

Is Advent about waiting for Christmas? In some sense yes, Advent is a season that prepares us to celebrate the birth of Christ. But Christmas isn't really the point. Christians are decidedly pro-life; we love babies, but the point of Christmas, what we're really waiting for isn't a baby. We're waiting for the coming of the Lord and Savior who will bring righteousness and justice to the world, restoring peace between God and man. Celebrating Christmas is like celebrating the inauguration of a president, or the drafting of a star player. What you are really looking forward to isn't just their *arrival*, but what they will *accomplish*.

And this is where we part ways with a pop culture celebration of Christmas. Our culture is happy to join us in celebrating Jesus' "babyship", as long as we don't talk so much about His *Lordship*. "God with us" is comforting, "God judges us" is terrifying. Babies are cute; Lords bring justice and judgment. It's easy to celebrate Christmas; it's hard to celebrate the Apocalypse.

But as our text today teaches, out of that fiery judgment, the Lord Jesus will bring forth new heavens and a new earth. Until then, His work isn't complete, and the righteousness and peace that He came to bring aren't here yet.

And so that's why celebrating Christmas without waiting for the Day of the Lord makes no sense. The birth of Jesus doesn't save you! It makes salvation possible, but it's only the beginning. The birth of Jesus is important because it leads the birth of the new creation. And so it doesn't make any sense to get excited about Immanuel, God with us, unless that Immanuel is Jesus, the salvation of Jehovah. Unless baby Jesus dies and rises again, ascends to heaven to rule all things and then returns again to bring us salvation and new creation through judgment, is Christmas good news? Is it worth waiting for and celebrating? No, it isn't. Christmas without the cross is nothing. And the cross without the new creation is nothing.

And that's the issue in our text today. The problem wasn't that people in Peter's day *didn't* understand this; it was that they *did* understand it, but they didn't *see* it. They understood Jesus when He said that His salvation was a two-stage process: in His first coming, Jesus came and died on the cross to make atonement for the sins of the world, and then He promised that He would come again to bring judgment and establish the new creation.

But when Jesus didn't return fast enough for them, scoffers started to say (v.4) "Where is the promise of His coming?" This Resurrection you Christians talk about was a cool magic trick, but it hasn't given us a new world. You say Jesus was going to do that when He comes back. Okay then, where is He?

And on top of that, you say that Jesus taught us how to live *new creation lives*, lives that would make sense when He came back. Apparently, He's not coming back. Give us one good reason why we should live new creation lives when the new creation hasn't come, and doesn't seem like it's coming at all. It's been a long time, and your God seems pretty slow. Even if

judgment day comes, it doesn't seem like it'll get here in time to affect me, so why should I live my life based on what Jesus said was coming? Where is the salvation He promised? Where is the justice that He said He would bring? Where is this new creation?

That's what the scoffers were saying then. Don't you think we have scoffers saying the same thing now? And the Christians then didn't know how to respond, or what to say. Maybe they shared some of those doubts themselves, or maybe they still hoped and believed, but couldn't figure out how to defend it or explain it. Either way, they were anxious and worried; their peace was gone, and so they reached out to Peter, who sent them this letter in response.

And what Peter wrote to them back then has everything to say to us today. Peter reminds his hearers of three truths: in v.8, he reminds them that **God is the Lord of time**, in v.9, he tells them that the **Lord is patient**, not slow, and in v.10 he reassures them that **the Lord will come and bring judgment**. Then in v.11-15, he applies these truths for them to believe to their lives and how they should live. How should doctrine affect your life? Since these things are true, Peter asks, what sort of people ought you to be?

So let's look at how Peter's teaching helps us. His first point is that God is the Lord of time. With Him, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day. Now, this poor verse has been badly treated over the years – it isn't giving permission to any sort of funny business with the days in Genesis 1, and it isn't taking a position on the thousand-year millennial reign of Christ in Revelation.

Peter is quoting Psalm 90:4 to establish the fact that God is not a servant of time; time is a servant of God. This means that we can't call God slow or lazy or incapable based on how long He takes to do things. Since He is in charge of time, His perspective on time is what matters. God doesn't do what time tells Him to do; time is doing exactly what God tells it to do. We are not allowed to bind God by our timetables; God alone binds Himself according to His promises. So when the scoffers scoff, Peter replies, "Don't worry about God. He's got time."

