

## 2 Peter 3:12a

### Introduction

Over the last several weeks, we've seen how Peter has now thoroughly refuted the "scoffers." Peter has exposed the irrationality of those who say: "Where is the promise of [Christ's] coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation" (3:4). After refuting the scoffers, Peter concludes in chapter three and verse ten:

- 2 Peter 3:10 — But it will come—the day of the Lord—like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be laid bare.

Peter's goal here has never just been to win an argument. Peter knows as well as we do that the scoffers will never be convinced and will never concede defeat. That's the very nature of the scoffer. Peter's goal has never been to win an argument with the scoffers, but rather to call those of us who have believed to a certain *kind of living*. It does no good for us to "know" what will happen in the end if that knowledge isn't shaping how we live in the present. And yet there's also a sense in which the only way to truly live the kind of life that we're called to live in the present is to be motivated and compelled *by* the knowledge that we have of what will happen at the end. Christianity is about a *kind of living* that's only made possible when it's growing out of biblical truth; it's about a *quality of living* that's only made possible when its roots are sunk deep in the realities of Christ and the Gospel. Now we know that what will happen in the end is ultimately the consummation of the history of redemption through Jesus Christ. Therefore, knowing what will happen in the end and being fully convinced of what will happen in the end is, for Peter, a non-negotiable essential for the living of that kind of life that we've been called to live today. So Peter goes on to write in verses 11-12:

- 2 Peter 3:11–12a — Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, *what sort of people ought you to be* in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.

We saw last week that the point of Peter's words here is that we're called to live *now—in this world that's destined to be destroyed*—the life of that world that is yet to come. This week we're going to focus in on those words, "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God."

### I. 2 Peter 3:12a and the Sovereignty of God

As one commentator puts it, "This is a startling statement indeed"! (Kistemaker) At least it's startling to us. As soon as we read these words, we have to ask the question: How can *we* hasten the coming of the day of God? After all, it's the day of *God!* It's *His* day. Should we really think that He's left the timing of that day in any way "up to us" or under our "control"? Should we really think that the date of the redemptive-historical consummation of all things—the most important date in the whole history of the world—is still "up in the air," still to be determined in

some way by us? But isn't that what we have to conclude if it's true that we can hasten the coming of the day of God?

Because of how startling and how apparently unacceptable this idea is, there are some commentators who give an entirely different translation of the Greek here: "expecting and **being eager for** the [coming] of the day of God" (Lenski; cf. Calvin). One commentator writes:

"We need not labor the sense by taking *spseudo* in the sense of 'hasten,' speed up the coming of the day of the Lord, so that it will come sooner than it would otherwise come. We question whether the holy conduct of Christians can hasten the day of judgment, whether this is the teaching of the Bible." (Lenski)

The only problem here is that the evidence overwhelmingly favors the translation "waiting for and *hastening* the coming of the day of God." But what does this mean? Does it really mean that we can "speed up the coming of the day of the Lord, so that it will come sooner than it would otherwise come"?

Now listen to what this commentator says:

"These words ['hastening the coming of the day of God'] indicate that "the 'day of God' is not a fixed date but something that believers can *change* by their 'holy and godly lives.' ... Our author... declar[es] that the coming... of the Day of God is not a fixed date, but that under the sovereignty of God and due to his mercy... it can be sped up (or... slowed down) by the behavior of the followers of Jesus." (Davids)

That's a classic example of rationalism – of taking something the Scriptures say and then reasoning from what they say to a conclusion that appears to fit and even to be required, but is actually unbiblical.

If the Day of God is not a fixed date, but can be sped up or slowed down *by us*, then how can this commentator say that the timing of that Day is still "under the *sovereignty* of God"? Some would answer like this: "It's still under the sovereignty of God because God is the one who sovereignly decided that whenever we finally get around to meeting certain conditions, then the end will come." In other words, the timing of that final day is still under the sovereignty of God because God was never forced to make that day *dependent* upon the conditions that we meet, but this is what He sovereignly chose to do. But this is to turn the very meaning of sovereignty on its head. By the Bible's definitions, this is just God, in the end, "sovereignly" *choosing not* to be sovereign. There are many Christians who believe in this kind of "sovereignty" – the sovereignty of God whereby He sovereignly chooses not to be sovereign; He sovereignly chooses to make His plans and purposes dependent on you and me and on *our* "free will." Now I know that how we feel doesn't determine the truth of a matter, but I wonder if I could still ask you how this makes you feel? How does it make you feel to think that, among other things, the timing of the most important date in all the history of the world—the day of God and the appearing of Jesus Christ to bring salvation to us—is still "up in the air," still to be determined in some way by us? I don't know about you, but it makes me despair. That's a crushing weight and burden. And why is that, do you think? It's because when God sovereignly chooses not to be sovereign, that means

He's handing sovereignty over to us in the exercise of our own "free"—and now "sovereign"—wills. But we're limited and finite creatures (not to mention sinful), and so the very idea of this will always lead us either to pride and arrogance or to an overwhelming despair. When will *we* finally get our act together? When will the day of *God* finally come?

