

Finding Your Story in HIStory

What's Next?

2 Peter 3:3-18

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Introduction to the Text: As they say, "All good things must come to an end!" This year we have made it our goal to understand something of what God is doing in history. Today, at least for the moment, we draw this series to an end. Repeatedly, we have said something like this: God created us for relationship. We have more times than not chosen rebellion against that relationship instead of relationship. But, God has continued in history to pursue passionately that relationship with His most prized creation—humanity. In the last few weeks we have seen that love come to a culmination in the coming of Jesus to earth, the cross of Christ for our sins, and the resurrection as the exclamation point on what God is doing in history. Last week, we considered the doctrine of the church so as to see what we should be doing now. In the broad scope of history, there is yet one more major event that we must consider—the return of Christ. This is the next big event in history and as such will bring history on the earth to an appropriate conclusion.

Text: First, be aware of this: Scoffers will come in the last days to scoff, living according to their own lusts,⁴ saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? Ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have been since the beginning of creation."⁵ They willfully ignore this: Long ago the heavens and the earth were brought about from water and through water by the word of God.⁶ Through these waters the world of that time perished when it was flooded.⁷ But by the same word, the present heavens and earth are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

⁸ Dear friends, don't let this one thing escape you: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.⁹ The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

¹⁰ But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed.¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness¹² as you wait for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God. The heavens will be on fire and be dissolved because of it, and the elements will melt with the heat.¹³ But based on His promise, we wait for the new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell.

¹⁴ Therefore, dear friends, while you wait for these things, make every effort to be found at peace with Him without spot or blemish.¹⁵ Also, regard the patience of our Lord as an opportunity for salvation, just as our dear brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom given to him.¹⁶ He speaks about these things in all his letters in which there are some matters that are hard to understand. The untaught and unstable twist them to their own destruction, as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures.

¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard, so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stability.¹⁸ But 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.

Introduction: Now, I have been preaching long enough to know that you've got more questions about the return of Christ than I am going to give answers to you this morning. I've got a good reason for that. I don't know all the answers. And by the way, if you ever run across anybody who has got all the answers about the return of Christ they are fooling you. Regardless of how many degrees they have, how many times they have been to Israel, how many books they have written, or even if they have devoted their entire ministry to being a "Prophecy Expert," I'm convinced that if they say much more than Jesus is coming back at a day and hour we do not know, they are going beyond what the Bible says on the subject.

I heard about a student in a Seminary class who had just heard a lecture on all the theories about the return of Christ. He raised his hand and said, "Doc, I.A.K." The professor said, "What does I.A.K. mean?" The student said, "I am confused!" Of course, the professor said, "But confused doesn't start with a k." The student said, "That ought to give you an idea of how confused I am."

There are a lot of people today that are confused about the return of Christ. The biggest concern that I would have about some folks is that they do not even believe in the literal and imminent return of Christ. That was the concern of Peter as he addressed some unidentified Christians of his day regarding some, as he calls them, scoffers. Peter communicated the position of the scoffers in verses 3 and 4.

I want to give you the essence of this text today and then take just a few moments to "unpack" it for you.

***A person's conviction about the literal and imminent return of Jesus Christ
will be evident in that person's conduct.***

The Conviction Regarding the Return of Christ

In verse 4, Peter indicated the reasoning of the scoffers. Their scoffing at the return of Christ was based on two things:

- (1) Where is the promise? They used the delay of His coming to argue for the denial of His coming. If that were so only a few years removed (maybe 30 or so), where does that leave us today a scoffer might say today.
- (2) Others were saying, "Things just continue on as they have always been since creation." This is kind of the same view of the Deist—that person who believes that there is a God, but He has removed Himself from the ongoing affairs of the world.

Peter takes these two reasons and gives a compelling argument regarding the certainty of Jesus' return. He does so in reverse order from the two points made by the scoffers.

Where does our conviction come from?

- The eternal God who has been in control since the beginning is bringing the world to an appropriate conclusion. (5-7)
- What may seem like a delay to some is not necessarily a delay to an eternal God. (8)

- The God who is full of love and mercy has delayed His return in order to give more time for repentance. (9)
- We have the word of Jesus on the matter. (10)

So, to sum up our conviction on the return of Christ: We can be certain of His coming, but the Scriptures are not clear on the timing of His return.

If anything, we might even say that the Scripture is clear that the timing will be uncertain. Consider:

- Matthew 24:36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.
- Matthew 24:42 “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”
- Matthew 24:44 “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”
- Acts 1:7 “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.”

