



For the last few weeks we’ve been in a series titled, “Undistracted” as we go through the New Testament letter of 2 Peter. And the last two weeks we’ve navigated the second chapter, which was Peter’s words to the church not to get distracted by false teachers who are adding on to the gospel message or replacing the gospel message and who are teaching primarily for their own financial benefit. You put it all together, and Peter is telling the church not to get distracted.

In today’s passage, we see a little of that carrying over, but mostly the tone of the letter changes to a positive message about what to stay focused on. One of the major themes in this stretch is about God’s timing, particularly in regards to Jesus’ second coming, but also in a more general sense about God’s timing for how he moves. So, let’s turn to today’s passage – **2 Peter 3:1-10**. This is God’s word to you and me this morning.

Right off, he makes the letter more personal and positive with this phrase, “Dear friends...” In many translations, it will simply read, “Beloved.” It’s a term of endearment. Coming out of the previous section with its strong warnings and judgment of false teachers, this signifies a significant change in the letter. He reminds them that this is his second letter to them, and he states why he’s written both the first letter and now this one as well: to stimulate them or spur them on, to “wholesome thinking.”

The word is “elikreenase” and it means “pure, unsullied, or sincere.” In the context of this letter and the gospel, it’s about following Jesus in a pure, unsullied, and sincere way and with theology that matches. This is why he has such strong warnings in chapter 2 – his goal is to steer them away from this other stuff that’s distracting them from the gospel, and instead turn toward Jesus. One translation of this passage reads that his letters are “reminders to hold your minds in a state of ‘undistracted’ attention.” This is where the title for our series comes from. It’s what this letter is all about.

Then in verses 3-7 he addresses some specific challenges that these first century Christians are facing. Perhaps the things he mentions here are some of the things that false teachers in the church were teaching, but this seems to be something more. These are the questions of people who are straight up mocking what Christians believe. So, these people are saying, “Hey...what’s happened to the promise of Jesus’ return? Nothing’s changed...everything in the world and the universe is just carrying on as it always has.” That’s the mocking message of some people around them.

Peter then has an interesting observation. **“But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water...” (Verse 5).** I love this phrase “they deliberately forget.” There have been times with my kids, particularly when they were younger, like JD’s age, where they “deliberately forget” something. I tried to think of a specific and real-life example from my own kids, but I’ve forgotten them. Not deliberately...I just can’t remember them. I’m sure something happened with our youngest even just in the last week or two that fits this...and now it looks like I’m the one deliberately forgetting.

But my dog does this all the time, and I can remember that. Waverly knows she’s not supposed to get up on the couch. But sometimes I’ll come home, and she’s the only one in the house...and she’ll greet me at the door. And then I’ll walk over toward the couch and she starts to get a little shy and won’t follow me into the tv room and instead goes toward the dining room table where she’ll sheepishly hide underneath, and between the chair legs. And I go to the couch and feel around a little, and sure enough, I’ll find an abnormally warm spot where she’s been snuggled up in the empty house. She deliberately forgets that she’s not supposed to be up there.

This is similar to what these people are doing. **They’re forgetting that God is the one in charge, not them, as evidenced by creation and the flood that Peter mentions.** We don’t control these things – God does. He’s the one who takes initiative and makes things happen. And he does so in His timing, not ours. This is true whether it’s the return of Jesus as being discussed here in these verses, or whether we’re praying for God to answer some personal prayer, such as giving us the gift of patience. We want to be patient right

now! We want spiritual maturity right now. We want peace right now. We want financial security right now. We want healing right now. We want to meet Jesus face-to-face in the hereafter right now. Well, actually, that's one thing most Christians *don't* pray to happen right now, somewhat ironically. But the others we do. The second coming of Jesus is in God's timing, not ours. If these same mockers from 2,000 years ago were around today, they'd probably use an argument along the lines of, "You can be just about anywhere in the world and order anything on Amazon and have it delivered to your doorstep in two days. Where is this Jesus who said he's coming back? Amazon has him beat!"

But beginning in verse 8, Peter turns the tables. And in doing so, he models for them exactly what he's been telling them to do all along: stick with the time-tested prophets of old, and the teachers of today who point them to Jesus and teach what Jesus taught. No distractions from that message.

So, in regards to God's timing, Peter reminds them in verse 8 with these words "But, do not forget this one thing..." And then he goes on to paraphrase Psalm 94:8. Peter writes, "**But, do not forget this one thing: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day**" (verse 8). Psalm 90:4 reads, "**A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.**" Clearly, he's drawing on this Psalm that is attributed to Moses. While the Psalms are not really considered prophetic writings, there are occasional Psalms that have a prophetic feel to them...and Moses is certainly considered a prophet of old. So, Peter is putting his own advice to "listen to the prophets" into practice right here in his letter.

And the point Peter makes here is that God's timing and our timing are two totally different things. In fact, our sense of time is very different than God's. This should come as no surprise, and many of us are familiar with this verse...but it's good to be reminded because we all struggle with God's timing sometimes. Things don't move forward at the pace we'd like them to. A political election season seems to last an eternity, while our kids grow up way too fast. This sermon might feel like an eternity to you but it's the blink of an eye for God 😊. **The result of this different sense of time is then seen**

in verse 9, that God is *not* slow in keeping his promise. Rather, God is always on time. He's totally punctual – by *his* sense of time. It may not line up with our time expectations, but our expectations are second fiddle compared to God. We submit to him, not the other way around. He's the one who created everything, not us. Who are we to tell what to do and when to do it?

