

9.11.22 While We're Waiting for the Return of Christ 2 Peter 3:8-15a
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I want to begin today by talking about waiting. Like Inigo Montoya in the movie *The Princess Bride*, many of us hate waiting. People my age and older, often associate waiting with medical appointments or going to see a doctor. What I'm about to say shouldn't be taken as a criticism of the medical profession, it's merely an observation. First of all, you know you're in trouble when you go somewhere, like the doctor's office, and there's a waiting room. They don't call it "*the ready to see you room*," it's "*the waiting room*," so you better have your Bible, a book, some kind of e-reader, a cell phone, a crossword, a Sudoku; because you're likely to be waiting for a while. To make you feel better, at some places they move you to another room where you wait some more. If you've been to a medical appointment lately you may know what I mean. It can take two hours and you may spend less than twenty minutes with staff. This is the way it is, and we need to keep in mind doctors, nurses, and technicians (and we have plenty at BBC and I'm grateful for all of you) have it tough – there are so many demands, so many people to see, so much information to process, time is so tight, and every patient wants to feel important and not rushed when you're being seen and you're thankful when you're given that time. It's helpful for everyone to maintain some perspective and a sense of humor while waiting.

There are many situations in life that require waiting. In the late first century, early Christians found themselves waiting for the second coming of Christ. They were living in between the first appearance of Jesus and his return. Initially, they thought it was going to be soon, but years passed, the twelve apostles and the first generation of Jesus' followers were passing away. There were second and third generation Christians and folks were wondering, "*Why hasn't Jesus returned as he promised? What are we supposed to do while we're waiting?*" For Christians like us almost 2,000 years later, those questions are still relevant. Why hasn't Jesus returned as he promised? What are we supposed to do while we're waiting? Listen to how **2 Peter 3:8-15a** answers those questions: "*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. **The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any***"

to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, **what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,** because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, **where righteousness is at home.**

Therefore, beloved, **while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.”**

The first thing we notice in this passage from 2 Peter is the timelessness of God - God's sense of time is different than our own. The last 2,000 years are like a mere couple of days to an eternal God. Peter is reminding his hearers of **Psalm 90:4** which declares, *“For a thousand years in your sight, are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.”* Peter answers the question **Why hasn't Jesus returned by speaking of the tender love of God – because the Lord is patient, not wanting anyone to perish.** If Jesus had returned centuries ago, we might not have existed, so personally, I'm grateful he's waited. There should be no question in anybody's mind whether God wants as many people as possible to be saved. In addition to these words in 2 Peter 3, **First Timothy 2:3b-4** states, **“God our Savior... desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked as the prophet Ezekiel shared centuries before Christ (**Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11**), *“Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live. As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?”* This was part of the message that John the Baptist preached. Turn and live.

1 Peter 3:9 is the only place the word **repentance** is used in either of the letters that bear Peter's name. To repent means *"to change one's mind."* It's not "regret," which often means "being sorry I got caught." **Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of action.** If you change your mind about sin, you'll turn from it. If you change your mind about Jesus, you'll turn to Christ, trust him, and be saved. **Acts 20:21** says, "**Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ**" is God's recipe for salvation. Repentance is a gift from God (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25), and Peter says Christ hasn't returned because the Lord ***"is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance."***

So what are you to do while you're waiting for Jesus to return? Because you don't know the time of the Lord's return, you're to be ready at all times. This attitude ought to make a difference in your *personal behavior* (2 Peter 3:11). Our lives are to be marked by **holiness and godliness** as if Jesus might return today. **1 Peter 1:15–16** says, "*As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*" The word *holy* means "to separate," Israel was a "holy nation" because God called the Jewish people to be different than the people around them. Christians are also called and set apart for God. The word **godliness** describes a person whose life is devoted to pleasing God. It's the attitude of John the Baptist who said of Jesus, ***"He must increase, but I must decrease"*** (John 3:30).

Many New Testament passages teach that an eager expectancy of the Lord's return ought to **motivate us to live pure lives** (see Romans 13:11–14; 2 Corinthians 5:1–11; Philippians 3:17–21; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11; Titus 2:11–15; 1 John 2:28–3:3). 2 Peter says you can be ***"hastening the coming of the day of God,"*** by how you live your life as you're waiting. "Hasten" and "haste" aren't words we hear a lot anymore. At the birth of Jesus, the shepherds ***"came with haste"*** (Luke 2:16). Jesus told a man named Zacchaeus to ***"make haste and come down"*** from the tree he climbed and ***"he made haste and came down"*** (Luke 19:5–6). Paul ***"hasted... to be at Jerusalem"*** (Acts 20:16); and then the Lord told Paul to ***"make haste and get... out of Jerusalem"*** (Acts 22:18). Peter says you can hasten or speed up the coming of the day of God by how you live and hopefully that is motivating.

