

DO NOT FORGET THIS ONE THING**2 PETER 3:8-14**

How many of you believe Jesus will come again? Do you ever think all that much about the Second Coming of Jesus? The Second Coming can provoke all sorts of interesting associations and reactions. I used to associate fear with the Second Coming of Jesus. When I was growing up, the Second Coming was presented to me in terrifying ways. I heard sermons about the mark of the beast from the book of Revelation. I was afraid I would be tortured by the Antichrist until I consented to having the number 666 stamped on my forehead or hand. Then, I'd be eternally damned as a result. I can still recall waking up from a nap when I was probably under the age of 10 and finding myself alone in the family home for some unknown reason. A wave of panic flowed through me. "Oh, no, Jesus came back and I've been left behind!" I still associate disagreement with the Second Coming of Jesus. There's more disagreement among Bible-believing Christians about what will happen before, during, and after the Second Coming than any other biblical doctrine or teaching I know of. Maybe confusion is the biggest association when it comes to Jesus' return. Dr. George Sweeting, former President of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, tells of the day he noticed an unusual combination of bumper stickers on the car of a man who was visiting the school. The confusing message conveyed by the two stickers prompted Dr. Sweeting to suggest to the unsuspecting visitor that he might want to remove one of them. One bumper sticker read: JESUS IS COMING! and the other read: ESCAPE TO WISCONSIN. Confusing!

I believe with all my heart Jesus is coming again. The Second Coming of Jesus is plainly taught throughout the New Testament. Be that as it may, one reason there's so much confusion about the Second Coming is because we often ask the wrong questions about it. Often we hear people ask, "Is this the last generation before Jesus returns? Does the book of Revelation predict a nuclear holocaust? Is the Antichrist alive today?" Those are the wrong questions to ask. Yes, they might be interesting and sensational questions, but they're still just the wrong questions to ask.

Asking the wrong questions isn't just a problem experienced today, however. The first Christians, living just 30 or 40 years after Jesus ascended back into Heaven, wondered a lot about the Lord's return. They, too, asked the wrong questions about it. One example was happening among counterfeit Christian leaders – false teachers – in the churches established in what is now the country of Turkey. They asked, "Why hasn't Jesus come back yet? Jesus said He'd return. Life just continues on around here much as it always has. What's changed? Where is He?" Peter, a Christian leader and one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus, had to address the issue in one of his letters to these churches. Let's read what he said.

Now, today, I conclude a series of five messages based on Bible passages that all share something in common. They all include the phrase "one thing." We've talked about how we live in this confusing, distracted, "all too many options" world. It's refreshing when someone says, "Forget all the noise out there. Focus on this one thing. It's very, very important." Did you hear and read the "one thing" phrase found there in 2 Peter 3? "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a

thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” (2 Peter 3:8 NIV) Again, when it comes to the Second Coming of Jesus, it’s important to avoid the wrong question.

THE WRONG QUESTION: WHY HASN’T JESUS RETURNED YET?

These counterfeit Christian leaders were causing real problems among those first Christians. By questioning why Jesus hadn’t returned yet, they implied either Jesus just got it wrong or He didn’t have the power or ability to return from Heaven. Peter’s response? You’re asking the wrong question! First, Peter reminds both them and us we must understand one thing about God’s relationship with what we call “time.” God is timeless. He created time and He intends for you and me to live within it, but He Himself lives outside of time. God has never had a beginning. God will never have an end. God is neither young nor old because those are “time” words. God is eternal. To Him everything is present. We measure time by seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years. That’s appropriate for us, but not for God. That’s why Peter says, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” (2 Peter 3:8 NIV)

Meaning what? Quite simply, just because Jesus hasn’t returned yet, doesn’t mean He’s not coming back at all. Don’t impose when you think it’s appropriate for Jesus to return onto God. He has a perspective on time we don’t. On the one hand, a thousand years can seem as insignificant and fleeting to God as one day does to us. On the other hand, please don’t assume time is insignificant to God. Peter suggested God can see time with an intensity that eludes us. Just one day can be more significant to God than a thousand years. For example, the Bible says, “But when the right time came, God sent his Son.” (Gal. 4:4 NLT) For some 33 years in human history, God subjected Himself to the limitations of time. Those 33 years might well be the most important part of human history to God Himself because He was physically here in the person of Jesus. But take it one step further. The day Jesus died on the cross for the sins of humanity and the day He rose up from the grave have more significance to God than ten thousand years of human history might have to us. “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” (2 Peter 3:8 NIV)