But that hasn’t kept us from having a fascination with trying to figure out when Jesus is going to return. Consider:

- Ignatius said in 110 A.D. “The last days are upon us. Weigh carefully the times.”
- Martin said in 375 A.D. “There is no doubt that the Antichrist has already been born. Firmly established in his early years, he will, after reaching maturity, achieve supreme power.”
- Martin Luther said, “We have reached the time of the white horse of the Apocalypse. This world will not last any longer ... than another hundred years.” (Martin Luther, 1538)
- In 1800, William Miller predicted the return of Christ in 1844. All over the Northeast, half a million Adventists awaited the end of the world on April 3, 1843. Journalists reportedly some disciples were on mountaintops, hoping for a head start to heaven. Others were in graveyards, planning to ascend in union with their departed loved ones.
- In the 1980s NASA engineer Edgar Wisenhut used his mathematical skills to determine that Jesus would return in 1988. He wrote a book entitled, “88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Take Place in 1988.” He was so certain the rapture would happen on September 10, 1988, that he said, “If I’m wrong, then the scripture is mistaken.” He was wrong, but there’s nothing wrong with the scripture.
- Then in 1992, Harold Camping wrote a book entitled “1994” in which he predicted Jesus would return in 1994. The next year, he wrote another book entitled, “Much More Evidence That 1994 Could Be the End of the World.” Wrong again. Then, you probably remember that just last year, Camping again predicted May 21, 2011. When that did not happen, he moved it to Oct. 21, 2011. I am thankful to report that Camping indicated just about a month ago that he had sinned in making those predictions and urged people to trust the Scriptures that say “No man knows.”¹

So, our conviction is that we can be certain of His coming, but the Scriptures are not clear on the timing of His return. So that Conviction leads to Conduct!

Our Conduct in Response to a Definite Conviction of the Return of Christ

¹ Material taken from various internet sources including a sermon by David Dykes, pastor of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas.

For most people who have a fascination with the subject of the end times, their fascination is based upon their curiosity to know stuff. For the writers of the New Testament, all exhortation about the return of Christ focused not on their curiosity, but rather on their conduct. Peter was clear that the conviction of the return of Christ would make a difference in our conduct. What is that difference? The rest of this chapter spells that out for us.

Purity (10-13)— Peter gives us several phrases: Notice words like holy conduct, godliness, and righteousness. Notice ideas like the stuff of this world no longer existing.

Peace (14)—When preparing the disciples for His death, Jesus comforted them with assurance of His returning. Paul, in addressing the Thessalonians about the return of Christ, instructed them to encourage one another with these words. For believers, the assurance of Christ's return should give us peace.

Passion for the lost (15)—Remember earlier when we spoke of the delay of Christ's return giving opportunity for repentance. The certainty of the return of Christ and the unpredictability of the timing of the return of Christ should challenge our evangelistic zeal. I preached a similar message some years ago at a meeting attended by lots of pastors and church leaders. When the meeting was over a lady said that she wanted to have a "word with me about my sermon." I've learned through the years that when somebody wants to have a word with you, "the word" is usually not good. Sure to my thoughts, she challenged me in regards to my seeming excitement about the return of Christ being any day. She said this and I hope I don't ever forget it, "I've been going to Asia for many years and there are so many people there who are lost, and they will go to Hell should Jesus return." You know, she's right. That's why we must let the certainty of His coming and the uncertainty of the timing challenge us to great evangelistic activity.

Praise (18)—Finally, the return of Christ ultimately leads us back to giving glory to Him—both now and forever. In his most recent book, Max Lucado, tells the story about Philippe Auguste, a king of France in antiquity. Before going out to battle, the king gathered his most noble knights and urged them to be strong in the battle. He placed his crown on the table and said, "To the most worthy." In that gesture, he pledged the crown to the most valiant warrior.

Upon the completion of the battle, one of the most noble warriors stepped quickly forward, took the crown, placed it on the head of the king, and said, "Thou, O king, art the most worthy."²

One of these days, brothers and sisters, we who are believers in Jesus, will stand before Him and gathered with the multitudes from every tribe and nation are going to declare:

Holy, holy, holy
Lord God, the Almighty
Who was, who is and who is now coming

You are worthy to receive
Glory and honor and power
Because You have created all things,

² Max Lucado, *God's Story, Your Story: When His Becomes Yours*, Zondervan, 2011, p. 158.

And because of Your will
They exist and were created (Rev. 4:8, 11)

Blessing and honor and glory and dominion
To the one seated on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever (Rev. 5:13)

Are you ready?