



good shepherd  
presbyterian church

## **Patient, Not Slow**

2 Peter 3:3-9

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February 9, 2020

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It's a cold, crisp winter Saturday – 8:00 a.m. sharp on the narrow pavement path that is the Piper Glen Greenway. Mark Katibah looks over at the three of us there for Solemates and says, “Let’s go!” “What about so-and-so?” I say. “It’s 8!” he responds, “and I didn’t hear back from them.” “Let’s wait another few minutes... I think they are coming,” I say. And on that particular day, our faces brighten to see one more coming down the path toward us at 8:02!

It's a different time and place many years ago. We are piling in the car to go to a concert or game or something and one of the kids is still looking for something inside. Another complains, “She is being sooooo sloooow!” “Be patient!” I say back, though I am feeling every bit of that slowness myself. But we want her with us, of course! And when she does finally come out, we are excited and soon the delay is forgotten as we excitedly get closer to the big event.

In our text today, Peter assures us that mockers will come in the last days and say, “Where is the promise of God’s coming?... all continues just as it was from the beginning.”

What is God waiting for? Didn’t Jesus say he would come back? Isn’t there enough pain and suffering in the world? When will it end? When will justice roll down and the evil be called to account?

Peter's answer to all those questions is this: "The Lord is not slow... but is patient."

Today we are going to look at what that means and what it teaches us about God and how to live in the world God made and loves.

### **Mockery, Doubt, and Unbelief**

The antagonists in verses 3-4 are the mockers. They make fun of the believers and they make fun of God. They are described as "following after their own lusts" – that is, pursuing their own desires above all else. They see no evidence of God or God at work.

I daresay you know people like this. It may not be as blatant as openly taunting or mocking you personally, but there is definitely a growing attitude towards Christianity (and other faiths) that it's all a big waste of time. And sometimes the critique of faith can get personal and pointed, especially when the behavior of so-called Christians leaves much to be desired.

Scripture makes connections between mockery, doubt, and unbelief. This is not to say that all doubt is bad. In fact, I'd say that healthy doubt is a key ingredient in growing, maturing faith. But that's faith seeking understanding – asking questions in order to find answers, not shut down conversation. There is other doubt that is more pessimistic, more harmful, more bias confirmation of unbelief already there. And scripture says that such self-feeding unbelief can blind us to God's truth and love. In other words, it makes it harder and harder to see and believe.

It's easy to grow impatient towards such people, to want to move on and find a more receptive or friendly audience. And where Peter goes next just ups the ante.

## **Did It Escape Your Notice?**

I think it fair to say that the tone of vv. 5-8 are impatient and judgy. The phrase “it escapes their notice” has a little edge, a little bite, to it. Those mockers, they’ve missed something important. Fools!

God made the heavens and earth. God made water and has used it to judge the ungodly. And God made fire and is ready to use it to judge the ungodly. How dare anyone mock the God of Heaven and Earth, the God of water and fire, the God of righteous judgment!

You can feel the fire and brimstone sermon heating up to the boiling point, then Peter turns in another direction altogether. He uses the words “escape your notice” a second time: “But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved.” Suddenly the sermon has shifted! Suddenly it’s not the ungodly who have missed something important about God; it is Peter’s believing audience... his beloved in Christ!

“Do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.”

Um, okay. ...? Yeah, I remember “O God, Our Help in Ages Past.” I remember Psalm 90, “A thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, a watch in the night.” (v.4) What does that have to do with the stupid mockers?

How long do we have to wait for our sister? We are going to be late!

Rodney is never going to understand why I go to church, and he makes fun of it. I’m done with him.

## **Patient, Not Slow**

Peter continues in v. 9: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

Peter ties it all together. The mockers are right... God seems to be slow. Things never seem to change. Is Jesus ever coming back? Will there ever be justice in this world? Wait, God is not slow? He's patient? What does that mean?

God does not wish any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. God is willing to wait in order for Rodney to hear more of the truth, perhaps from you. Remember last week's sermon and text? Perhaps your kindness or grace will lead him to turn toward the truth. God is willing to wait for the sister who is taking so long because he wants her and you to know the joy of riding together as family, as community. God is willing to wait for one more participant to show up because there is not a finite amount of His forgiveness or grace or patience.

Last week we talked about reflecting the heart of God as we deal with opponents, with those who are deceived, with people who make us angry. Today Peter teaches us about the heart of God. It is not slow; it is patient and it is full of mercy and love.

Perhaps this should change the way we look at the people around us. Perhaps it will even change who we choose to have around us. God's patience and apparent slowness should not be confused with inaction or inattention. God is at work in the world all around us. It is we who too often fail to join in God's work in the world.

Perhaps that has escaped our notice... May God's Word to us through that headstrong and passionate disciple, Peter, sink deep into our hearts and minds. In Jesus' name, Amen.