

Sermon 20, Don't Forget This, 2 Peter 3:8-10

Read Psalm 90

Proposition: The promise of His coming is right on schedule; our Lord is merely giving time for repentance before the world burns.

- I. The One Thing You Shouldn't Miss: God's Time Isn't Like Ours, v. 8
- II. The Implications of the One Thing You Shouldn't Miss, vv. 9-10
 - A. Christ Isn't Stalling, v. 9a
 - B. Christ Is Patient with You, v. 9b
 1. He Doesn't Want Anyone to Perish
 2. He Wants Everyone to Come to Repentance
 - C. Christ's Delay Doesn't Mean that Judgment Will Never Arrive, v. 10
 1. God's Day will come when you least expect it, v. 10a
 2. The heavens and the celestial bodies will pass away, v. 10b
 3. The earth and its works will be found out, v. 10c

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, my brother loves the old joke in which he asks me to give him directions for how to do a particular thing — say how to hitch up the potato planter to the tractor, or how to rope a steer. I will begin “Now listen carefully. First you check the potato planter and get it all lined up. Then you back the tractor up to it, align the three pins, dismount the tractor and insert the pins, then put the little pins in the big pins to keep them from falling out. Then you hook up the hydraulic lines. Then get back on the tractor and go plant potatoes.”

To which Seth responds, “I didn't get all that.”

“Which part of that didn't you get?”

“The part after “Now listen carefully.”

Brothers and sisters, Peter is saying “Now listen carefully.” He gives us the one thing that we need to take away from this letter. This is his “now listen carefully” moment. Don't be like my brother. Be sure you get this part. The false teachers overlook three crucial things about water and the word in history. Be sure you don't overlook this one thing, because it reveals something about Christ. And the whole point of the letter is to teach you to grow in the knowledge of Christ. If you listen to this one fact, you'll know how Christ transcends time, how He's patient with you, and how His judgment is certain. Christ transcends time, He's patient, but His judgment is certain.

I. The One Thing You Shouldn't Miss: God's Time Isn't Like Ours, v. 8

So here it is. Here's the one thing you shouldn't miss: God's time is incommensurable with ours. One day to Him is like a thousand years to us, and vice versa. That's right — one of our days can

“feel like” a thousand years to God, and a millenium of ours might only be one day to Him. What’s the point? That God is really messed up? No. The point is that His “time,” if we can even apply that factor to Him, is simply not comparable to ours. This is not some kind of rule of thumb such that you can calculate and say “God said the world would last for a week, therefore it will last for seven thousand years.” Instead, the whole point is to say that there are no rules of thumb. As Aslan tells the children, “To me, all times are soon.” To God, there is no such thing as delay because His time simply can’t be compared to ours. You’ve heard of apples and oranges and how they don’t compare with each other. You’ve heard of other incommensurable goods, like the good of designing a building versus the good of writing a book, or of rearing a child versus the good of eating ice cream. How can you compare those goods with each other — especially when they aren’t necessarily exclusive? And Peter is saying that you can’t compare your experience of how long it’s seeming to take Christ to come back to the way it seems to God. These things just don’t stack up to each other.

Brothers and sisters, you and I need to get out of our head once and for all the idea that God is just a hyper-powered version of us. He’s not. He doesn’t live under the same conditions that we do. He doesn’t deal with the same limitations that we do. He is not subject to the relentless ticking of the clock; He is not one minute older now than He was a minute ago.

Don’t let this escape your notice. So long as you think God is just like you, you don’t know Him. So long as you believe that you can control Him, you are ignorant of what He is.

