

At Peace

2 Peter 3:8-15a

The early church, like the 21st century church, endured scoffers who taunted this Christian community with the failure of the second coming (v. 3). Why did they continue foolishly to await Jesus' imminent return? Why not instead indulge themselves and live for the day? The critique was not just about the failed doctrine of the end times, but also about the larger question of how God relates to humankind. Rather than an enduring relationship between creator and creation, the scoffers charged there is no evidence that God intervenes in the life of the world and its inhabitants. The scoffers said life is a continuum—from creation until now—with no expectation of heavenly intervention. Not only is Jesus' return in glory not a legitimate expectation, but such a return would interrupt their worldly lifestyle.

The writer of our text objected by pointing out that the scoffers' analysis had failed to take into account three things: the power of God's word both to create and to destroy (vv. 5-7), the difference between the reckoning of God's time and human time (v. 8), and the character of God (v. 9). In other words, there is at once a power, a patience, and a graciousness that characterize God. The real question remains, then as now, is what disposition will our waiting take?

The writer indicates that a life turned toward repentance (*metanoia*) is the proper response to God's gracious patience (v. 9), and that life is characterized by holy conduct and godliness (*eusebeia*). Rather than thinking that the end times has been delayed and that therefore licentious

behavior is inconsequential, believers are exhorted to adopt a view that holy conduct and godliness not only exhibit faithful waiting but can actually hasten the coming of the day of the Lord. So we worship God and strengthen our relationships and associations with fellow human beings. This godly living is our focus, not how much money, power or privilege we have. As a mark of the Christian life, we live saintly lives—lives characterized by such communion with God that it become a witness, enabling others to believe as well.

The letter of 2 Peter was presumably written in a time of transition to a church in transition. The church was moving out of its Jewish heritage into a Gentile world. It was moving from apostolic to postapostolic leadership. These are significant credentials to speak to churches in successive ages that have evolved from the patristic to the medieval era, from the modern to the postmodern era, and that have seen a movement away from the dominance of Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant denominations toward nondenominational mega churches, the emergent church, and subsequent iterations.

Will God be at the end of this tortuous road? If our traditional churches crumble, will God still be there? The church of 2 Peter says a resounding yes to churches that have been burned to the ground and are trying to find where God is in their future; to mainline denominations who once thought their dominance on the religious landscape was about *their* power and uniqueness; to the poor who are overlooked in the midst of political posturing and bickering; to faithful believers who cannot make sense of the rising tide of acrimony that infects fundamentalist strains of all religions.

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So we ask: "Is he *ever* going to get here?" "Will it be worth the wait?" Waiting will do that to you. The author of our text gives us a theology of waiting. And our response is: "What should I do in the meantime?" The first step is to ponder the very nature of time and delay. "Refresh your memory" (1:13). The author asks, echoing the psalmist ("a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past," Ps. 90:4), "Does anybody really know what time it is?"

The answer, of course, is that only God knows what time it is, and unless one's sense of time is as finally attuned to God's as faith allows, one's timing will always be off. God's timing is different from ours. "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you" (3:9). Or, what looks to us like *delay* looks to God like *patience*; and God has all the time in the world.

What they and we are waiting for is the return of "the Lord (and Savior) Jesus Christ." God's primary disposition seems, to best be described as patience, and the end times, while not cancelled, seems to be held in suspense. God has not delayed the end in order to gather more sinners for the lake of fire; God is waiting with patience for another reason. "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." God wants all to be saved!

So how are we to respond to this patience of God? We are to share the mind of God, to see the cosmos, from creation to climax, as God sees it. "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" (3:11-13). Our patient waiting is an imitating God's own patience.

Then, as now, this word to Christian believers in the church of 2 Peter echoes the wisdom that the doxological ending of Christ's prayer teaches us—that the kingdom and the power and the glory belong to God, not to us. Our right response to God's providential care is faithful living evidenced by the practice of patience, pointing others to be in communion with the one who has formed and redeemed creation. That kind of waiting echoes Charles Wesley's poetic confession in "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling":

Finish then thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;
 Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee;
 Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
 Till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.

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So we wait. Just as we are to accept the vast difference between God's sense of timing and our own, if we apply God's patience in expectation of the salvation of all for our hurried desire for completion, we may find the waiting more to our liking. **William Brosend**

We live in a time of constant threat...wars...civic unrest in our cities...exotic illnesses...we wonder if the end times will come today...tomorrow...next year... We can have peace in mind, heart and soul if our focus is on the one who made the universe...the one who has promised our salvation...the one who is patient and wants none to be lost. Let us live godly, saintly, and obedient lives until Jesus returned or until He calls us home. Either way we can have peace!

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