

2 Peter 3:3-7

Introduction

“This is now, beloved, the second letter that I am writing to you. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles...”

I. 2 Peter 3:3a — ...knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing...

As Christians, there are many things that we need to know, and that we need to know *first of all*. Remember, the point here isn't *just* knowing in our heads but being carefully mindful of something and then interpreting life and all of the things that happen around us always in the light of these things that we know “first of all.” Peter used this same phrase earlier, in chapter one:

□ 2 Peter 1:20-21 — ...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

What we “know first of all” is that the Scriptures are the Word of God and so they're the foundation for all true “knowledge.” Therefore, what we know “first of all” is the true “knowledge” that we've gained from the Scriptures – not simply knowledge in terms of facts and information, but knowledge in terms of viewing life, and interpreting life, and living life wisely in the light of what we “know” — first of all. And so here Peter says that we're to know this first of all, “that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing.”

Peter could have just said, “scoffers will come in the last days,” and technically that would have been enough because we already know what scoffers do, don't we? Scoffers scoff! But Peter uses a Hebrew way of speaking here (Heb., infinitive absolute) so he can be as emphatic as possible: “scoffers will come... *with scoffing*.” We could give the sense like this: “knowing this first of all, that scoffers *will most surely* come in the last days.” And now the scoffers are here, even in the very churches to which Peter is writing, and so what does that prove? For us as Christians, it only proves that we're *in* the last days (cf. Mat. 24:23-24; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 Jn. 2:18-19). For us as Christians the coming of the false teachers only proves the very thing that the false teachers are denying – that we're actually living, now, in the days that immediately precede Christ's return in glory as the righteous Judge of all the world.

Do you see how everything ultimately comes down to what we “know *first of all*”? Peter's point here isn't some miraculous fulfillment of prophecy (as though it's an amazing thing that these scoffers were foretold ahead of time). His point is simply the “true” knowledge that is our presupposition or our starting point – the knowledge and the knowing that comes through faith. Therefore, we don't doubt the Word of God in light of the scoffing of scoffers, instead we interpret the coming of the scoffers in the light of the word of God. And that means that rather

than causing us to doubt, the coming of the scoffers only confirms and establishes us in humble faith.

II. 2 Peter 3:3b — ...knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, **following their own sinful desires**.

Why do scoffers scoff? In the Bible, the driving motivation of the scoffer is never that he's been intellectually offended by the "foolishness" of Christianity, but rather that what he's always craving, deep down, is to be free of any ultimate accountability to any God that's not of his own making. In the book of Proverbs, the scoffer is always just the opposite of the wise man who fears the Lord (cf. Ps. 1).

- Proverbs 13:1 — A *wise* son hears his father's instruction, but a *scoffer* does not listen to rebuke.
- Proverbs 15:12 — A *scoffer* does not like to be reproved; he will not go to the *wise*.
- Proverbs 9:7–12 — Whoever corrects a *scoffer* gets himself abuse, and he who reproveth a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you... If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

The question is, *why* do scoffers scoff? And the answer, we see, is that it's never *really* because of their intellectual learning or logical objections, but always ultimately because they want to follow their own sinful desires – to be free to do *what* they want and to live *how* they want. And so we see that the lusts of the flesh are always enlisting the mind and the intellect in their service – to promote and legitimize their own gratification. If I'm a scoffer, then that means that at the end of the day, all of my thinking and rationalizing is just the slave of my sinful desires. In other words, what I *know* "first of all" is what I want, and so it's what I want and what I desire that becomes the starting point for all the rest of my knowledge and for all of the ways that I interpret and think about the world. What I know first of all is what I want, and so this is what determines what I will think about the reasonableness, or the possibility—or even the nearness—of the coming of Christ in power to judge the world in righteousness. Don't let the scoffing of scoffers deceive you or intimidate and overwhelm you. Always remember that this scoffing is never ultimately driven by intellectual objections, but rather by this false "knowledge": by the constant, incessant, deeply rooted "knowing first of all" what *I want*.

What is it that you and I know first of all? Is ours a thinking and a "knowing" that has its starting point in our own sinful desires? Or is it a thinking and a knowing that has its starting point in the truth of God's word and in the revelation of His righteousness? What is it that you know first of all – every day? "...knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come *in the last days* with scoffing, following their own sinful desires."