So don’t miss it. God’s time is not like ours. It just isn’t. While you might say “Jesus, you promised to come soon and it’s been two thousand years,” God can say right back “It hasn’t even been two days. How could the place my Son is preparing for you possibly be ready yet?” And we can’t say, “Well, really, it has been 2000 years whether He wants to admit it or not.” Actually, in the divine dimension we call Heaven, it may not have been 2000 years. In fact, we are as sure as we can be that no time at all has elapsed in Heaven since Jesus returned there. Eternity, so far as we can tell, just means that time does not pass, that there is no duration and no succession of moments. In God’s place, the place we call Heaven, this sermon isn’t 27 minutes long. There aren’t any minutes there, or any lengths of time. There is only an eternal now.

We can’t understand this. Our minds literally refuse to wrap around it. But it’s the one crucial thing that Peter doesn’t want us to miss. Now listen carefully, he says. Jesus’ return is not delayed because, in divine perspective, time doesn’t mean what it means to you and me!

II. The Implications of the One Thing You Shouldn’t Miss, vv. 9-10

So what does that mean for us? What are the implications of God’s eternity?

A. Christ Isn’t Stalling, v. 9a

Well, the first one is that Christ isn’t stalling. He isn’t trying to buy more time. He’s not being slow about His return.

Alexa a few weeks ago told me she was going to run out and buy a few things at Seconds on the Avenue, which is about a two-minute drive from our house. An hour and a half later, she

was back. I counted that as slowness! I thought she was going to be gone for twenty minutes, and she was actually gone for ninety.

But though we've all had those moments where we've said "I thought so-and-so was going to be here already!", that doesn't apply to Christ. He isn't stalling. He isn't waiting around, distracted by reading the latest issue of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's *Decision* magazine. He is not slow about His promise.

Can you believe that? Can you believe that Jesus is coming at the right time, not being slow, dawdling, dragging His feet, etc.? Because if you can't trust Jesus, who can you trust? If you don't trust Him, you're not a Christian.

B. Christ Is Patient with You, v. 9b

He's patient with you, after all. The reason He's "slow," the reason that He's given it a couple of thousand years, is that He is longsuffering. He is patient. He is giving us time.

1. He Doesn't Want Anyone to Perish

The first reason He's given so much time (and remember, if He had come back much sooner, we wouldn't even exist!) is that He doesn't want anyone to perish. Now, this instantly brings up the question of whether some people will, in fact, perish, and if so, why? The Bible is actually fairly clear that some will perish. Some choose sin, and God will respect that and let them have Hell, which is all that someone given over to sin *can* have. But since some will perish, how can God want them not to? Doesn't He always get what He wants? Yes, in one sense, but no, in another. In one sense, everything happens according to His will — His decretive will. But clearly, many evil things are against His will. He doesn't want you to yell at your children. He doesn't want you to forget that His time is incommensurable with yours. He doesn't want you to overlook His goodness, and yet you often do. How can something happen if God doesn't want it to happen? In one sense, He lets it. Willingly or unwillingly? Obviously, He has to willingly let it happen, because if God does something unwillingly, He's forced into it by circumstances beyond His control — but there are no such circumstances. Of course, if we are forced by the text to admit that God willingly allows things He doesn't want, what might it mean to say that He doesn't want them? All I can say is that it's complicated. You and I, as parents, bosses, managers, etc. willingly allow things we don't want all the time. Maybe we're schizo. But God isn't. All we can say is that if we are complicated, how much more is He? If we are unsure how to never violate God's law in our ruling over the things entrusted to us, how much more might His rule sometimes appear odd to us? Brothers and sisters, I can tell you that it is completely true that God doesn't want anyone to perish, but also true that He does not save everyone.

However, this particular passage, though it reflects God's heart for every last human being, is specifically saying that God is patient with us. He's patient with you, Peter says — you in the church, you who profess Christ, you who are counted among the people of God — because He doesn't want you to perish. God has a special heart for His church. He's concerned particularly about us, His people. He doesn't want anyone in here listening to this sermon to perish, but all of us to come to repentance.

2. He Wants Everyone to Come to Repentance

You see, there's the thing. The way to avoid perishing is to repent. Those who won't repent will perish. Jesus wants you to turn away from your sin and toward Him. He wants you to get more like Him by rejecting your old filthy habits and ways and turning to Him as Lord and Savior.