It’s foolish to impose our understanding of time onto God. It’s arrogant to insist He conform His plan of saving humanity to our timetable. These false teachers were doing exactly that with their doubting questions about the Second Coming. Perhaps you’ve asked the same kind of questions at one time or another. “So, when is Jesus coming back? It’s been almost 2,000 years since He was here the first time. How much worse does the world have to get before Jesus returns?” Those are understandable questions, but they’re the wrong questions! They assume God operates within our concept of time. But God doesn’t dwell in time; therefore, He can never be late!

Peter gave us yet another reason for Jesus’ “delay” in coming back - if you insist on using that inappropriate word. The false teachers suggested Jesus was either unable to come back or unconcerned. In other words, Jesus was either weak or lazy. “Wrong!” said Peter. If there is any delay – which, in fact, there is not – it’s only because God

wants as many people as possible to repent and find new life in Jesus. “The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.” (2 Pt. 3:9 NLT) He says it even more succinctly again in v. 15, “And remember, our Lord’s patience gives people time to be saved.” (2 Pt. 3:15 NLT) God uses time to serve His gracious purposes. It’s not laziness, lack of concern, or inability that keeps Jesus from coming back. It’s God’s patience and grace. It allows many more to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior so Heaven will be as full as God desires. God is giving ample time for anyone who wants to receive eternal life to have the time to receive it.

By the way, Peter’s comment revealed what this church – what any and every church – ought to make its primary objective between the first and Second Coming of Jesus. Our job is to proclaim God’s love faithfully by leading men, women, boys, and girls of every race, ethnicity, culture, and background to repentance before God and saving faith in Jesus. That’s why this church exists. If we ever lose sight of it we might as well close the doors. Time is an opportunity given to individuals and to congregations. Every day is a gift of God’s grace and mercy – an opportunity to take one step closer to God by becoming more like Jesus, an opportunity to point a spiritually lost person to Jesus, an opportunity to serve someone else in the name of King Jesus.

It occurs to me there’s a wider application of this truth about time than just questions about the Second Coming. Prayer is one example. It’s easy to forget God doesn’t operate in time, so we get frustrated with Him. “Lord, why don’t You answer my prayers when I need them answered? How come what I’ve asked for hasn’t happened yet?” What’s wrong with those questions? They assume and imply God isn’t faithful. Is God lazy, unconcerned, or unable? No, God’s “delays” – if we can be permitted to call them that – are for merciful, gracious, and loving reasons. Philip Brooks, a famous pastor and preacher from years ago, was pacing back and forth in his office when a friend came by and asked him what was wrong. Brooks said, “The problem is I am in a hurry and God is not!” God can never be late. If you know from God’s Word and from the Holy Spirit’s witness that God wants something for your life, don’t get discouraged just because it hasn’t happened when you think it should. The Bible says faithfulness is one of God’s essential attributes. “Praise the LORD.... Not one word has failed of all the wonderful promises he gave through his servant Moses.” (1 Kg. 8:56 NLT) “He is the faithful God who... lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.” (Dt. 7:9 NLT) “God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says.” (1 Cor. 1:9 NLT) God is never late!

It was time for a certain sky lift to start carrying passengers. “Go on through,” the ticket seller told the man who was first in line at one of those automatic entrance stiles. “But the gate won’t open,” the man said. “Yes, it will. Go ahead,” the ticket seller urged again. The man moved a little closer to the stile, but stopped within a few inches of it. It still didn’t open. He looked back at the ticket seller helplessly. She said patiently and firmly, “Keep on walking. The gate will open in time if you just keep on walking.” So, the man raised his head and decided, if necessary, to walk right on through. Just before he touched the metal bar, the stile moved automatically permitting the man to

pass through. We will see God move into situations and change circumstances when – not if - we just keep moving forward in faith.