III. 2 Peter 3:4 — They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

Last week, we read a number of passages from the Old Testament prophets that told of a future “coming” of the Lord to destroy all the ungodly sinners from the earth and to bring salvation to those who fear the Lord and who live righteous lives by faith (cf. Mal. 3:1-5; 4:1-3; Isa. 24:1-23; 59:14-20; Joel 3:12-16). So we see that for the ungodly and sinners, these prophecies are all warnings and threats, but for the righteous who fear the Lord, they’re actually promises that we wait for in expectation and hope. In the New Testament we learn that this coming of the Lord will be fulfilled in the coming of Christ at the end of this age as the one God has appointed to judge the living and the dead (cf. Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rev. 19:11-21). In other words, one day there will be an apocalyptic, cataclysmic, earth shaking, awe-inspiring, dread-inducing intervention of God into this world that He has created – to judge all the world in righteousness.

Now the false teachers cannot believe this—because they don’t want to believe this—because they want to be “Christians” and yet still have a measure of freedom to follow their desires. And so what we see them doing now is enlisting their reasoning and their intellect to help them deny what they don’t want to believe. And how is it that they *reason*? What is their *logic*? They say: “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” So their argument is essentially this: It won’t happen because it hasn’t happened. This argument was nothing new in Peter’s day. The scoffers in Jeremiah’s, and Isaiah’s, Ezekiel’s, and Malachi’s day all said much the same thing.

- Jeremiah 17:15 — Behold, they say to me, “Where is the word of the LORD [the threatened judgment]? Let it come!”
- Isaiah 5:18–19 — Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes, who say: “Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!”
- Ezekiel 12:22 — Son of man, what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, “The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing”?
- Malachi 2:17 — You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, “How have we wearied him?” By saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”

We said that the scoffer’s argument is this: “It won’t happen because it hasn’t happened”; but they would say that’s not fair. They would want us to say something like this: “It won’t happen because it hasn’t happened for hundreds and even thousands of years. In fact, nothing like this has ever happened before. Instead, ever since the fathers fell asleep (ever since God began his work of saving a people through His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob)—even ever since the beginning of creation—all things are continuing just as they were. Just look around you. The sun rises every morning and the sun sets every evening and the world goes on as it always has. That’s how it’s always been and therefore that’s how it will surely always be.

Is there any part of this argument that even feels somewhat convincing to us? The false teachers would say that they believed in the God who creates the world in the beginning and who saves His people in time – just not the God who will one day come with an apocalyptic, cataclysmic, earth-shaking, awe-inspiring, dread-inducing intervention into this world for the sake of judging and destroying the ungodly and rewarding the righteous. We may not be *formally* denying the

future coming of Christ in judgment, but isn't all of our sin a *practical* denial of this coming judgment? Doesn't all of our sin make us guilty, at some level, of being the "scoffer"? There *is* a fundamental difference between the false teachers' formal denial of Christ's future coming *so that* they can live the life they want to live and the true Christian's practical denial of Christ's future coming *by* the sins he commits, and yet we still see in this example of the false teachers a caution and a warning to us – don't we? How often do we approach the living of our own lives even from that basic perspective of the false teachers – maybe not in outright rebellion, but at least in that "quiet" skepticism that leads us to apathy and complacency? "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." And so in this way Satan would lull us all to sleep. It's because of the very real and present danger of this drowsiness and apathy that Peter goes on to write—not for the sake of the false teachers, but for our sake, for the sake of his beloved:

IV. 2 Peter 3:5 (cf. NASB) — For in desiring this [to be true] it is overlooked by them that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God...

Notice that Peter never says, "I can see how this argument might appear convincing at first..." In Peter's book, this is only the argument of a "scoffer" and so it has no true legitimacy at all. Notice what he says: "For *in desiring this to be true*—In *wanting* it to be true that all things will continue as they always have and that God will never intervene cataclysmically and apocalyptically in the world with His righteous judgments—In desiring and wanting that to be true it is overlooked by them..." If there's any "strength" at all in the false teachers' argument, it's not to be found in its own inherent reasonableness, but rather in the bias of their own sinful desires.