When it comes to waiting for the second coming of Jesus there are two extremes to avoid. One is the attitude that we're "locked into" God's plan in such a way that nothing we do will make any difference because whatever is going to happen is going to happen. Christians are not fatalists, nor are we limp, lifeless puppets on a string. The other extreme is to think that God can't get anything done unless we do it. Two illustrations from Old Testament help us understand the relationship between God's plans and our lives. God delivered Israel from Egypt and told the people He wanted them to go into the land of Canaan. But at Kadesh-Barnea all except Moses, Joshua, and Caleb rebelled against God and refused to enter the land (Numbers 13–14). Did God force them to go in? No. Instead, they wandered in the wilderness for the next forty years while the older generation died off. God adjusted the plan to the people's response. When Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh, his message was clear and brief: *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"* (Jonah 3:4) It was God's plan to destroy the wicked city, but when the people repented, from the king on down, God adjusted the plan and spared the city. Neither God nor God's principles changed, but the application of those principles changed. **God responds when people repent.**

Peter says twice in today's scripture that the things we may regard as most ancient and permanent - the earth we live on and all that we see, the heavens and the elements, will one day pass away. There is a day when the Lord will return or we will go to be with God, in either case, everything we know will be changed and transformed. We're waiting for a new heaven and a new earth that will be different than this one which is filled with so much violence, bloodshed, and selfishness because it will be ***"where righteousness is at home."***

There's a sense in which the entire world we live in is God's waiting room. Just like in a doctor's office we don't want to waste or squander precious time. If you're killing time today you're killing your future tomorrow. Peter says as you live in the waiting room of the world ***"strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation."*** You're more likely to be at peace if you're in relationship with God and you're striving each and every day to live as God's child. When I'm washing dishes, I try get rid of all the spots or blemishes. We all do this when we wash dishes or wash our hands. In the same way, repentance, holiness, and

godliness are not “one and done” kind of things that you do once or pursue one time in your life. Peter says what you do with dishes or your hands multiple times a day you’re also to do in your life – you want your life to be clean and pure without spot or blemish. Just like you use dishes every day and they have to be cleaned, so in your life, there are things you do that need to be cleaned up each day. Many places including schools, hospitals, stores, and churches have hand sanitizer so people can clean their hands. The Bible encourages us to have clean hands and clean hearts in a spiritual sense so that if Jesus returns he’ll be pleased and if you die before he comes again, you’ll not be ashamed to stand before him and you’ll be welcomed as a member of God’s family.

These verses of 2 Peter 3 teach us that we sit and wait in God's space and time. They remind us of the value of taking the long view and keeping the Lord's perspective on life and what is good, important, and lasting. As a community of faith, we wait for God's judgment and Christ's return not in fear but with great desire. We are a community waiting and yearning in faithfulness, striving to live at peace with God and one other, without spot or blemish so that we hasten and don't delay God's righteous will being done on earth as it is heaven.

Peter makes clear **the problem** you and I have is that sin separates us from God and the result of sin is death and eternal separation from God. Because the Lord *“is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance,”* God provides **the solution** to our problem which is the gift of God's Son Jesus, who came to teach us how to live as members of God's family, loving God, and other people, as Jesus modeled. Through his death on the cross we see the extent of God's love for us and God's desire to forgive us and be in relationship with us, to bridge the gap created by our sin and in raising Jesus from the dead, we see the power of God to deliver us from sin and death. The answer God is looking for to the problem of sin and the solution God offers in Jesus Christ is **a response of faith and obedience**. To believe that in Christ, God is lovingly offering you eternal, abundant, joyful life that begins now and extends into eternity. The only question is, have you responded in faith and accepted this gift? If not, what is preventing you from doing so? If you have, then you're called to share this gracious invitation with others because ***“God our Savior... desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”***

Blessing: *“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen”* 2 Peter 3:18

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. How good are you at waiting? Is there anything you do to help yourself make the most of time when you must wait?
2. What do 2 Peter 3, 1 Timothy 2, and Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11 say about why the Lord has not yet returned?
3. What does Peter say you should be doing while you wait for the return of Christ?
4. How would you answer Peter’s question, *“what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God?”*
5. What is your response to the idea that you can hasten or delay the coming of the day of God by how you live your life?
6. How does your relationship with Christ help you to be at peace?