

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

We are now officially 3 weeks away from Christmas. While that time will go fast for adults, it will drag by for the children. Over and over again, parents will hear children ask over the next few weeks, "How long until Christmas?" "Is Christmas here yet?" And what do parents do in response? They distract! They find as many distractions as they can to keep the child busy and to keep the child from thinking about Christmas so they don't have to keep hearing the same questions over and over.

Let's be honest. We don't like to wait either. We may learn to be a little better about waiting as we get older, but some of that is just learning to discipline ourselves. We still don't like to wait. We are impatient. We get frustrated having to wait. This season of Advent helps us to focus our attention forward toward the coming of our Savior back to this earth. As we look forward to Jesus coming again, we might ask the same question: "How come it takes so long?" When we have to face the challenges of life and we know that sometime they will be taken away but they haven't been yet, we grow impatient. In our impatience, we are tempted to stray, to give up hope, and grow lax in our watchfulness. The devil likes to do to us exactly what parents do to their children when they are impatient in waiting: distract. No, I'm not calling parents the devil for trying to distract their kids. The devil has much different purposes in trying to distract us than parents do in distracting their children. Parents seek to divert attention to make the waiting easier. The devil seeks to take our focus off of the Savior's coming in hopes that we will be unprepared to meet him when he comes. He wants us to doubt God's love, minimize sin, drift into smugness, despair or apathy, grow careless and worldly in our daily lives, love trash and ignore treasure, and stay embarrassed about him and quiet in our witness. Though the wait is long, it is important that we keep our focus and remain ready at all times to meet our Lord when he comes. Today, God sends his heralds through his word to help us prepare our hearts so we are ready to meet him when he comes. Heed the herald's call as he proclaims to us: **Jesus is Coming. Be Ready!**

2 Peter 3:8-14 *"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. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. ¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. ¹⁴So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

Since the time of Noah, the people of our world have laughed and scoffed at the idea of accountability to God. Even though God had told Noah that he was going to send a flood in judgment of the world, the people of his day laughed at the thought. They thought Noah was crazy! God was going to send a flood in the middle of a desert to wipe us out as judgment on our sin? No way! How different their thinking was when the rain began to pour from the sky and the waters rose and the door of the ark was shut!

People today are no different. It has been 2000 years since Jesus said he would be coming back. There are many in our world who scoff at those who wait for Jesus. They ridicule Jesus claiming that since he hasn't returned as he promised he isn't serious about the things he has said in his word. Many have become hardened and apathetic toward Jesus' coming with more than 2000 years of getting comfortable with the "nothing will happen mentality."

Peter's words snap us out of apathy and hardness and remind us of the truth: he is coming! Make no mistake about it. The day of the Lord will come. Jesus will return as he promised and when he does, every person will stand before him in judgment. Just because we don't fully understand God doesn't mean he isn't serious. Just because we are impatient doesn't mean he isn't coming again. Listen to Peter: *"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."* God isn't bound by time. Time doesn't impact him in any way. He doesn't see time like we do. Peter here quotes Moses in Psalm 90. There Moses praises God that he has been our dwelling place through all generations and that he is eternal. The counting of years don't affect God because he has other plans. Peter lets us in to these other plans which are the secret to his patience: *"he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* God has not come back to earth yet because he is forgetful or apathetic or senile or powerless or asleep. He hasn't come back yet because he is patient. He wants to give his people the opportunity to repent. He hasn't come back to this earth yet because of his love for lost sinners. God's desire is that his people come to faith and repentance and he allows this world to continue so that they can do that.

Our impatience for the coming of Jesus is really selfishness on our part. The fact that Jesus is coming back to this earth in judgment and the fact that he hasn't come yet in love for lost sinners ought to spur us on toward evangelism and outreach

rather than apathy. Yet rather than worry about the souls of others and reaching out to bring the elect into God's family, we worry more about ourselves and the troubles that we have to face. Some of those troubles come from the temptations of trying to abstain from the things of this world. Our impatience shows itself in apathy—who cares, it doesn't really matter at all, how could I possibly make a difference. Others let their impatience show in procrastination. God takes the second seat in their priorities. As they make their decisions they reason, "There's always tomorrow. I'll have time for God tomorrow, or next week, or when whatever I am doing now is over." Others show their impatience as they fall into the prodigal son syndrome. You know the thoughts: "I'm going to live it up today. I'll always have time for God later. There will always be time for God when I'm done having fun."