Because the false teachers want this to be true, therefore, Peter says, "It is overlooked by them that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God." Apparently, the false teachers "know" this, but they've overlooked its true meaning and significance. I wonder if to some extent maybe we have, too. The "heavens" refers to the realm of the sun and the moon and the planets and all the stars. So Peter's point is that the heavens and all the heavenly bodies came into existence suddenly and even cataclysmically,¹ in a moment, in a mere twenty-four hour period of time, *by the spoken word of God*. We read the account of creation and it can all sound so "tame" to us, but think about what it must have been like when that giant inferno that we call the Sun was brought into being – not to mention all the rest of the stars and planets and even entire galaxies. We use words like cataclysmic and apocalyptic to refer to a catastrophic destruction, but what we really need is words just like these to describe not a catastrophic destruction, but rather the overwhelming, awe-inspiring display of God's infinite power in the work of creation.

The heavens and the heavenly bodies were created *out of nothing*, but notice how Peter says that the earth was "*formed out of water and through water* by the word of God." The word for "formed" is never used anywhere else in the Bible for God's work of creation—this is the only

¹ "Cataclysm" generally refers to a violent event with disastrous and destructive results. Webster, however, also defines it broadly as "an event that brings great changes."

place—and it has the basic meaning of causing something to stand, or even to stand *together* (*synistemi*). We read in Genesis chapter one:

- Genesis 1:1–2 — In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The Bible tells us that the primeval earth was a watery chaos where no human could live. And then we read in verses 9-10:

- Genesis 1:9–10 — And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Do you see what God does in these verses? He causes the earth and the dry land to rise up out of the seas – to “stand up” or even to “stand up together” out of the primeval waters of chaos. Can you imagine what that must have been like? That was a cataclysmic event as fearful and awe-inspiring as anything you and I could conceive of. So we see that God formed the earth that we walk on by causing it to “stand up” out of the waters, and it’s in this sense that the earth or the dry land was formed “out of water and through water.”

The world we live in every day – from the earth we walk on to the heavens above and all of the heavenly bodies – is the result of a cataclysmic, earth-shaking, awe-inspiring, dread-inducing divine act of creation – “by the word of God.” Peter knows nothing of a natural evolutionary process that God directs and oversees and the ultimate reason for this is not that he’s ignorant of modern “scientific” theory but rather that he’s read Genesis chapter one. Why do unbelievers today promote evolution as scientific fact? It’s ultimately, always because what they know “first of all” is what they want (they crave the freedom to follow their own sinful desires), and so it’s what they want and what they desire that’s the starting point for all the ways that they interpret and think about the world. Why, then, do so many confessing evangelicals today teach the idea of theistic evolution – a “natural” evolutionary process of “creation” that God supernaturally directs over a period of millions of years? It’s ultimately because they’ve abandoned the Word of God as the foundation, or the starting point, of all true knowledge *and* because they want to make the Scriptures more palatable *to whom?* To *what kind* of people? Only to those who’ve made the foundation for all their “knowledge” their own sinful desires. But if theistic evolution is true, then we’re about to see that Peter’s argument cannot be true and therefore there really is no coming day of the Lord at all. What’s at stake in theistic evolution is nothing less than the Gospel itself and the ultimate climax of all of redemptive history.

The world we live in every day – from the earth we walk on to the heavens above and all of the heavenly bodies – is the result of a cataclysmic, earth-shaking, awe-inspiring, dread-inducing divine act of creation – “by the word of God.” What this *means* is that the present stability and predictability and “uniformity of the world we live in—with the sun that rises and sets every day and the seas that stay in their place and the dry land that’s firm beneath us—none of this is something that should ever be taken for granted by us. If God spoke once, causing the earth to

stand up out of the seas, why could He not speak again and cause all the world to be covered once again with water? In fact, isn't that exactly what God did do in the days of Noah?

“In desiring this to be true [that all things will continue as they always have] it is overlooked by [the scoffers] that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God...”

V. 2 Peter 3:6 — ...*and* that by means of [these same waters and this same word of God] the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

The flood is described not only by Peter, but also in Genesis as the reversal and the undoing of creation – not that the earth stopped existing, but rather that the earth no longer stood up out of the waters. In the flood there's a sense in which the earth returned to its original condition before the six days of creation. In the flood, the earth was covered by water once again so that all life on earth was destroyed – all except Noah and those who were with him in the ark. We read in Genesis chapter seven:

□ Genesis 7:11–12, 17–22 — In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights... And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.