Does God keep His promises? Yes. Well, then, He will be faithful to send Jesus to this Earth again. It will happen. One of the clearest references is in a letter another Christian leader, Paul, wrote. It says there, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.” (1 Th. 4:16-17 NLT) And here in 2 Peter 3, Peter leaves no room regarding the certainty of the Second Coming. He referred to it as the Day of the Lord. Actually, there have been several Days of the Lord throughout history. These are moments in time and human history that have eternal significance – like the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, like the day Jesus died, and like the day He rose again from the dead. The Day of the Lord.

But Peter envisioned here yet another Day of the Lord none of us have experienced yet. We live in a fallen, sinful universe permeated by evil. But one day it will all be made new and every trace of evil will be removed. Both this world and even the universe itself will be transformed, renovated, re-created, purified, and made perfect. “But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God’s righteousness.” (2 Pt 3:13 NLT) Don’t you want to know a whole lot more about all of that? Of course. We all do! But it’s not important we know the details, just the fact it will happen. There are plenty of “end times experts” or “end times specialists” running around out there trying to sell you their books, their charts, their DVDs, and whatever else suggesting only they have detailed knowledge of what will happen before, during, and after the Second Coming. Save your money! At best, it’s their own personal opinions. At worst, it’s an attempt to get your money by peddling fear and a thirst for the spectacular. When it comes to the Second Coming, don’t be guilty of asking the wrong question, “Why hasn’t Jesus returned yet?” Instead, ask...

THE RIGHT QUESTION: BECAUSE JESUS WILL RETURN, HOW SHOULD I LIVE?

We don’t know when Jesus will return and it’s not important to know when. Instead, what’s important is how we live each day in light of it. Peter said, “Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live.” (2 Pt. 3:11 NLT) How should I live, how should you live in light of the absolute fact that Jesus will come back some day? His Second Coming is as certain a future reality as His first coming is a past reality. One response is a repentant lifestyle. Remember Peter said here, “He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.” (2 Pt 3:9 NLT) Repentance is all about an internal revolution – a change of heart, a change of mind, and a change in behavior and attitudes. Repentance doesn’t get emphasized today as much as the Bible emphasizes it. When we invite people to become followers of Jesus, we often say, “Just believe in Jesus and what He did. He will meet your needs. He will fulfill your life.” It’s all true, but not without deep, authentic repentance. Repentance involves true sorrow for our sin, a willingness to give them up

in order to follow Jesus, and a growing desire to have our lives changed from the inside out by the Holy Spirit who now dwells in us. Nor is repentance something you do once when you first become a follower of Jesus. Instead, it's all about a growing recognition that sin is deeply ingrained in us and finds ways to hide out in ungodly values, attitudes, priorities, and ambitions. Those have to be surrendered to King Jesus – sometimes over and over again. Repentance is never “once and done” – it's continual, it's progressive, and perpetual. It needs to keep on happening until Jesus returns.

Most countries around the world use the metric system - a decimal-based system of measurement. You know, kilometers instead of miles, meters instead of yards, grams instead of ounces, and liters instead of gallons. While all kinds of efforts have been attempted to adopt the metric system in the United States, we are now the only industrialized country in the world that doesn't use the metric system as its predominant system of measurement. It's a more logical system since everything is based on multiples of 10, rather than the odd collection of weights and measures we have now like 12 inches to a foot and 5,280 feet to a mile. But it hasn't worked, has it? Most of us know very little about the metric system. As long as the old, familiar system of measurement is still visible, we rely on it regardless of how superior the new one might be. That's the way it is when we follow Jesus. We've got to keep on abandoning and eliminating the old life in order to take on the new life in Jesus. Otherwise we just fall back into old, familiar patterns. Repentance has to be continual to be effective.

Another response to the future reality of the Second Coming is an obedient lifestyle. Do you hear that challenge in Peter's words here? “Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live.... While you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight.” (2 Pt 3:11, 14 NLT) The Bible makes it very clear what God considers appropriate and inappropriate behavior for a follower of Jesus. To be more specific, Peter told those who read or heard his letter to live lives that sharply contrasted with both the pagans as well as the false teachers in their midst. If you read through chapter two of 2 Peter, he told them and us that followers of Jesus can't live lives of arrogant pride, can't be greedy for money, can't be dishonest, can't despise rightful authority, can't make pleasure their god, and can't be sexually immoral. It wasn't intended to be an exhaustive list, but you get the idea. In other words, followers of Jesus are supposed to be different than those who don't follow Jesus. That's a “Captain Obvious” truth, but it's easily missed today even by some who consider themselves Christians. We're supposed to be different because we operate on a different set of values, a different set of priorities, and by a different standard of conduct. And why? Because one day Jesus will return and a whole new world – indeed a whole new universe – will be created in which no evil will be permitted to exist.

