**Lesson 5:** 2 Peter 3:1–13

**Hook**

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**Main Point: When Jesus comes back, the false teachers will be proven wrong, the wicked will be punished, and the righteous will be vindicated.**

American culture simply *hates* to wait. When flights are canceled or even delayed, especially during the holidays, we get really upset and complain nonstop. When phone calls are dropped or a Wi-Fi connection is lost, we throw a fit. When we have to stand in line for basically anything, we can’t stand it. We seem to forget that, thanks to technological advances, we do less waiting than ever before. We can fly thousands of miles in a few short hours, communicate with people on the other side of the world instantly, and microwave in minutes meals that used to take the whole day to cook. Now, instead of having to save up to purchase things, we can purchase right away with credit cards. Waiting is almost a foreign concept to us.[[1]](#endnote-1) But according to Scripture, waiting is key. We are currently in a time of waiting, waiting for the Son of God to return.

**Q: How are you spending this time of waiting? Are you spending it wisely?**

**Q: What examples of waiting do we see in the Bible?**

**Book**

**Main Point: When Jesus comes back, the false teachers will be proven wrong, the wicked will be punished, and the righteous will be vindicated.**

**Text Summary:**  Peter returns to his main argument – that Jesus is coming back, just as He and the prophets of the Old Testament promised. The false teachers doubt His coming because they don’t understand God’s concept of time. God is waiting as long as He can before the Day of Judgment to save as many people as He can. But one day, He will fulfill His promise of the Day of Judgment when the righteous will be vindicated, and the wicked will be destroyed. But no one knows the day or time. He will come like a thief in the night.

**2 Peter 3:1–4 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** We need to remind ourselves of the truth so we can recognize false teaching.

**Q: Why would Peter refer to the false teachers as scoffers (or mockers)?**

**Q: Why is it important to remind each other of the truth of the Gospel?**

This is Peter’s second letter to the Church in Asia Minor. In his first letter, he talked extensively about keeping their hope in the midst of persecution, reminding them that no matter what was going on in their lives, they could hope in the promise of their eternal inheritance in the kingdom of God. Even though the focus of this letter is different – more on false teaching than persecution – the concepts are related. In both situations, the people had to rely on their hope in God’s promises. The only way they could keep the faith through persecution and false teaching was by remembering and clinging to God’s promises (3:1).

The biggest lie the false teachers were spreading was that Jesus wasn’t really coming back to judge the world. In chapter 1, Peter gave two reasons we can be confident that Jesus is returning in glory at the Second Coming to judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous: the transfiguration (1:16–18) and the prophecies of the Old Testament (1:19–21). Here, he repeats his arguments in more detail.

Peter says his desire is to “stir up their sincere minds” (3:1). A more literal translation of that word would be to wake them up out of sleep. It’s as if Peter is saying, “Wake up, guys! This is important!” As believers, we can’t just float along in our spiritual lives. We need to be awake, alert, on guard. We are in a spiritual battle with the forces of darkness every day. Satan is a liar and a sneaky one at that. Peter reminds them of God’s promises in order to wake them up to “sincere minds” – minds that are pure, focused on holy thoughts. Remember, the battlefield is in our minds. If we don’t keep our minds awake and alert and focused on what is good and lovely (Philippians 4:8), the Enemy will find his way in.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The way to keep our minds awake and alert is to remember. Remembering is a central theme in Scripture. God knows how easily we forget, how easily we are distracted. He encourages His people to remember what He has done and to tell their children about it (Deuteronomy 4:9). David said the reason the Israelites rebelled in the wilderness was that they “did not remember His power” (Psalm 78:40–43). Psalm 107 tells the story of an Israel who cried out to the Lord when things were hard, and He rescued the people. But once things settled down, they forgot about Him until things became difficult again. This happened over and over, generation after generation. Peter encouraged the people to remember the Scriptures – both what Jesus said and what the Old Testament prophets said. The best way to fight the spiritual warfare of false teaching is to remember the truth.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Peter believed in the value of repetition. He knew he had to keep reminding them of the same truths again and again, and he was willing to keep doing it until his death (1:13). Much of the teaching and preaching in the Church wasn’t giving people new information, but reminding them of what they already knew. One of the biggest temptations of false teaching is that it can sound new or different while the Gospel may seem like “old news.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