Because the false teachers desired it to be true that God will never intervene cataclysmically and apocalyptically in the world with His righteous judgments, they overlooked the meaning—or they were blinded to the meaning—of the flood in the days of Noah. They probably believed that the flood happened, but maybe they rationalized like this: “That was also a long, long time ago, practically as far back as the creation itself, and nothing like that has ever happened since, so it really doesn't apply. It really doesn't contradict my belief that all things *now* are continuing and always will continue as they are – and as they've (“practically speaking”) always been. Brothers and sisters, do you see the foolishness of this reasoning? And yet do you see how sometimes were lulled into the same way of thinking?

What is the *meaning* of the original creation? What is the *meaning* of the flood? The meaning is that though the earth today is stable and predictable and uniform and has been even for thousands of years, this is by no means something we should ever be taking for granted. It's true that the flood is an event that's never been repeated in the history of the world, but do the false teachers remember *why* this is? Do *we* remember *why* this is? We read in Genesis chapter eight:

□ Genesis 8:20–22 — Then Noah built an altar to the LORD... and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his

youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

Why do all things continue in the stable, predictable, and uniform manner that they do? It's not ultimately because this is the natural way of things or because of the so-called “natural laws” of the universe. That's not why life on earth continues as it does day after day. So *why*, then? The Bible tells us that it's because of God's gracious covenant with Noah. It's because of the bow that He set in the cloud so that whenever He sees that bow he remembers His covenant – so that He will never again destroy all flesh from off the earth by the waters of the flood (cf. Gen. 9:18-17). We enjoy the stability of life on this earth—on dry, habitable land—only because God is daily, moment by moment, faithful to His covenant promise. Shouldn't this call forth from us our loudest praise and adoration? There was a time when the earth was nothing but a watery chaos cloaked in a primeval darkness. There was a time when God covered the earth a second time in that same watery chaos, destroying all life from off the face of the earth. So, then, what is this that we see all around us? It's the constant miracle, renewed day by day, of God's gracious, merciful, creative, sustaining power.

Every single day that the earth continues and that life on earth continues is a brand new proof to us that God is, even now in this moment, keeping His promise. And yet in the midst of that promise to Noah, did you also hear the note of warning?

“I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. *While the earth remains*, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

The point of these words is not that one day the earth will no longer be here. The point of these words is that one day the end of this age will come and when that day comes—and because of God's gracious covenant with Noah, *not until* that day comes—then God will once again intervene in the world cataclysmically and apocalyptically so that all the ungodly and sinners will perish—this time not only from off the face of the earth, but eternally in the fires of hell. Only the righteous, in that day—only those who've demonstrated the obedience of faith—will be saved. And so Peter concludes this section in verse seven:

VI. 2 Peter 3:7 — But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist [and the heavens and earth that have existed by God's grace ever since the flood] are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Notice how Peter says, “by the *same word*...” In verse five we saw that by the *word* of God the heavens existed and the earth was made to stand up out of the waters in that great cataclysmic event at the beginning of time. In verse six we saw that by the *word* of God the waters covered all the earth again in the apocalyptic flood of Noah's day, destroying everything in whose nostrils was the breath of life. And now here in verse seven, we see that it's “*by this same word*” that “the heavens and earth that *now* exist are *stored up* for fire, being *kept* until the day of

judgment and destruction of the ungodly.” Notice especially those words “stored up” and “kept.” Every single day that life on earth continues as it always has ever since the days of Noah should be to us not only a proof that God is faithful to keep His covenant promise, but also a fresh and brand new reminder that God has “stored up” and is even now “keeping” the earth *for* that final cataclysmic Day of the Lord when all the ungodly will perish in His righteous judgment.

Conclusion

Beloved, we know this *first of all*, “that scoffers will come *in the last days*[!] with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’” But we also *know* that “in desiring and wanting these things to be true it is overlooked by them that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these same waters and this same word of God the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.” And we know that “by the *same* word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”

The present stability, and predictability, and uniformity of the world is for us not the proof that God is not coming to judge the world, but rather the “proof” that He is, and therefore the daily call and command to us to be counted among those who have repented and who will find their refuge on that day in Christ alone.

- Malachi 4:1–3 — “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.