Peter then says in verse 9, rather than being slow, the truth of the matter is that God is patient. And guess who he's patient with? You and me. Like the Psalm paraphrase earlier, this is a paraphrase of Ezekiel 18:23. So another prophet of old that he turns to. If there's any sense of God not moving fast enough, the problem actually is us, as God waits for us to get things in gear. He's patient as he waits for us to come to faith, or to put our faith into practice, to trust him more, to follow his lead....in all these things, God is patient with us. In particular, Peter talks about God's patience in people coming to faith. God doesn't want anyone to perish; rather, he wants everyone to come to repentance.

Repentance is probably not our favorite word, and it's one you hardly ever hear outside of the Church. But it's a key word to understand. Repentance is not just saying "I'm sorry" or asking for forgiveness about something. **Repentance ("metanoia" in the Greek) literally means "a change of mind, a reversal of a decision."** Biblically, it's a change of mind in regards to the stuff in our lives that breaks our relationship with God. The word for that stuff is "sin," another word that doesn't usually fly well in today's world outside the church. But without acknowledging our sin that pulls us away from the One who created us in His image, it's hard to repent of it. It's hard to have a change of mind in regards to sin if we don't acknowledge it as sin, as something that separates us from God (and people).

But that is exactly what we are invited to do, and God is patient with us in regards to that. He gives you the span of your lifetime to have a changed mind in regards to your sin, so that we no longer crave sin or seek it out or love it, but instead would hate it, run from it, and crave the presence, love, and truth of God instead. That's a true repentance, a true metanoia: It's no longer loving the sin in our lives, and loving God instead. And **God is**

patient with us in regards to this, wanting everyone to come to repentance. Jesus speaks to this in his own teaching. For instance, in the gospel of Luke, Jesus says, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). This is part of the invitation Jesus gives to following him, and Peter is saying that God is patient with us in that process.

And it’s not just some people, it’s everyone – God “doesn’t want *anyone* to perish but *everyone* to come to repentance.” We see this elsewhere, such as when Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:4, “God our Savior wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.” Jesus makes it clear in the gospels, that he came for the world, not a select few. The good news of Jesus is good news for all, including you and me. We are invited to this place of repentance and faith in Jesus.

Now, the pressing question at hand that the mockers are picking on in their day, is addressed next in verse 10, and that is Jesus’ return. Peter writes, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.” Jesus’ return will come, but no one knows when it will happen. Paul uses the same metaphor in his 1st letter to the Thessalonians, which is probably one of Paul’s earliest letters. So maybe Peter is leaning on that. But, Peter was with Jesus for three years. And Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 24 that is the original source of this metaphor. Jesus says, **“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but the Father only...if the master of that house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake....Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:36, 43-44).**

So, Peter is simply using a metaphor that he heard Jesus use, and is passing it along to them. Not even Jesus, in his flesh standing before the disciples, knew when he’d return. I’m always stunned at Christians today who make predictions of Jesus’ return. I know Scripture speaks to events that will precede Jesus’ return – wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and so forth – but those things have been happening for centuries. Some pastor, I can’t remember who, was recently teaching that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is a sign that Jesus is returning soon, and used Bible verses to validate what he

said. I mean, *maybe* he's right??? I don't know. I do know this: Jesus didn't even know when he's gonna return...so how can we know? Jesus' message in that parable, and Peter is echoing it, is to simply be ready. Be ready for Jesus to return. So, here's the deal about us Presbyterians (if you didn't know, we're a Presbyterian Church): we believe that Jesus will return, but we don't get into the prediction business. The timing is in God's hands. **Rather than being distracted by the "prediction business," because Jesus didn't even do that, let's stick to the "gospel proclamation business."** The discipleship business. The "following after Jesus" business. Jesus was God come to us in flesh, crucified for our sins, and raised to new life, so that we might have a right relationship with God our heavenly father here and now and for eternity...and we get that through trusting Jesus. That's the gospel. That's what God has done for you and me in Jesus, and it is enough. God could never do a single other thing for any one of us – no healings, no earthly blessing, no spiritual gifts, nothing – and what Jesus has done would be enough.

And what He has done, has been done right on time. God is always on time. Whether it's creation, the flood Jesus' life/death/resurrection, the second coming of Jesus or the proclamation of the gospel in your life, God is always on time. And fortunately, he's perfectly patient with us when we aren't running on the same schedule. **God is utterly patient with you because he loves you, he cares for you, because he wants you to come to repentance, to turn to Jesus and follow him.** I pray you would know his perfect love in your own life, and be growing closer and closer to him each day. I hope and pray that *today* you take a step of faith toward Jesus, whether you feel like you're already pretty close to him or you're a long way off. Today, right now, is the day to step toward Him. God may be patient, but I'm not! 😊 Call me impatient. Guilty as charged. Because really, there's no time like the present to repent and take a step of faith toward Jesus, to go deeper in your journey of faith than you have before, trusting that God is with you and will lead you in his perfect timing. Let's pray...Amen.