

Really?
Text: 2 Peter 3:1–9
Trinity Presbyterian Church
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In the 2 letters the Apostle Peter wrote to Christians in the first decades after Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension he has addressed persecution and trouble from **outside** the church – the culture persecuting Christians because they are Christians – and persecution and trouble from **inside** the church – by false teachers. These 2 sources of persecution are still very much a part of life for Jesus-followers today. Some of the persecution is very visible – physically and financially dangerous. Some of this persecution is more subtle affecting our understanding of God and His Word, causing doubt, and disrupting fellowship within the body.

In this last chapter of Peter's second letter, Peter recaps what he has been teaching and points to a certain future helping us to think about how we should live in light of what we know and in light of Jesus' soon return.

Peter writes with a sense of urgency, so we should listen with that same sense that these are important words God has caused to be written and preserved for US today. In light of this urgency and the authority of God's Word, please stand as I read 2 Peter 3:1-9, second Peter chapter 3 verses 1 through 9.

Waiting can be difficult. A much anticipated event seems to take forever to arrive. Think of birthdays or Christmas when you were young. Or the arrival of your first child or any other long-awaited event. The certainty of the event makes the anticipation that much sweeter for you know for sure the big day is coming. However, if that event has only been promised, the certainty of it depends upon your trust in the one making the promise.

I remember when my family was living in St. Louis. I must have been 9 or 10 at the time. Very much interested in cars. My dad promised to take me to a car manufacturing plant in the area. Boy! Did I daydream about that visit! Seeing the whole process of cars being assembled and coming off the line all shiny and new. I wasn't sure if that visit would happen that week or the next, but I knew it would happen soon because my Dad had promised. Days stretched into weeks and weeks into months and little by little certainty of the promise began to fade.

At first I was impatient. Then disappointed. We moved away from St. Louis to a small town in Kansas and the anticipation pretty much dissolved. To this day, I have never visited a car assembly plant. I'm not bitter. I'm not angry at my Dad. I know life gets busy and things happen. But that sense of faded anticipation has lingered.

We can experience some of that as Christians as we anticipate Jesus' return. How we long to be free of life's disappointments and trials, to be in the presence of our Savior, welcomed, loved, accepted, and whole! But as we wait and long for and anticipate that great and awesome day of the Lord, the world around us whispers, "Really? Where is this savior? You've been dreaming about this for 2000 years. Isn't it about time to get real and just get on with doing what you want to do and forget this nonsense?"

BUT – unlike promises made by fallible people, God's promises are completely dependable. God doesn't change. What He says, He does. It may not be in the time frame we imagine or want, but He is sovereign and works all things out on His own schedule and in His own way. In fact, 2 Corinthians 1 verse 20 assures us that all God's

promises are YES and AMEN in Jesus or put another way, “Jesus says yes to all of God’s many promises. It is through Jesus that we say, “Let it be so,” when we give thanks to God.” (NLT)

Since Jesus is the fulfilment of all God’s promises, believers must wait with certainty and eager anticipation that colors our whole outlook on life. (v.9)

We see this implicitly in verse 9 – “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.” Jesus is Lord. We have already seen in 2 Corinthians that Jesus is the fulfilment of God’s promises. Hebrews 10:23 challenges us to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” Habakkuk 2:3 assures us “For still the vision awaits its appointed time: it hastens to the end – it will not lie. If it seem slow, **wait for it**; it will surely come; it will not delay.”

So what challenges and encouragements might we face as we wait? Let’s see how Peter encourages believers then – and even us today. Our 3 R’s for today are **Recall, Recognize, and Reconcile**.

In the first 2 verses of this chapter, Peter reminds us of **his reason for writing** – to **stir up a sincere mind that we should recall**. To stir up is to arouse, awaken, agitate! How easily we slip off into slumbering! Linda can attest to my propensity to slip off into slumbering when she’s watching a movie or TV show! Notice, I said SHE’s watching. I’m slumbering!

Are we really any different in our Christian walk? We set ourselves goals of reading through the Bible, or talking with someone about salvation, or moving beyond a certain sin. We may start out with good intentions, but it isn’t long until life happens and we begin to put it off to a more convenient time or we simply forget. And we slip back into a slumbering state of simply getting from one day to the next. Peter wants us AWAKE. The Holy Spirit is LIVING within us and would have us be ALIVE and eager to follow Jesus more nearly, loving Him more dearly.