Yet another response to the Second Coming of Jesus is a purposeful lifestyle. For followers of Jesus, life is more than pursuing happiness, raising a family, and enjoying a comfortable retirement. Way back in 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the then Soviet Union, said, “A Communist has no right to be a mere onlooker.” How much more is that statement true for a follower of Jesus! Between the first and Second Coming of

Jesus, our primary mission – both as individuals and as a church – is to point people to Jesus, disciple those who become followers of Jesus, and both promote and represent the Kingdom of God wherever we live, work, and play. We’re not called to be observers, keeping a low profile, and just trying to make it through life the best we can. We’re called to be actively involved in living, loving, and serving so that spiritually lost people see Jesus at work in and through us. Peter even hints at a tantalizing thought in this passage. What’s that? We might even be able to hasten the day of Jesus’ coming by the way we live our lives! “Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along.” (1 Pt 3:11-12 NLT) Interesting...!

So, what are you doing to help build God’s Kingdom? What are you doing – in the now well-known words of Rick Warren – to live a “purpose-driven” life? Our church always has more ministries than volunteers. Pick one or two and get busy! Stop being just a “pew potato” for an hour and a half on Sunday morning! Maybe it’s a ministry outside of the church building that impacts our society in some way like helping courageous women who have decided not to abort their children, or helping refugees and immigrants adjust to a new life in America, or reading to some kids at a Northland area elementary school and letting them see Jesus in you. Maybe it’s asking God to use you to have faith conversations with people where you live, work, go to school, or play. If there’s no Second Coming of Jesus than this world and its history has no ultimate purpose. It’s not moving toward anything. But for those of us who have come to know the real purpose and goal of life in Jesus alone, we have every reason to live every day full of repentance, full of obedience, and full of purpose to the glory of God.

Kevin Miller had to drive from Chicago to Fort Wayne, Indiana, for work, so he went to Enterprise to rent a car. They gave him a big, brand-new, comfy Chrysler 300 to drive—and he loved it! In fact, Kevin enjoyed feeling large and in charge so much so that he blew right past the first tollbooth. You see, Kevin wasn’t used to stopping for tollbooths, because he had an I-PASS in his own car—a little device that signals he’s already prepaid his tolls. After passing the first tollbooth, he thought about it, “Oh, yeah! This car doesn't have an I-PASS!” But just as he started to worry about it, he thought, “This car belongs to the rental-car company—not me. So they're probably responsible for any tolls. That must be what some of my rental money goes toward covering.” He then drove past another toll, thinking, “Even if I’m responsible for the tolls, there's only a few tolls between here and Indiana—maybe \$4 round trip. I'm sure there's some threshold where they don't even bother sending you a bill for the tolls. I mean, it wouldn't be worth their time to send me a bill for only \$4. Nothing's going to happen!”

After Kevin returned home from his business trip, a month or two went by. Nothing happened—or so he thought. In October, Kevin received a piece of mail that read: “Notice of Toll Violation.” He was right, to a degree. The Tollway Authority didn't bother sending him a bill for his measly \$3.90 in tolls. But when you add in a \$20 fine for every one of the five tollbooths Kevin drove past, they did bother sending him a bill for \$103.90! Kevin says he about had a heart attack. They had him dead to rights. They had a photo of his rental car’s license plate. They even knew the exact lane number

he'd been in. The fact that months had gone by and nothing had happened didn't mean that nothing was ever going to happen.

Because Jesus has not returned yet, doesn't mean He won't return. If Jesus came the first time, you can be sure He will come again. Don't be guilty of asking the wrong question, "Why hasn't Jesus returned yet? When will Jesus return?" Instead, ask the right question, "Because Jesus will return, how should I live?" Then, go out and live today and every day ready to repent, ready to obey, and ready to live a purpose-filled life to the glory of God.