Let's recognize this for what it is: sin. This type of thinking and acting goes directly contrary to the will of God. God didn't forget his promise to come back and he wasn't joking about. Peter reminds us today, "Be assured he will come again." Only when Jesus comes again he isn't going to announce his coming in advance. He has already done this in his warning to be ready. When he comes again, he will come like a thief in the night. Jesus doesn't want us playing any games with his second coming. He wants us to be honest and ready to meet him whenever he comes. He wants us to heed his message and look for his coming which could come at any time.

If these words and promises of Jesus are not enough for you to be sure that he will come again, consider his words about what will happen when he does come. Physically, there are many ideas put forward about what Jesus' second coming will be like. What exactly does he mean by "new heavens and new earth?" While we do not know for sure, the Greek words that are used here do not support that what is new will be made from nothing, as happened at the beginning of the world. It is possible physically that the new heavens and new earth will look much like we see now, only changed—like the original Eden that God intended for his people to live in.

It's the reason why this has to happen that gives us pause. Peter tells us that everything will be laid bare. This is true not only physically, but also spiritually. As sinful people, this presents the scary part of the scenario. This earth will be laid bare because it is tainted by sin and death. So also are the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. When Jesus comes on the last day, nothing will be hidden from his sight. No one will be able to hide anything from the judgment seat of God. Not only our actions, but even our thoughts will be laid open for all to see. All of our wicked, selfish thoughts will be out in the open. We're talking about every good deed that looked good outwards, but served only you. We're talking about every cursing or damning thought that wished evil or hatred towards someone else; everything you ever got away with that no one else ever saw or knew. All of that will be laid bare before God to pronounce judgment on. And the only judgment he can make is to be sent away from him forever.

Our only hope is to be ready and prepared. To stand before God in peace on the last day we need to be blameless and holy and spotless. The only way for that to happen is through Jesus our Savior. This is the joy of Christmas. The baby sent into this world as true God and true man went forward to be our sacrifice on Calvary's cross. We are thankful to God that he was patient with the world and allowed it to go on to the point where he could keep his promise to send his son to die for our sins and be our Savior. That same God was patient enough to wait until he could send the Spirit into our hearts through baptism. There at baptism, God made us the blameless, holy, spotless people he needed us to be. Peter's encouragement for us as we face the scoffing and ridicule of the world around us along with all of its distractions is to make every effort to remain blameless, holy, spotless and at peace with God when he comes again. We do this by heeding the words of John the Baptist: Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. We prepare ourselves by making the effort every single day to recognize our sins and lay them before God and pray for his forgiveness. We are sure to be ready to meet our God whenever he comes by laying bare ourselves before God and being confident that in Jesus we are cleansed of that sin and holy in God's sight.

Since we have been cleansed of these and all of our sins by Jesus and prepared through His forgiveness to meet him, we can now go out and live holy and godly lives as we look forward to the time of his coming. Peter calls on us who have been washed, justified, sanctified and filled with the Spirit's power to live holy and godly lives. God doesn't want his people paralyzed by the thought of Judgment day. He wants us to be energized. Knowing of his final destruction should not make us idle, apathetic, fruitless and wasteful of God's gifts. God invested heavily in us as his children so that we can be a blessing to others. Clear knowledge that the end is coming is what spurs us on to worship God, obey his word, and strive with all that can to carry out his mission to seek and to save the lost. We are not to spend our time until God comes hiding within the walls of this church. This is not to be a refuge where we can get away from ungodly people. This is a place where we can be refreshed, healed, trained and inspired to glorify God in the world and carry out his mission.

Let the message of Christ's return spur you on to make every effort to be ready yourself and to do all that you can to help others be ready too. Don't let the temptations, doubts, ridicule and scoffers distract you from the certainty of Jesus return. Keep your focus. Be on your guard. Jesus is coming again. Be ready. Amen.