

Preparing for Christ's Return

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[0 : 0 0] before we come to the preaching of the word let's just have a prayer our father we thank you that you have given us this your word we ask now that as we hear it that we would have open hearts open minds that your spirit would move among us and that we would be obedient to its truth in jesus name amen when i was growing up there was a aog church in the next street and i spent many a saturday evening during the 1970s probably before most of you were born spending evangelistic spending my time watching evangelistic movies there and of course a favorite theme of many of these movies was the return of the lord jesus christ now this is no surprise given that one of the best sellers of the time was a book called the late great planet earth by hel lindsey and the foundation of the state of israel in 1948 had been seen as a pivotal moment in ushering in the last generation of the last days the so-called budding of the fig tree so there was great expectation of a date around 1981 82 so i can't give you a date anyway it's already passed um nevertheless there was one movie which i saw more than once and that i'll never forget because it was designed to frighten all of us into heaven it was called like a thief in the night and while i no longer subscribe to most of its more lurid eschatological emphases eschatology for those who don't know or don't like big words means the doctrine of the last times nevertheless its fundamental message has never left me you see when christ comes back it will be like a thief in the night at a moment when you least expect him he will return to take his people home and to judge the world but more of this in a little while firstly i need to just make some introductory remarks about our passage tonight peter has written this second epistle primarily to stir up his listeners to remember to remember some very important things and he says so a number of times throughout the epistle to remember what he has taught them so that they be reminded of how they should live and to remember the words of god's messengers now his audience in this epistle are a group of believers who are clearly very dear to his heart and he also makes it very clear um in chapter one that jesus has actually revealed to him that he is coming to the end of his apostolic ministry moreover he wants them to be in no doubt as to his to their standing before god in chapter in verse 10 of chapter 1 he actually says to them therefore be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure unfortunately this is a congregation that has been invaded by false teachers and peter spends nearly all of chapter 2 denouncing these teachers as vile irrational lust-filled self-serving dogs it's actually a vitriolic attack that will probably inspire court cases in our politically correct tolerance idolizing times on the other hand peter presents himself in his fellow apostles and stark relief to these deviants in verses 16 to 21 of chapter 1 and one of probably the most beautiful passages in

scripture he says for we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our lord jesus christ but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty for he received honor and glory from god the father when that voice was conveyed to him by the majestic glory saying this is my son my beloved with whom i am well pleased we ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain so we have a prophetic message more fully confirmed you will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts first of all you must understand this that no script prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation because no prophecy ever came by human will but men and women moved by the holy spirit spoke from god you see peter's authority is founded upon being an eyewitness to the glory of the risen christ and he is a recipient and a proclaimer of holy spirit inspired truth it is not however until tonight's passage in chapter 3 that he actually gets to the content of what these false teachers have been propagating their particular heresy is this they were denying the coming again of the savior i was given the title of tonight's sermon which is preparing for christ's return and christ's return is always a weighty matter that that really deserves our careful attention since as we will see it is imperative for every one of us here tonight to be prepared for that day because the sure and certain coming of jesus christ means also that there is to be a day of reckoning and if a day of reckoning or a day of judgment what the prophets called the great and terrible day of the lord then the question that peter poses to his listeners in verse 11 is also important to us and that question is this what kind of people ought we to be so let's go to our passage then in verse 1 this is now beloved the second letter i am writing to you in them i am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you we should be immediately struck by the repetition of this idea of remembrance of remembrance i am writing again to remind you i won't go into the details but because of what we know of the message and audience of 1 peter it is unlikely that peter is referring to that letter here rather he is more likely referring to a letter now lost but don't be alarmed by this not every letter written by the apostles was preserved by god to be part of the canon we know from the corinthian epistles that there is a missing third letter that paul mentions as well as a letter to laodicea referred to in colossians which has not survived in verse 1 peter also uses this great term of a term of great endearment this is a beloved congregation for whom he cares greatly and i think this is a message for us tonight as well that we need to be much like peter in a concern for those whom we serve here and further afield you know if you were to read chapter 2 which i've already mentioned the kind of terminology he uses and then into chapter 3 you can't help noticing the change in tone so it's peter's earnest and urgent desire to stir up their sincere minds that they should remember the words spoken in the past