These false teachers weren’t just teaching the wrong things; they were scoffers or mockers. The use of the word *scoffers* harkens back to those who mocked Jesus on the Cross. These false teachers mocked the teaching that Jesus was coming back to judge the living and the dead. Because it hadn’t happened yet (at this point, a little more than 60 years after His death), they said it must not be true. Though they were part of their church and claimed to be believers, their mocking meant they really despised the things of God. Peter considered their teaching to be blasphemy against the truth and considered them to be even worse than atheists who mock Christ, because they claimed to do so in the name of God.[[5]](#endnote-5)

This mocking of the Second Coming was how the false teachers justified their sinful behavior, which Peter discusses in chapter 2 and mentions again here (3:3). If Jesus were not coming back to judge, they could live however they wanted. Their sinful behavior led them to develop bad doctrine. As many false teachers do today, they twisted Christian doctrine to justify the way they wanted to live. It may sound repetitious, but Peter believed in repetition because the way we can recognize false teaching is by comparing it to the unchanging truth of the Word of God.

**Q: How have you seen people twist the truth of the Word of God to justify their sinful behavior? Don’t name names, just discuss the situation/issue.**

**Q: If we always need to remind each other and repeat the truth to each other, what does that say about whether we can ever be “done” studying the Bible?**

**Q: Why is it hard to keep your mind awake, alert, and focused on the things of Christ? Why is it easy to fall prey to false teaching?**

**2 Peter 3:5–8 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** We need to recognize that God’s timing is different than ours.

**Q: How does God’s eternal nature, that His sense of time is different from ours, affect the way you view His answering your prayers or keeping His promises?**

Peter’s answer to these false teachers is that they don’t understand God’s timing. God is eternal. He is outside of human linear time, so to God “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day” (3:8). That isn’t a mathematical equation. It doesn’t mean that one day in human time equals 1,000 years of God’s time. It’s a metaphor. In the ancient world, “a thousand years” was a symbolic number meaning a really long, *indefinite* period of time. Peter wasn’t giving them a timeline for Christ’s return; he was sharing a deep theological truth – God’s calendar is nothing like ours. Our entire lifetime is but a mere vapor to Him (James 4:14). So, the 60 years they had been waiting was nothing.[[6]](#endnote-6)

This sentence alludes to a similar line in Psalm 90 – “For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past or as a watch in the night” (Psalm 90:4). Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses that centers on the destruction that awaits those who give themselves over to sin (Psalm 90:7–9) and includes a prayer for God to “come back to us” (Psalm 90:13) – the same things Peter was addressing with these false teachers. In their culture, faithful Jews and even Gentile Christians would have had the Psalms memorized, so with this one line the entire Psalm would have come to their minds. Peter was pointing out that Scripture has always taught the truths he was reminding them of:

* Those who give themselves over to sin will be judged.
* Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.

Peter was reiterating, repeating, and reminding them of the truth of the Gospel in every possible way.

Like the other New Testament writers, Peter referred to “the last days” as if he were living in them, because he lived expectantly, believing that God would fulfill His promises. Theologically “the last days” are the entire Church Age – from Christ’s First Coming to His Second. So we, too, are living in “the last days,” even if Christ’s Second Coming is still a thousand years off, because we are in the final act of God’s story of salvation, the last chapter (1 Corinthians 10:11).[[7]](#endnote-7)

God’s timing is different from ours. Even though 2,000 years have passed since Christ promised He would be coming back “soon,” it has only been like a couple of days to God. The Lord isn’t being “slow” about fulfilling His promises. He is being patient, waiting for as many people to repent as possible before He returns to judge the world (3:9). British theologian and author N. T. Wright wrote that “what appears to us in our impatient moments as God’s delay is in fact God’s moment of fresh vocation.”[[8]](#endnote-8) Remember when Jesus waited to go see Lazarus, and he died before Jesus got there? Jesus *intentionally* waited so the power of God would be displayed when He raised Lazarus from the dead. We may not understand God’s timing or why He waits, but we can trust that if He does, it is because more good will be done by His waiting.