Okay, Peter. Sure. God's in charge of time. But if He's in charge of time, why does He wait until the last minute? What's He waiting for? Why is He making us wait? In v. 9, Peter tells us that God takes time because **the Lord is patient**. He takes time because He doesn't want you to die in your sins! He holds back His judgment so that everyone has the opportunity to board the ark, to flee from Sodom, to escape to the mountains. Listen! The fact that God hasn't brought justice and judgment to the earth isn't because He *doesn't* care! It's because He *does*! Do you realize that? God waited for you! He didn't destroy you before you came to Christ, He held back so that you would have time to repent! As Peter says in v. 15, God's patience = your salvation! Next time you are tempted to complain about how long God takes to bring peace and justice to you and to the world, remember that! Patience equals salvation.

Peter's third statement in verse 10 is that **the Lord is coming in judgment**. There will be a point at which the door of the ark shuts, when all those whom God has chosen for salvation have reached the safety of repentance. And when that time comes, the day of the Lord will sneak up like a thief, and the heavens will collapse into thunder and the stars and planets will go supernova, and the earth and everything in it will be stripped bare.

Judgment day isn't the time when Jesus goes around poking scoffers in the eye for doubting him. Jesus won't come and ask you if there is anybody you'd like Him to smite while you watch and sip your tea. When judgment day comes, Jesus throws the entire universe into the refiner's fire to be melted down and remade. That day will be awesome and terrible, and you will be caught up in the middle of it. Are you ready for that day? Is your family? Are your friends ready? Many people aren't, which is why God is taking His time.

Since that's the fate of the world, Peter says, since it's all going to burn, "what sort of people ought you to be, in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming day of the Lord?" In asking the question, Peter answers it. You need to be *holy* people, *godly* people. You need to be people of expectant hope, not *forgetting* about the coming judgment, but *waiting* for it, and even *hastening* it. That's an amazing statement: you can hasten the day of the Lord. What you do can speed up the coming of the Apocalypse. What is Peter talking about?

Look back at v.9 – the reason for God's patience is that He wants everyone He's chosen to reach repentance. And listen to what Matthew 24:14: "This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." People reach repentance through the preaching of the gospel. God waits until the whole world has heard before bringing the end. So how can you hasten the coming day of the Lord? By preaching the gospel.

Now, I believe that both that what both Matthew 24 and 2 Peter 3 are talking about was God's judgment on Israel, which happened within the generation that Jesus spoke to, like Matthew 24:34 said. But I also believe that the coming of Jesus that these passages talk about was a preview of the great day of judgment when Christ returns in bodily form to deliver the kingdom to His Father. The lessons Peter is teaching here apply to the coming that we confess in the creeds, and so they apply to us today, even though the specific events they refer to already happened. Christ is still waiting for the nations to come to repentance, and still spreading the good news of the kingdom through the mouths of His people as we preach the gospel. God is still Lord of time. He is still patient. He is still coming again in judgment. And since that is true, we are still called to be holy people, godly people, people who believe His promises and wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

If God is Lord of time, then embrace His timetable. Embrace *waiting* for justice instead of seeking justice from some other Lord or getting it for yourself. If God's reason for delaying justice is patience, then don't complain about how long justice takes. Thank God that He showed patience toward you, so that you had time to reach repentance. If judgment is indeed coming, then stop sinning. Stop feeding your bitterness. Stop holding grudges. Stop being so greedy with your money. Stop being disciplined by fools on television and the internet. Stop snapping at your children from the couch instead of getting up one more time to discipline them in love. Stop whining and talking back to your mom and dad. If you really are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, then be diligent to scrub these spots and stains and blemishes out of your life.

If judgment isn't coming, go ahead and live like you won't ever be judged. But are you waiting for a righteous world? Then live a righteous life, and you will be found to have peace with God when the judge comes to melt the world. The world will dissolve, but you will have peace with God, through faith in the promise of Jesus Christ.

And if you want justice and righteousness to make the world new, then preach the gospel and hasten the Day of the Lord by leading others to repentance. And all the while, don't be anxious that justice hasn't come yet, or worry that the work that began at Christ's first advent isn't complete. Trust in His promise. Be patient, be holy, and be at peace.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

**Let us pray:** *"O God, you have given us the sure promise that Jesus will return to judge the earth. Make us ready, we pray, for His royal coming. Teach us to consider daily what sort of people we ought to be, that we might be found faithful servants waiting and working for our Master's return. Teach us to love and imitate your patience, so that all should reach repentance. According to your promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, where steadfast love and faithfulness meet, and where righteousness and peace kiss. May the righteousness and peace that we your people share now here in heaven come and renew the whole earth through Jesus Christ our Lord, **Amen.**"<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, D.1.4.21, pg. 437.