Peter writes to stir us up to a sincere mind. The Greek word for sincere has within it a reference to the sun implying that our minds, our hearts are to be examined in the bright light of day, all within our heart and mind exposed through brightly lit transparency. How we struggle against this! Do you really want all that is within your heart and mind exposed to the bright light of day? God knows what is in our hearts. Psalm 139 assures us that God knows our thoughts and ways, even our words before we say them.

This is not meant as intimidation, but as **comfort**. Haven’t you longed for a friend with whom you can be completely honest – and know that you will still be loved and respected? God is that “friend.” Far closer than a friend. He is your Creator. The Lover of your soul. He loves you so much that He sent His only Son to be your savior, to pay the price of your sin so you wouldn’t have to.

Are you willing to open your whole life to the searchlight of God’s piercing truth? To submit to the authority of His Word, His Spirit? To surrender all that’s important to you to His will and authority? How freeing to live within the framework of God’s all-wise plans and purposes! To know that you can stand confidently before God Almighty and be accepted, loved as His own dear child! Washed clean by Jesus’ cleansing blood. No longer under the weight of

guilt, shame and pervasive sin. Wow! THAT is freedom. That is a sincere mind – filled with the light of God’s Word and truth.

Peter wants to agitate us, stir us up, to a sincere mind, lit up by the blazing light of God’s Word. And for what purpose? That we might remember the predictions of the prophets and the commandments of our Savior. What specific predictions and commandments?

Remember that Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises. Many, if not most, of the prophecies made in the Old Testament had to do with the Messiah whose mission is to save the lost, to build a Kingdom of His chosen people. At the end of the first chapter of this second letter of Peter’s he talks about prophecy being made more certain. In OT times, the prophets saw visions and had dreams that allowed them to make God-directed predictions and promises about the future.

Peter had the privilege of seeing Jesus with his own eyes. Jesus teaching and healing and releasing captives. Jesus crucified – and RISEN. Jesus ascending into heaven where even now he is interceding for us. Peter’s eye-witness account of all this confirms the OT prophets, making their prophecies more certain by way of his first-person accounts of these prophecies fulfilled.

These are not fairy tales or interesting ancient texts. This, God’s Word, is TRUTH. And Jesus is the focus and manifestation of that truth. In John 14:6 Jesus tells us that he is the way, the truth and the life. These words are of eternal significance for you, for me. We must pay attention – be stirred up!

And the commandments to which Peter refers in verse 2? Again, look back to chapter 1, verse 10 where we are admonished to be diligent in confirming our calling and election by practicing “these” qualities. Which qualities? Scroll back now to verses 5 to 7 in the first chapter of this letter. “Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness.” In other words, becoming more like Christ – from the inside out. Transformed. Stirred up to a sincere mind.

What might need to change in your life to stir you up to a sincere mind? Simply put, pursuing the means of grace will do that. Means of grace? What’s that? The means of grace are the ways that God’s grace is made real in our lives. We grow in our understanding and experience of grace as we participate in worship with other believers, take part in the **sacraments** (baptism and communion), read, think about, and memorize God’s **Word**, and invest significant time in **prayer**.

As you grow in grace, you will grow in your hunger for God and His Word, for fellowship with His people. As you feed the hunger for His Word, His Word will begin to shape your use of time, your hopes, your desires and relationships.

In the first two verses of chapter 3 Peter reminds us of **his reason for writing** – to **stir up a sincere mind that we should recall**. We must remember that Jesus, the fulfillment of all God’s promises, our Savior by God’s design and purpose by dying for us, is coming again to make perfect his Kingdom, to finalize all his promises of glorified bodies, eternal life, and the new heaven and earth. In light of all that, we must live lives that honor him and bring him glory.

And as we live differently from the world around us, we will be hated and ridiculed. Our second challenge found in verses 3 through 7 is for us to **recognize** that there will be scoffers, to recognize that their oppression of Jesus-followers and resistance to God's truth has been predicted – and to keep our eyes and hopes focused on Jesus – our faithful, unchanging, completely dependable Savior and God.

The Holy Spirit speaking through Peter assures us that the same Word that brought creation into being and judged the world in Noah's day is the Word that promises Christ's return and will judge the world again – with fire.

When God promises something, it is as good as done. What is Christ's return about? When Jesus comes again, all the dead will be brought to life again – in the flesh. Those who have refused to believe and obey Jesus will be sent to eternal punishment. Those who have responded to God's gospel call, confessed their sin and need for a savior and trusted Jesus alone for cleansing, forgiveness and life will inherit new glorified bodies and live and reign with Jesus in the new heaven and earth. What glory! What freedom! What joy! Promised by God and SURE to come about in his own time and way.