It's in light of the prospect of this kind of crushing weight and burden that we should be ever so relieved and joyful to be reminded that God *is* sovereign and we are *not*, and that God will never "sovereignly" choose to share His sovereignty with us.

- Acts 1:6-7 — So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority."
- Acts 17:30-31 — The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.
- Matthew 24:36 — But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

In the eternal decrees of God, absolutely nothing at all has been left to chance – least of all the timing of that final day and the consummation of redemptive history (cf. Mat. 24:44; 25:13; 1 Thess. 5:1-4). According to Jesus, the day and the hour has indeed already been fixed and determined by God.

When you say that you believe in the sovereignty of God, what do you mean? Do you mean that you believe in a God who has "sovereignly" chosen not to be sovereign – who leaves His plans and purposes up in the air, to be ultimately determined by you and me and by our own "free" and sovereign wills? Well, if that's not the sovereignty of God, then what is? How can Peter be calling *us* here to "hasten" the coming of the day of God?

## **II. 2 Peter 3:12a and the Responsibility of Man**

Leaving aside, for right now, any confusion we may have, what Peter's saying here is really a most amazing thing! It's our responsibility and our awesome privilege as Christians to be always hastening and always bringing closer and closer the coming of the day of God. As Christians, we're called to the task of daily hastening and bringing closer and closer *what?*— Nothing less than the consummation of redemption and the history of the whole world. Now as long as I'm truly convinced that God is still sovereign in this and that the coming of that day is ultimately fixed and determined and guaranteed by Him, then this call on my life to be hastening that day and bringing it nearer is truly an amazing and a wonderful thing. And how does Peter say that we do this? Remember what he's just said in verse nine:

- 2 Peter 3:9 — The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you [toward His elect in Peter's generation and in every generation], not being willing that any [of you / of His elect] should perish, but that all [of His elect in Peter's generation and in every generation] should reach repentance.

God has “delayed” the coming of the day of the Lord these two thousand years *for our sake* – so that we might be born, and live, and hear the Gospel, *and come to repentance*. But now we have to remember that there’s a sense in which “coming to repentance” isn’t just a “once and done” event. Repentance is a decisive turning: it’s a turning away from our sin because by faith we’ve come to hate our sin and it’s a turning to the Lord because by faith we’ve come to see in the Gospel that His commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:3), but rather that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Mat. 11:28-30). Can you see from this definition that repentance is a single, momentous event in our lives, but then it’s also a “condition” and a “state” that we live in every day? We’re called to be a “repentant” people, always bearing in our lives the fruits of repentance (Lk. 3:8) and performing the deeds that are in keeping with repentance (Acts 26:20). So what we learn from this is that God “delays” the coming of Christ not simply until the last of the elect has been converted and justified – as though it’s just a matter of getting to the right number of people to fill the roll call of heaven. That may be true as far as it goes, but it’s way too simplistic. Try to think about it like this. The coming of Christ is the *consummation* of all the fullness and richness of redemptive history – of God’s saving work in the lives of all His elect from beginning to end. In other words, the coming of Christ will be the *consummation* not just of our conversion and justification; it will also be the consummation of our sanctification in bearing daily—and always more and more—the fruits of repentance (cf. Rom. 6:22). So we see that it’s not necessarily true that Christ will come at the very moment that the last of God’s elect has believed. *Maybe* that’s true, but it’s not ultimately the point. It’s not just about the last of the elect to believe. It’s about *all* of the elect. It’s about the whole bride of Christ and His redeeming, sanctifying, saving work in order to present that bride to Himself “in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). Now we know that in one sense we won’t be perfectly holy and without blemish until the consummation when Christ returns and we see Him as He is (cf. 1 Jn. 3:2; Phil. 3:20-21). And yet Peter can still say in verse fourteen:

□ 2 Peter 3:14 — Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, bring all your energy to bear in order to be found by him **without spot or blemish**.