by the holy prophets and the commandment of the lord and savior spoken through your apostles the things to be remembered are contained in the words of the prophets and the apostles it is these same words that should be stirring our hearts and minds to love and action too this should be our test always do we go back to the source of truth when we are being troubled by doubts or attacks or the manipulative persuasion of false teachers i studied engineering at uni in what now seems like a lifetime ago but i have never forgotten the mantra that my professors drummed into us when in doubt go back to first principles i'll say it again when in doubt go back to first principles because i never ever got said once and it should be the same for us as believers our first principle is the word of god go back to the bible test every teaching even tonight especially tonight see if what is being taught is consistent and aligned with the whole word of god because this is the commandment of our lord and savior so we have to ask ourselves why is peter so keen for them to know their scriptures as he says in verse 3 because first of all you must understand this that in the last days scoffers will come scoffing and indulging their own lusts scoffers what an emotive word that is the writer to psalm 1 has a very similar message to peter blessed are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path that sinners tread or sit in the seat of scoffers but their delight is in the law of the lord and on his law they meditate day and night so who were these scoffers we'll find out soon enough what they were scoffing about but the first thing we know is that they only care about indulging their own lusts their concern is not for the truth but for what they can gain in the context of tonight's message they only have an eye for the now not for eternity and peter implores his listeners to understand that this is nothing to be surprised about you see the last days will be characterized by those who mock and deny god's promises and his warnings of course whenever we consider christ's return we have to pay serious attention to this phrase the last days because unfortunately it has been sorely misused fundamentally however its consistent usage in the new testament is that these last days began after pentecost if you recall peter's preaching at pentecost he quotes the prophet joel in the last days i will pour out my spirit and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams and he goes on to tell them that this prophecy has been fulfilled so peter's audience in jerusalem are in the last days as is congregation reading the epistle and so also are we in the last days already as we have been for the last two thousand years of the church age therefore it should not surprise us either to find that we are surrounded by scoffers scoffers and mockers too verse 4 goes on to tell us what these scoffers were saying where is the promise of his coming forever since our ancestors died all things continue

as they were from the beginning of creation basically what they're saying is nothing's changed they're saying you know you guys had this great anticipation of jesus coming back soon and what's it been what 30 years now and nothing in fact you should be realistic and admit that nothing has really changed at all from the beginning since our forefathers fell asleep we are born we live we die and go to the grave does that sound familiar it should it is the conclusion of a mechanistic evolution centric world view that has removed all thought of god from its calculations the only purpose that humankind can aspire to is to be found in living this life essentially it's what you make of your brief time before you return to the primordial stuff of the big bang that counts you silly christians you who need the crutch of religion to give you purpose open your eyes the only thing 2000 years of religion has got us is this war and strife intolerance and persecution your pie in the sky hope means that you're of no earthly use

I bet you've all heard or read similar sentiments but Peter has news for these mockers verse 5 they deliberately ignore this fact that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished bit tough to read quickly but what he's saying is that these scoffers choose to overlook the facts before them you see things have changed this earth is not the same as the one at the beginning God's judgment has already been felt by the planet because of the sinfulness of its inhabitants at the flood God had enough of the wickedness of his creation and he destroyed them in a deluge the NRSV in verse 6 says that by means of water the world was destroyed however other versions like the ESV and the New American Standard Version actually say by means of these the world was destroyed that is it was by water but it was importantly also by the word of God that the world was destroyed you see the force and the material that were in play at creation are the same force God's word and the same material water that are behind the uncreation that happened in Noah's day and Peter treats this event as a fact a real event in God's dealings with his creation and so should we the same God who created all things has been warning us that his patience is not limitless we see in verse 7 that by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless verse 6 referred to the world of that time the world that existed contrasting it with the present these present heavens and earth the heavens and earth that now exist clearly Peter is making sure that they understand there is a difference things have changed and those who say nothing has changed are deluding themselves what is more what's more dangerous for them and more dangerous for us if we are taken in by this is they are blinding themselves to the reality and to the consequence that a day of judgment has always been reserved by God from the beginning this is no afterthought on the part of God no second judgment because the world failed again post Noah it has always been part of the plan and what's more is that day of judgment has a more terrible side to it because it includes the destruction of the wicked and you don't only have to go to the flood to see this the scriptures are full of evidence of the judgment of God upon his chosen people Israel and even the nation surrounding them you see it is a false and it is a heretical teaching to talk only of the God of love you know this God of love found in the New Testament as if he's different from the God that we encounter in the Old you have to know this and you have to take it as fundamental fact God is immutable he does not change

[17 : 32] the god that created the god that deals with israel and the canaanites in ways that we cannot understand is the same god who sent christ at christmas the same god who we rejoiced of his gift during the christmas stories he does not change you know after the flood god covenanted with noah that never again would he destroy the world but that's not where it ended he covenanted never to again destroy it by water and he will not you see in the next judgment the destruction will be by fire by an all consuming fire fire but behind it is actually the same force responsible for the flood the judgment will come about by the word of god you know and if the scoffers are guilty of ignoring the facts peter has a message too for us that we should be careful not to do likewise verse 8 says but do not ignore this one fact beloved that with the lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day the lord is not slow about his promise as something slowness but is patient with you not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance you'll have noticed that there are a few buts in these next few verses and but is a word which should always make us pause when we are encountered in scripture having proclaimed the certainty of just of judgment peter tells these believers to make sure that their view of god is correct otherwise they will be sucked in by the apparently clever questions of the scoffers you know in spite of mentioning one fact peter says do not ignore this one fact he goes on to make two points about god firstly our god is not constrained by time like we are you see he dwells in eternity in comparison even with the entire timeline of biblical history from adam until now it is but a blink of an eye to him but it's not simply that time behaves differently for god rather there is an intentionality about his slowness you see it is infused with mercy going back to the example of noah we see if we look carefully at the passage that noah spent a hundred years not only building the ark but also preaching to his wayward generation before the lord closed in that small group of eight who escaped the judgment of the flood so even in the greatest judgments we see in scripture we see god's merciful patience and thus it's the same with the final judgment only god's merciful patience has kept the day at bay so far but when we come to verse 10 we come to the most important but in tonight's message but the day of the lord will come like a thief and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise and the elements will be dissolved with fire and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed judgment judgment is coming the coming of the day of