Scoffers are predicted, prophesied and promised. They WILL come. And their motivation is their own lusts. They will abuse us in many ways because we are followers of Jesus. They will taunt us with disbelieving cries of "Really? You believe that stuff?" We must grow deeper in our trust in Christ's authority and faithfulness. Remember: Jesus is not slow; He is sovereign. Just as a lighthouse stands unmoved in the storm — Christ is our unshakable truth amid the waves of doubt and opposition.

As Peter has challenged us to **recall** God's prophecies and promises and to **recognize** the inevitability of scoffers, so now in verses 8 and 9 he encourages us to be **reconciled** to God's timing and God's sovereign plans and purposes, which the scoffers willfully forget.

How we want things to happen on our own self-defined timeline! We want what we want, when we want it and how we want it. But life is seldom really like that. It's about time, we submit to the fact that God is the **One** who is sovereign over all things. He knows all perfectly. His perfect administration of the world and of history is infinitely superior to anything we could do. When we try to make things happen on our terms and in our time-frame, we are excellent at making a mess of things. Not so, God.

When Peter says that God is "not wishing that ANY should perish, but that ALL should reach repentance," he is not talking about the possibility of God's plans being foiled or universal salvation. He is talking about God's plans and purposes and the promise of Jesus' return – in the context of scoffers who want to justify their own lustful living and undermine the faith of Christians. Peter's audience is believers. God does not wish ANY believer to perish but ALL he has chosen to repent and be saved. Have YOU repented? TODAY is the day of salvation. Today is the acceptable hour. (2 Cor. 6:2)

What appears to us to be delay on God's part is an expression of His mercy. Jesus times His return so that the whole number of the elect will come to repentance through His saving work on the cross. We must see his timing not as neglect, but as grace. And in response to his grace, we must use the time to share the gospel and live in readiness. Jesus has commanded and commissioned us in Matthew 28 to GO and make disciples.

Note the command is to make disciples. The Holy Spirit makes the converts, bringing people into Jesus' Kingdom. Our task is to teach and guide, encourage godly living, pray with and for all those he brings across our path. **ALL** of us are to do this, not just ordained pastors and evangelists. **ALL** of us!

In Peter's first letter, chapter 3, verse 15, he encourages us to be ready at **all** times to give a reason for the hope that is within us. When we are living in a way that honors God, people will notice – and they may ask. And we must be ready. That doesn't mean we must be ready to give a sermon or a theological treatise, but we must be ready to tell them that whatever they see in us that is commendable is entirely the work of Jesus in our lives giving us joy for today and hope for eternity. And they can have that same hope and joy simply by trusting Jesus alone, confessing their sin, receiving Jesus' forgiveness and resting in Him.

God's timing is always perfect. We may tell others about Jesus, pray for them for years, but seeing the fruit, the results may happen at a much different time or way than we imagined. But rest assured, the matter is in God's hands. Ours is to sow the seeds. God's work is to cause the seeds to germinate and grow. Ours is to obey in faith. God's work is to bring the increase as Paul reminds the Corinthians in First Corinthians 3:6.

As you farmers know – but some of the rest of us might not – is that when you delay to plant your crops, it is not from laziness or carelessness. It is from careful planning with an eye on the weather, the calendar, soil moisture and temperature, and the crop itself. It is according to plan and purpose. Just as God's timing is according to **his** plan and purpose – and is always perfect.

I don't know about you, but I am much encouraged by this. God is infinitely more faithful in his plans and purposes – and timing – than I am in telling or praying. May he help us all to sow the seeds of his truth often and prodigiously, trusting him to bring the increase.

Conclusion:

God's patience is not weakness; it is love. Christ's promise is not uncertain; it is sure. The delay is not a pause in His plan; it is part of His plan.

Recall: Christ will return — His Word guarantees it.

Recognize: there will be scoffers – those who look askance at our belief and taunt us with “Really?” We must live holy, hopeful, and mission-minded lives that will attract even the scoffers to consider the wonderful news of new and eternal life through trusting Jesus.

Reconcile: We must be reconciled to God's timing, sharing the gospel urgently, knowing that every day of delay is a day of grace for someone's salvation. God's timing is not the same as ours. Since we don't know when Jesus will return, we must redeem the days he has given us and use them to his honor always being ready to give a reason for the hope within us.

And as we practice those 3 R's, may the Holy Spirit cause us to REPENT and use us to lead others to repentance and saving faith in Jesus Christ.