Peter’s point here isn’t that there are extra perks and rewards for over-achievers – *if* we go the “extra mile” and are found without spot or blemish. His point is that if we would enter the new heavens and the new earth, then this is how we must all be found by Him – we *must* all be found by Him without spot and without blemish (see sermon on 2 Peter 3:14-15a). This is a necessity for entrance into Christ’s eternal kingdom. Peter’s point here is not the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (though he does assume this as a foundation). Instead, his point is the holiness and righteousness that we must diligently strive for with all of His energy that powerfully works within us (Col. 1:29; cf. Eph. 3:20). Finally, Peter’s point is not that we’re required to attain sinless perfection in this life. And yet Peter does say that there is a real spotlessness and blamelessness that we *can* and *must* strive for in this life as we daily confess our sins and bear in our lives the growing fruits of repentance. It’s the living of *this* spotless and unblemished life that reaches its fulfillment and consummation at the coming of Christ and the creation of a new heavens and a new earth *in which righteousness dwells*.

- 1 Corinthians 1:7–8 — You are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Jude 24 — Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy...
- 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13 — May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23 — Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Colossians 1:21–23 — And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith...
- Philippians 1:9–10 — And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

What we learn from these passages of Scripture is that the coming of Christ will be the *consummation* not just of a certain number of people being saved, but rather of all the fullness and richness of redemptive history – of God’s redeeming, sanctifying, and saving work in the lives of all His elect from beginning to end. When we really understand and grasp this, then we’ll see that we “hasten” the coming of the day of God not just by working and praying and giving for the sake of the elect that still remain to be gathered in (cf. 2 Tim. 2:10); we also hasten the coming of the day of God by living lives of holiness and godliness ourselves (3:11b). We hasten the coming of the day of God by bringing all of our energy to bear so that we’re truly ready to be found by Him without spot or blemish. In other words, these lives of holiness and godliness are not only begun and enabled by Christ in the Gospel, but they also reach their completion and their consummation in Christ at His appearing. And so we see that the living of our “little,” “mundane” lives here on earth is caught up into something big. As Christians, the living of our lives is going somewhere. What we’re to be doing is always preparing the way, as it were, for the coming of the day of God, ***which is the consummation of His redeeming work in us***. It’s in the light of all this that Peter says that we, in the faithful living of our own lives, can actually be “hastening” and bringing closer and closer the coming of the day of God. Think about it! *We* are actually “hastening” the consummation of redemption and of the history of the whole world by living, every day, lives of true holiness and godliness. This is what we’re actually commanded to be doing—every single one of us. “What sort of people *ought* you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.”

### **III. Embracing the Mystery by Faith**

Are you beginning to get a picture, now, of what “hastening” really means? It doesn’t mean that God has fixed a date for the end, but that that date might actually be changed or moved up based on the lives we live. That’s not how Peter wants us to be thinking. Neither is Peter suggesting

there's been no date fixed at all and it still remains to be determined based on the lives we live.<sup>1</sup> He's not saying that any more than he's saying that the exact number of the elect is still to be determined based on our own faithfulness in evangelism. Remember that we joyfully confess the sovereignty of God, which means that God can never "sovereignly" choose not to be sovereign. Never fear! There's immeasurable encouragement and comfort just in knowing this.

And yet when God fixes dates and establishes times and seasons, He also incorporates into His purposes all the means that He will use in bringing about the things that He has planned – including even the free actions of human beings. We confess this great mystery in the words of the 1689 London Baptist Confession:

“From all eternity God decreed everything that occurs, without reference to anything outside of Himself. He did this by the perfectly wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably. **Yet God did this in such a way that... this decree does not violate the will of the creature or take away the free working... of second causes. On the contrary, these [second causes] are established by God's decree.**” (LBC 3:1)