Peter reminded them that, although it seemed like a long time, there was also a long time between the creation of the world and the flood – the first time God judged the whole earth (3:5–6). Scholars debate the exact timing of these ancient events, but if you take a literal approach, based on the genealogies in the Bible, the flood happened about 1,650 years after creation.[[9]](#endnote-9) It was even longer than that – about 4,000 years – between the time God first promised a Messiah to Adam and Eve in the Garden and the time Jesus came. God’s idea of “soon” or “a long time” is radically different from ours. The point here is about patience. God will do the exact right thing in the exact right timing; we just need to trust in His goodness.[[10]](#endnote-10)

**Q: Why is it hard to be patient when we are waiting on God’s answers to our prayers?**

**Q: Why can we trust God to do the right thing in His perfect timing?**

**2 Peter 3:9–13 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** We need to be ready for Christ’s return by sharing the Gospel urgently.

**Q: Why is God waiting to send Jesus back to judge the earth?**

**Q: Why do you think God doesn’t want anyone to know when Jesus will return?**

God is not being *slow*; He’s being patient. He’s not *delayed*; He’s waiting as long as He can to save as many people as He can. Agreeing with what Paul told Timothy (1 Timothy 2:4), Peter wrote that God desires that all people would be saved. As God said through Ezekiel, “Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked … and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23). God does not wish that anyone should perish, but that all would turn and repent. This verse does not support universalism. It *doesn’t* say, “God doesn’t want anyone to perish, so He’s just going to let everyone into heaven!” It says God wants everyone to *repent*.

Peter makes it clear that hell is real. On the Day of Judgment, the ungodly will be destroyed (3:7), the current heaven and earth will pass away (3:10), and everyone’s deeds will be exposed (3:10). Peter said God *wants* everyone to be saved, but He did not say that hell isn’t real or that everyone will go to heaven. That’s the kind of thing the false teachers were preaching. God doesn’t want anyone to perish, but in order not to perish, they must repent (3:9). *Repent* means “to turn around,” “to go in the opposite direction.” The image is that all of the wicked are walking straight toward those fires of judgment, and God is calling to them, “Stop! Turn around, come back to Me! Come this way, to life!” God desires that they be saved. The Bible even says He does everything in His power to pursue His lost children (Luke 15). He is calling them, but they have to listen to His voice and turn around themselves. They have to repent, or they will walk right into the very real fire of judgment.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Peter agreed with all the other New Testament writers that the Second Coming would come as a surprise, like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Revelation 16:15). Therefore, Peter asked, how should you respond? Live lives of holiness and godliness (3:11). Jesus Himself said no one knows the day or time He will return. But He promised that He will return. Our goal shouldn’t be to try to calculate the exact date and time but to be ready for that day whenever it may come (Matthew 24:36–44). As Paul described it, to present ourselves to Christ as a pure Bride, ready for the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (2 Corinthians 11:2), not based on our own righteousness, but in Christ’s (Ephesians 5:27). Believers do not have to fear the Day of Judgment. We can have confidence in our salvation.

In the meantime, as we wait, we are to share the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In the beginning of Acts, just before Jesus ascended, the disciples asked Him if this were the time He would take the throne. Jesus answered that it was not for them to know God’s timeline, but to be His witnesses. If God is being patient in sending Jesus back in order to save more people (3:9), then that is our charge, too. As Jude described it, to snatch as many people as we can out of the fire (Jude 1:23). We don’t know when Jesus is coming back. It may be a thousand years from now *or it may be tomorrow*. Now is the time to tell people about Jesus! Don’t wait. Peter was communicating both a sense of trust in God’s timing and a sense of urgency to share the Gospel with as many people as possible as quickly as possible before Jesus returns. Peter, Jesus, Paul, and John would all agree – don’t worry about when Jesus is coming back; just be ready and get as many other people ready as possible.