That's why Jesus preached repentance, and why the Bible teaches it so explicitly. It's also our answer to the universalists, who say that everyone will be saved. For that to happen, everyone would have to repent — and some refuse to repent. They will not bow before Christ, will not admit that they were wrong.

So here's the question: Is your heart as big as God's? Are you willing for some to perish? Would it make you very happy to know that abortion doctors are tearing each other apart with forceps in Hell? God wants them to repent. Insofar as you and I hold grudges and hate people (even false teachers), we are not yet like Christ. *He* wants everyone to come to repentance. He wants former abortion doctors and homosexual activists to sit with us at the Lord's Table and host our church potlucks. He wants the most evil people you can think of to turn away from their sin and come join our church.

C. Christ's Delay Doesn't Mean that Judgment Will Never Arrive, v. 10

Yet that's not the final word. The chapter doesn't end there. You see, brothers and sisters, the fact that Christ is patiently waiting to return doesn't mean that He will never judge. It doesn't mean that all of that stuff has been called off. I was joking this morning, listening to the menu on my phone say "To delete this message, press 7. Message deleted. To hear your messages, press 1." I added, in the same tone of voice, "To forget the whole thing, press #."

Brothers and sisters, does the truth of God's heart for people to repent mean that He's going to just forget the whole thing? Does it mean that judgment is no longer a factor? Not at all.

1. God's Day will come when you least expect it, v. 10a

You see, though God is patient, His day will come when you least expect it. Just as a thief does his best to enter and remove your valuables at a time when you're not thinking, "I bet a thief is about to walk in here," so God patiently waits for the time when the whole planet will be least expecting it — and then Jesus will return. You may wish to ignore the coming of judgment. You may prefer to believe that nothing's ever going to change. But the reality is that the time when God has His day, the day when He sets everything right and punishes everyone who deserves it — that time is coming. You won't get a thirty-second warning to give you time for repentance. You won't get time to destroy the evidence of your misdeeds, to delete your Internet history, to clean up your life. God's day will be here before you know it, and you will be stunned by it.

2. The heavens and the celestial bodies will pass away, v. 10b

On that day, the heavens and celestial bodies will be ripped away with whoosh. They will vanish, get out of the way. Right now, the image seems to be, the heavens and the stars and planets are like the annoying little brother who stands right in front of the TV. You can't see the show until he moves! And in the same way, the heavens and planets "obscure" God's vision. But the day is coming when He will rip them away.

3. The earth and its works will be found out, v. 10c

And when that happens, the earth and all the deeds done on it will be exposed. No longer will you be hidden from God. Of course, you're not actually hidden from Him now. But suddenly, at that moment, you will see Him looking at you and know with complete certainty that He beholds and understands perfectly who you are and everything you've done. You'll know that you've been found out. Some manuscripts say that the earth and its works will be burned up — and that is indeed the final result, after those deeds have been evaluated. Those that don't measure up, that don't meet God's standard, will be burned up and brought to nothing. Everything will be tested by fire, Paul tells us, and only what survives will be worth anything.

Are you ready? If everything you've done this week were to be found out, would you be embarrassed? Ashamed? Saddened? Of course you would. And that's the point here. God will see the secrets of your heart, and everything you've done. Your works will be exposed.

We'll see next week how that ought to motivate us toward holiness and godliness. But for now, don't forget that God's time is incommensurable with us. There's no comparison. Right? We might say "There's no comparison between a Barbie car and a Corvette." But they can be compared. One goes 5 mph, the other goes 185. But there is truly no comparison between God's time and ours. He will act to save us in His own good time. He waits patiently for us to repent — but when the time is right, He will judge. So walk in repentance this week. Know Christ as the one patient one who will judge at the right time. Trust Him. And He will save you. Amen.