh to give them time to repent. Now, we've talked also a lot about the story of Noah, both in 1 Peter and in 2 Peter.

Remember, Noah spent years and years and years building the ark. We found out earlier in this book, in chapter 2, that he was a herald of righteousness. And so, even as God was bringing the judgment that we saw last week, the judgment of the flood, he was slow to anger.

[17 : 15] He had forbearance. He gave people years to repent. He was not slow, he was patient. And so, once again, Peter here is rejecting the premise of the question.

Yes, God brought judgment in the days of Noah. He was also patient. He also waited. He gave time for people to repent. Now, I told you we had some heavy sledding theologically today.

One of them is God's relationship to time. One of them is this next portion of verse 9, which has caused great controversy. It tells us here we're going to take a little bit of a detour here to address this section.

Not wishing, this is the end of verse 9, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. What do we do with the fact that we're told that God wants all to reach repentance?

And we know that all don't reach repentance. Does God, this is the question, somehow lack power? Is he somehow unable to bring about what he wishes?

[18 : 23] And this is something people have spilled an enormous amount of ink over to try to resolve. I'm going to explain it to you this morning what I hope will make it simple, which is by way of an analogy, because I think what makes this difficult is the fact that it's related to salvation.

salvation. We understand this intuitively, actually, when it comes to other things that God wishes. So I want you to think about the Ten Commandments with me. We have the Sixth Commandment, which is don't murder.

Does God wish that no one should murder? Yeah, of course. It's the Sixth Commandment. He's commanded don't murder. Do people murder?

Yes, people sin. We live in a sinful world. People don't always do what God commands. No one's having a debate about that. We understand that God commands things on the one hand, and people don't always follow it on the other hand.

Take that understanding, transfer it over to salvation. Jesus commands, Mark chapter 1, verse 15, repent and believe the gospel. Not everyone repents and believes the gospel.

[19 : 27] Of course, he wishes that all repent. That's his command. He wishes that all would repent in the same way that he's commanded and wishes there will be no murder. It does not mean that God lacks power.

It means that God has given commands, and because of sin in the world, man often fails to follow them. God's commanded people not murder, people still murder. God has commanded everyone to repent, not everyone repents.

And so it's not a problem for us that we're told that God desires everyone's salvation. not wishing that anyone should perish. In the same way, he commands no one should murder.

In the same way, seventh commandment, he commands no one should commit adultery. In the same way, the tenth commandment, he commands no one should covet. This is how the world works. But when it comes to salvation, it becomes this difficult issue.

We just need to take our understanding from everything else in the world when it comes to God and his commands and transfer it over. That's something I believe all sides of this argument can agree about, right? We can all agree, whether you're an Arminian or a Calvinist, whether you're a dispensationalist, you believe in covenant theology, you know how the world works.

[20 : 36] You know God commands things. Not everyone obeys them. Same thing is going on here. Okay? That is our theological heavy sledding for the day.

And I'll point out also that Peter knows this is true. He's aware of this when he says it because he's already told us multiple times that God is going to judge the wicked. So he tells us on the one hand God wishes all to be saved, all to reach repentance, and he knows they're not going to.

So we see things like 2 Peter 2, verse 1, the false teachers are bringing upon themselves swift destruction. They're not going to repent. 2 Peter 3, verse 7, we know the day of judgment is coming.

What will happen? The destruction of the ungodly. This is often what's talked about in theology as God's two wills. He has his variety of terms for it.

Some people call it his decretive will or his preceptive will, what he's declared like the Ten Commandments, and his secret or hidden will, what he's actually foreordained to come to pass.

[21 : 38] The purpose, however, of all this is not that we would untie theological knots and have a wonderful intellectual exercise, but instead that we would know God's heart.

God has not yet returned, not because he is inactive, but because of his love. God has not returned because, as we're told in Ezekiel chapter 18, I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God.

So turn and live. you long, Christian, for people and your family, your friends who don't know Christ to come and to know him.

How much more has Christ suffered for the sake of the world? How much more has he hurt for people to come to him?

He is patient because of his love. It is not that God has forgotten us, that he does not return, quite the opposite. We're told in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 that he was working to reconcile the world to himself.

[22 : 53] His patience is part of that. In fact, I want you to think about it in this way. If you're a Christian, God's patience has been undoubtedly for us.

Think about, thought experiment, if Jesus had returned, when the recipients of this letter wanted him to. What would that mean for you? You would not be in God's kingdom if he had returned in 75 AD.

God's patience is good news for you if you're a Christian. His patience means that he brought you into his kingdom. And so, it is good news.

If you are not a Christian, perhaps God's patience is for you. His patience is giving you time to repent.

If you do not, you will not be able to say you didn't have time. If you do not, you will not be able to say that no one told you.