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<sup>1</sup> **Isaiah 60:22** — The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the LORD; in its time I will hasten it. **Habakkuk 2:2–3** — And the LORD answered me: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it yearns/pants for the end [it is moving quickly (hastening) toward the end]—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. **Sirach 36:1–5, 12** (200-180 B.C.) — Have mercy upon us, O God of all, and put all the nations in fear of you. Lift up your hand against foreign nations and let them see your might. As you have used us to show your holiness to them, so use them to show your glory to us. Then they will know, as we have known, that there is no God but you, O Lord... Hasten the day, and remember the appointed time [or, “remember the oath”], and let people recount your mighty deeds. **2 Baruch 83:1–6** (approximately contemporary with Peter) — The Most High will assuredly hasten His times, and He will assuredly bring on His hours. And He will assuredly judge those who are in His world, and will visit in truth all things by means of all their hidden works. And He will assuredly examine the secret thoughts, and that which is laid up in the secret chambers of all the members of man. And will make (them) manifest in the presence of all with reproof. Let none therefore of these present things ascend into your hearts, but above all let us be expectant, because that which is promised to us shall come. And let us not now look unto the delights of the Gentiles in the present, but let us remember what has been promised to us in the end. For the ends of the times and of the seasons and whatsoever is with them shall assuredly pass by together. **2 Baruch 54:1** — I sought the Mighty One, and said: “You alone, O Lord, know from of old the deep things of the world, and the things which befall in their times you bring about by your word, and against the works of the inhabitants of the earth you hasten the beginnings of the times, and the end of the seasons you alone know.” **2 Baruch 20:1–2, 5–6** — Therefore, behold! the days come, and the times shall hasten more than the former, and the seasons shall speed on more than those that are past, and the years shall pass more quickly than the present (years). Therefore have I now taken away Zion, that I may the more speedily visit the world in its season... Go therefore and sanctify yourself seven days... And afterwards come to that place and I will reveal Myself to you, and speak true things with you, and I will give you commandment regarding the method of the times; for they are coming and will not delay. [“Jerusalem has fallen, and the years intervening before the judgement will therefore be shortened”; Commentary on the Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament] **Epistle of Barnabas 4:2–3** (shortly after the time of Peter) — Let us therefore flee altogether from all the works of lawlessness, lest the works of lawlessness overpower us; and let us loathe the error of the present time, that we may be loved for that which is to come. Let us give no relaxation to our soul that it should have liberty to consort with sinners and wicked men, lest perhaps we be made like them. The last offence [struggle/conflict] is at hand, concerning which the scripture speaks, as Enoch says. For to this end the Master has cut the seasons and the days short, that His beloved might hasten and come to His inheritance.

Can you see, now, why even though the time of Christ's coming has been established before the foundation of the world in the sovereign decree of God, yet we still pray earnestly that He would come and that He would come soon?

- Matthew 6:9–10 — Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
- Revelation 22:20 — He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
- 1 Corinthians 16:22 — If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!

A little further on in the confession we read this:

“All things come to pass unchangeably and certainly in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, who is the first cause. Thus, nothing happens to anyone by chance or outside of God's providence. **Yet by the same providence God arranges all things to occur according to the nature of second causes.**” (LBC 5:2)

Can you see, now, why even though the timing of the day of God has been established unchangeably and certainly in the sovereign decree of God, yet we still earnestly seek to live such lives as will be “hastening” that day and bringing that day always closer and closer? We see this wonderful mystery on full display in Acts chapter three when Peter says:

- Acts 3:19–21 — *Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, [in order] that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and [in order] that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.*

In the Old Testament prophets the timing of this day is not still up in the air, but is already fixed and determined by God, and yet Peter still exhorts his hearers to repent *in order that* that day might come.

These are things that we come to understand not so much by rationally fitting everything together in our brains, but rather by the exercise of faith. And so when we're able to embrace this mystery by faith, then what we'll see is a whole new dimension of what it really means to be “waiting” for the coming of the day of God. Peter's word for waiting has the idea of “watching” and “expecting” and “looking eagerly” for something (cf. Lk. 7:20; 8:40; Acts 10:24). He mentions this “waiting” three times in just three verses:

- 2 Peter 3:11–12 — What sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, **waiting for** and hastening the coming of the day of God...
- 2 Peter 3:13 — But according to his promise we are **waiting for** new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.
- 2 Peter 3:14 — Therefore, beloved, since you are **waiting for** these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

Doesn't this make you feel the need to ask yourself a simple question: "Am I *waiting*?" But what does this "waiting" look like? What does it mean? It means living *now*—*in this world that's destined to be destroyed*—the life of the new heavens and the new earth that is yet to come. That's what we saw last week. Now this week we see that the Christian's "waiting" means striving every day to live lives that are actually hastening that day—that are actually bringing that day closer and closer—until its glorious arrival – until not only my own life but the whole bride of Christ and all of redemptive history finally reaches its consummation in that great "day of God" when Christ returns, bringing with Him a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

### **Conclusion**

Are you waiting for that day?—Which is to say: Are you living your life in order to hasten that day and bring that day ever closer and closer? Here is an amazing thing: Within the context of the absolute sovereignty of God and His eternal and unchangeable decree, you and I are called to the task of daily hastening and bringing closer and closer *what*? The consummation of redemption at the appearing of Christ.

So then, let us hasten that day—watching always with eager longing and expectation. Let us hasten that day by living today the life of that world that is yet to come. Let us show by the lives we live today that we mean what we say when we pray as the Lord taught us to pray: "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Mat. 6:9-10)