

2 Peter 3—the Day of the Lord and the Coming of Christ

2 Peter 3—the Day of the Lord and the Coming of Christ

The early church found great comfort in the promise of the second coming of Christ. In 2 Peter 3, we see that the false teachers of chapter 2 were trying to shoot holes in the church's hope, and it was causing turmoil in the churches. The doctrine of the second coming was very important to Peter because he knew that when Christians live in anticipation of Christ's promised return, they live with excitement and enthusiasm in their faith. The second coming is mentioned and expected in every N. T. book except Philemon and 3 John. In Titus 2:11-14, the second coming of Christ is the church's blessed hope, and in Romans 8 our utmost longing. It will be the great climax of salvation history.

It is a "good news—bad news" message in the sense it will be a wonderful time for believers, but an end to time for unbelievers. We will experience the joy of our resurrection bodies and live in the glory of God, but unbelievers stand condemned and so it will be the end of the world for them. In the first century context of Peter's readers, false teachers who loved the world and all that's in it were mocking true Christians for basing their life on this future blessed event. Because this world is all they have to put their hopes into, they don't want it to end. Without a doubt the adversary of God motivates these false teachers to minimize or discount the hope of Jesus coming back to right all wrongs. When Jesus taught about His second coming in Matthew 24, he followed with His purpose statement for revealing this truth---Be alert, be ready for it. After all, if I as a Christian believe that at any moment history could come to an end, and I would find myself standing before Christ to give an account, would it not affect the way I live now?

Five Parables of Matt. 24&25

Jesus, knowing how important it is to anticipate the second coming by being prepared and living godly lives, taught five parables after His teaching on the second coming in Matt. 24-25. These parables are all illustrations of the importance of living expectantly, being alert, and being ready for His arrival. In Matt. 24:40 we see a short story of two people in the field and two other people in the mill. In both cases one is taken off to judgment and one is left to go into the Kingdom. In Matt. 24:42-44, an owner of a house must be ready for a thief to prevent being robbed. In the same way always be ready for Christ to return. Then in v.45-51 Jesus told the parable of a wise servant who was put in charge of his master's house until he returned from a trip. Since he doesn't know when the master is coming back, he better be ready at all times else the master will catch him doing evil things. In Matt. 25:1-13, Jesus told a parable about ten virgins who were supposed to be ready to be in a wedding. Five of them were foolishly unprepared when the bridegroom unexpectedly arrived, but the other five were ready. When the groom was announced, the foolish five had no oil for their lamps, but the wise five were prepared. The prepared virgins were happily in the wedding, but the foolish ones missed it. The point is that those who follow Jesus have been told He is coming, and the wise and proper thing to do in the meantime is to serve Him and glorify Him always until He comes.

The fifth and most explicit parable, THE TALENTS, is also the longest and most well known of the five. A man who is a symbol for Jesus is a master of a rich estate, but he goes on a long journey. He must trust all his money and possessions to his three servants. The most capable servant is entrusted with five talents, the next servant with two talents, and the third is entrusted to invest one talent. In those days a talent was a weight of silver up to 80 pounds, so it was a significant stewardship. We understand Jesus to mean that He also is leaving His disciples for an undisclosed length of time, and until Jesus comes back we are expected to represent Him using all the gifts and abilities He has given us. When Jesus comes back we will be rewarded based on how we served Him while He was gone. Perhaps as an indication of how long Jesus will delay, we read in v.19 that "after a long time" the master came back and settled accounts with the servants. The first two servants did a good job and were rewarded appropriately, and they got a wonderful commendation of "Well done good and faithful servant" which proved their faithfulness; but the third servant proved that he did not truly know or understand the master. The third servant said that because the master was a hard unfair man who got his money dishonestly, the servant was scared and just buried the money. We perceive immediately that this man is wrong about everything! The master was very gracious in his rewards, and he was the true owner of everything and had a right to the servant's faithfulness. Although this is a fictitious story told to make a point, it seems that the third servant is proven to be an unbeliever because he doesn't know or understand the master, and received a severe reprimand and judgment. Regardless, we see the contrast between those who make good use of God's stewardship and those that don't.

2 Peter 3:1-7, You Know the Truth, Don't Forget

In 2 Peter 3:1-2, Peter repeats that he is writing again to them to “stir them up” with a reminder of the truth they have been taught many times. Initially the O. T. prophets had taught it, then Jesus taught it, and now the Apostles were teaching it to them. Peter had already told them in chapter 1:12-13 that he was reminding them of the truth in order to stir them up so they wouldn’t forget. Why was Peter worried they would forget so easily? He knew from personal experience that when it comes to spiritual truth, forgetting is endemic to the human race. Jesus explained it well in the parable of the soils in Matt. 13:22 that the Word of God gets choked out because of the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the pursuit of pleasure.

The false teachers are likened to mockers who deny Christ’s coming using a naturalistic argument. The world is very good at making fun of us, ridiculing believers, and intimidating us. They say that naturalistic laws have always governed the world, so nothing changes and there will be no intervention by God. We live in a closed system where the naturalistic laws that have determined the past control the present as well. QUESTION—Why are they so vindictive with their mocking? I can think of at least four reasons: 1. If Jesus returns then the resurrection was true, and 2. It means retribution and accountability to unbelievers, 3. Christ will set up His Kingdom and they won’t be in it, and 4. Judgment will reveal all their evil secrets.

2 Peter 3:5-9, Peter’s Counter Argument

In 2 Peter 3:5-9, the author gave a counter argument against the false teachers by referring to Scripture, history, eternity, and the character of God. In verse 5 Peter brought up two events in the creation account of Genesis that God spoke our atmosphere into existence and God spoke again and the land was created. Then in the time of Noah, God destroyed the world with water. The point is that the mockers with their self induced blindness, discount the events of history that God is responsible for causing. If God already intervened in history by bringing judgment by flooding, why is it hard to believe He will do so again? The fact is that the prophets of the Old Testament and the Apostles of the New Testament have consistently predicted that God will destroy the present atmosphere and the present earth by fire rather than water. The argument from eternity is that God’s perspective on time is way different than man’s view. The church age we now live in has been short to God since He has an eternal perspective.

In 2 Peter 3:9, the author uses the argument based on the character of God. It is actually God’s loving patience that is causing the delay in the time of Christ’s return. God is patiently waiting, giving all who will come to Christ time to come. The delay is actually allowing more people time to come to salvation in Christ. Today, skeptics criticize God for allowing evil to continue, but they don’t realize that when Christ comes He will bring the righteous judgment on the earth and destroy it. Therefore, it is actually merciful of God to wait and give sinners every opportunity. God desires that everyone have freedom to believe or disbelieve the gospel.

The Day of the Lord

Peter’s third argument in v.10 is the assurance of divine judgment through the miraculous intervention of God to destroy the fallen world. Most of the Old Testament prophets spoke clearly of “The Day of the Lord” which would be a sudden unexpected cataclysmic day of judgment upon the earth. Jesus also predicted this in Matthew 24, as did both Paul and John in their epistles. Now in 2 Peter 3:10, we read that “the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.” The good news is that Jesus will set up His Kingdom in which only righteousness will dwell, and all who are His will live in His glory forever.

APPLICATION-Peter gives us the obvious application in 2 Peter 3:11-18. Since we who believe know that all this is coming, we should respond now by living “spotless and blameless” lives. Regard your remaining time as an opportunity to save others, serve the church, and grow spiritually.

CHARLIE TAYLOR

Lesson 10 Questions:

Lesson 10 Podcast: [podcast]