**Q: What obstacles get in the way of us having a sense of urgency when it comes to sharing the Gospel?**

**Q: What does it say about God that He desires that all people would repent and be saved?**

**Took**

**Main Point: When Jesus comes back, the false teachers will be proven wrong, the wicked will be punished, and the righteous will be vindicated.**

Many people never even think about one day giving an account of their life to God. They are like the fisherman in the North Pacific. While at sea with his fishing fleet, he was contacted by a woman from the IRS who had finally tracked him down to inform him that he was delinquent in paying his taxes. Over the phone, he taunted her, saying “Ha! Ha! Come and get me!” He was confident that even the IRS couldn’t get the money he owed from him, and so he had nothing to fear. He scoffed at the IRS the way many people scoff at God.[[12]](#endnote-12) People you come into contact with may be like this man, thinking there is nothing to fear and that they will never be held accountable for their sins. This should motivate us to share the Gospel with as many people as we can.

**Q: Can you think of people who scoff at God? They may not openly shake their fists at Him, but they live as if they will never stand before God to give an account of their lives.**

**Q: What are ways that you can reach those people by leading them to consider the consequences of their life choices?**

**CHALLENGES**

**THINK: *Do I have a sense of urgency in sharing the Gospel?*** If hell is real, and people I know and love may go there if they don’t repent, and Jesus could come back at any time, why am I not doing more to tell people about Jesus? How can I do more? How can I communicate my concern for my friends and family as it is intended – out of love, not judgment? Is there anything else I can do to convince them that Judgment Day and hell are real?

**PRAY: *For unbelievers –*** That they will repent and be saved. That their hearts will be softened to the Gospel and that the Holy Spirit will work in their lives. That God will bring people into their lives who can share the Gospel with them in a way that they will really hear it and accept it.

***For yourself –*** That the Spirit will give you the words to say and the boldness to share the Gospel with your friends and family. That you will have a sense of urgency about sharing the Gospel if you don’t already. That God will give you wisdom and discernment to know how and when to share the Gospel in a winsome way.

**ACT: *Be a witness –*** This week, find at least one way you can share your story with someone who doesn’t know Jesus. It might be in a small way, just sharing a bit of the hope you have or telling someone how Jesus has brought you joy or peace. Or it might be laying out your full testimony and an explanation of the Gospel with people you have known for a while. Keep your eyes and ears open for any opportunity to share the Gospel.

1. Bob Deffinbaugh, “Scoffers, the Second Coming, and Scripture (2 Peter 3:1-13)” *Standing on the Promises-A Study of 2 Peter*, Dec 12, 2019 - <https://bible.org/seriespage/9-scoffers-second-coming-and-scripture-2-peter-31-13> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. John MacArthur, *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Grant R. Osborne, M. Robert Mullholland, Jr., *James, 1–2 Peter, Jude Revelation, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The New Daily Study Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Grant R. Osborne, M. Robert Mullholland, Jr., *James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Grant R. Osborne, M. Robert Mullholland, Jr., *James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter, NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 155–6. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. N. T. Wright, *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John, and Judah* (London, UK: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. David Wright, “Timeline for the Flood” *Answers in Genesis*, Mar 9, 2012 - <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-timeline/timeline-for-the-flood/> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. N. T. Wright, *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John, and Judah* (London, UK: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Gene Green, *Jude and 2 Peter, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Steven J. Cole, “Lesson 11: Mockers and the Coming Judgment (2 Peter 3:1-7)” *2 Peter*, Dec 12, 2019 - <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-11-mockers-and-coming-judgment-2-peter-31-7> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)