[24 : 00] We've talked about this a lot in previous chapters because this is a theme in 2 Peter. no one knows the day or the hour of the coming of our Lord. And so, the time to repent is now.

If you're a Christian, God's patience is for you. It has allowed you to be part of his kingdom. If you are not a Christian, you need to wonder and think and consider is God's patience for you now allowing you still time to repent and to turn to Jesus Christ in faith.

I said this a couple weeks ago. Some of you are hanging around the edges of the church. Some of you are nibbling around the edges of Christianity.

God is patient with you. He will not be patient forever. The time to repent is now. The time to commit is now.

Not only do we not know the day and the hour of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do not know the day and the hour of our own end. Do not take advantage of God's patience.

[25 : 12] Let his patience be for you now. His patience, it tells us here very clearly, is so that all should reach repentance.

That means that everyone would turn away from their sins confessing that they have no hope outside of Jesus Christ and resting and relying upon him alone for salvation.

That is what God's patience is waiting for from you if you are not a Christian. Waiting for you to repent and trust on Christ. That leads us to Peter's final point here.

Remember that the point of this passage is to answer the question, why has Jesus not come back? Peter ends by reminding us he has not come back, but he will.

Verse 10. 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.

[26 : 13] I told you we're not going to focus on everything in verse 10, but I want to highlight a few things for you this morning. First, the main point is this, Jesus is coming back. God may be patient, he's not patient forever. Jesus will return to this earth.

when he does, it will be like a thief in the night. He will come when you don't expect him. Not only will he come like a thief in the night, but he's going to come, verse 10, on the day of the Lord.

Remember, we've talked about the theology, the meaning behind the day before when we were earlier in 2 Peter. The day is an idea in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, that refers to when God will come back to bring both salvation and judgment.

God is patient, he will not be patient forever. Jesus will return, he is coming back, he will be like a thief in the night, we will not know or be able to predict, we will be surprised by the timing of his second coming.

And when he does, he will be patient no more, he will bring full and final judgment, and he will bring full and final salvation.

[27 : 22] salvation. And so, do not make the mistake that Paul warns us against in Romans chapter 2. Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

For the Christian, then, the encouragement from Peter is this, take heart, God has not forgotten you. It may seem like a long time, and Jesus is coming back.

For the non-Christian, repent, because God has not forgotten you, and he is coming back. Just because it is delayed does not mean it will not happen.

And so, for the Christian, live as if Jesus is coming back. That is your great hope. That is what our eyes are focused towards. For the non-Christian, he will come like a thief at a time you do not expect.

Remember, we talked earlier about the danger of knowledge. One of the dangers is that we would become numb. Don't allow the knowledge of Jesus' return to make you numb. Instead, make it move you towards repentance.

[28 : 39] When the day comes like a thief, will you be saved or destroyed? When the day comes, like a thief, will you be saved or destroyed?

Remember, every sin, not all sins. Every sin deserves God's wrath and punishment. Jesus shows us that this is God's will.

We talked about that God wishes not that any should perish. church. I told you in Mark 1, verse 15, he commands that we repent and believe in the gospel. And then Jesus also tells us a story about a thief in the night.

Peter is taking these words from Jesus who taught him. And Jesus tells us in that same way about his second coming. I'm looking now at Matthew 24, starting at verse 36.

This will sound very familiar to what we've just looked at at 2 Peter. Concerning that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but the Father only.

[29 : 50] By the way, at times like this in our world, people like to ask pastors if the second coming is soon. The appropriate response is not even Jesus knows. Verse 37, for as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Jesus, like Peter, focuses on Noah. For as in those days before they were the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

God was patient in the times of Noah. He brought judgment in the time of Noah. Then two men will be in the field, one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken and one left.

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

therefore, verse 44, you also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them food at the proper time?

[31 : 09] What is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes? Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. Now listen to this, but if that wicked servant says to himself, my master is delayed, or it's familiar for us, right, from 2 Peter 3, he's become lulled into a false sense of security because Jesus hasn't come back yet.

My master is delayed and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Why has Jesus not come back? Christian, Jesus has not come back so that you could be a part of his kingdom.

If you are not a Christian, it is God's patience that means that he still offers for you to be a part of his kingdom. Do not let the day and the hour surprise you because it will come like a thief in the night.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for your word, even when it speaks to us words that wake us up, words that are uncomfortable.

[32 : 44] Ask for these people here that we would be like a wise and faithful servant, knowing that your return is sure, and so that we would live in light of that, live looking forward to your coming, ready for you to return.

Father, ask for those who do not know you, that you would use your patience this morning to bring them to repentance, that they would have faith and trust and hope in Jesus Christ.

It's in his name that we ask these things. Amen. Amen.