the lord will be unexpected we will be busy with the pursuits and follies of this life when that last trumpet sounds and an end is called to this world there will be no prior warning and we should know this that this day has been and remains imminent there is nothing that must still happen the warning of which will give us time to make right with god now is the time today is the day you see our appointment with judgment is always imminent for we know not when we will die as in that parable about the rich man building larger barns for his accumulated wealth who had to learn that that very night he would be required to give an account of himself so also verse 10 makes clear the great day of the lord is not only about refining fire which is needed before the new creation can be made known it is also about the exposure of all the works done on it for the scriptures make plain before the great judgment seat of god we will have to give an account of what we have done in this life and whether the second coming or our own death both are always imminent events tonight might be the night for one of you or it might be the night for all of us so now we get to the real crux of this passage verses 11 and 12 since all these things are to be dissolved in this way what sort of people ought you to be 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 melt with fire in the face of the truth of christ's return and the judgment that accompanies it this is the question that every one of us must answer what sort of people ought you to be now peter is writing to believers so he gives them some pointers but i think we have to address this question first tonight to those here who are not believers or who are not sure you see maybe the mockers and the scoffers have intimidated you into thinking that christian belief is intellectual suicide maybe the eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die philosophy of our age is too enticing and what do you know christianity is so boring anyway maybe you are being challenged by the word of god and the example of other believers but you're putting off that that decision putting off just that you've got too many other things to do there is only one thing that i must tell you it's all going to be burned up the cerebral and the intellectual life the material abundance those monuments to human achievement the palaces and temples dedicated to the worship of fun and pleasure all gone all meaningless as ecclesiastes made clear so long ago on that great and terrible day there is one hope however peter explained it to those at pentecost those who were cut to their hearts and asked what they needed to do he said to them repent and be baptized in the name of christ jesus for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the holy spirit and to

that same group he also said save yourselves from this crooked generation a generation of mockers and scoffers like we are in so with contrite hearts confess your need for a savior before you face him at the judgment seat repent and turn to him for he will surely not reject any who turn to him in humility romans 10 9 tells us that if you confess with your mouth that jesus is lord and believe in your heart that god raised him from the dead you will be saved but what about we who believe tonight do we escape how should we then live well peter makes it clear that ours should be lives of holiness and godliness anticipating his return we should not live like the world lives we have been set apart that's what holy means for his service and that service is important in the context of this truth because in some mysterious way peter says that we can hasten the coming of the day of god you know this was an idea that inspired the great missionary movements of the 18th and 19th century as they sought to save the lost and it should inspire us too how do we hasten the day we hasten it by proclaiming the truth of the gospel of christ for we know that he will come again when the full number of the elect is brought in and we're his chosen vessels weak as we are to proclaim that word and evangelize the lost the fact that many are facing such a terrible future before the wrath of

God should move us to compassion and an urgency to announce the good news to all who are lost and outside the fold so often it is the complexities of the various views explaining the prophecies of the return of Christ that grab us but instead we should be moved by the fact that many are still outside the kingdom with no hope unless they hear the word so this is our rightful response to the fact of judgment but why because there is more to his promise than destruction alone verse 13 says but in accordance with his promise we wait for the new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells after he returns and judges the wicked he will remake the heavens and the earth and he will live with his people only righteousness will be found in that place and there will be no more death there will be no more illness and no more weeping the scoffers may decry this as pie in the sky but their hope is in a decaying world which is on permanent notice

I I I I I prefer to believe Peter who saw Christ in his risen glory and who comes to us with no well devised myth but rather the liberating truth of a lamp shining in a dark place so what must we conclude a day of reckoning is coming some here might be disappointed that in a sermon on the second coming I did not get into the whys and the wherefores of that event suffice it to say it will appear like a thief in the night so you need rather to answer that you are prepared you are prepared to face the judge because your hope is firmly founded on the saving grace of Jesus Christ and that this hymn reflects your expectation o day for which creation and all its tribes were made o joy for all its former grief a thousand fold repaid the armies of the ransom have fought with death and sin fling open wide the mighty gates to let the victors in bring near your great salvation o lord return again to gather all your chosen flock then take your power and reign appear desire of nations your exiles long for home show in the heavens your promised sign then prince and saviour come cultures you