

## 2 Peter 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] Do turn back with me in your Bibles to 2 Peter chapter 3, which is on page 1019 of the Church Bibles.

! And at first hand, it seems frankly a bit silly and a bit flippant, a bit of a waste of someone's money to put these things on the side of the bus.

It's a slogan dreamt up as a comedian, and perhaps we might be tempted to just laugh it off. But I think, perhaps accidentally, perhaps really quite knowingly, that slogan touches on something fairly deep, doesn't it?

It's something that's been gnawing at mankind for a very long time. There probably is no God, you can't stop worrying and enjoy your life. There's two parts to that statement, aren't there?

The first part is a kind of pessimistic scepticism. There probably is no God. This is it. There's nothing left after life. Nothing more.

[ 1 : 28 ] Nothing really looking down and smiling when you do good. There's no one who cares. This is it. This is all there is. This world full of civil wars. Some sets, yes, but civil wars and diseases.

Beautiful mountains, lovely animals, and sin and pain and misery. This is it. This is all there is.

There probably is no God. The first part is a gloomy scepticism, isn't it?

But it seems to be driven by that second part. There probably is no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life. This pessimism is seen by so many as liberation.

There is no God. There's no judge. There's no eternal consequences to what you do now. Just stop all that worrying. There's a 112 million percent chance that there's nothing out there.

The percentage doesn't work, doesn't it? But it's very unlikely there's anything out there. So let's just quit worrying. Let's just enjoy our lives. We'll have much more fun. And it sounds like a modern statement, doesn't it?

[ 2 : 32 ] I think the people who make statements like this like to think of this as being the height of enlightenment after however millennia we finally come to this position. But really, there's nothing new about this statement at all.

It's been there since the beginning of time. And at root, it's this challenge that Peter is dealing with in 2 Peter chapter 3. There's probably no God. So just enjoy your life.

We're going to look this evening at how Peter answers this challenge. We're going to look at it broadly in three sections. Firstly, we're going to analyse the challenge itself, roughly looking at verses 1 to 4.

Then we're going to see Peter's very direct and pretty blunt response to this challenge in verses 5 to 7. And then his broader explanation. Well, where is God?

Where is he? In verses 8 to 10. Firstly, the challenge that comes to the churches Peter's writing to. We see it in verses 3 and 4, don't we? Knowing this, first of all, the scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing.

[ 3 : 36 ] 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.

Come on, Christians. Where is the promise of his coming? Jesus has said he's coming back, but where is he? Are you sure you heard it right? You didn't just misunderstand something he said. It's been 30 years now since he ascended. Where is he? Surely he didn't really mean it. There probably is no God. There probably is no second coming.

It's quite a lot like that bus campaign, isn't it? But unlike that bus campaign, there's something more sinister, more insidious about this scoffing. This scoffing comes from within the church.

It's a challenge from not outside. It's not smug atheists who perhaps you can laugh off. It's a challenge from within the church. The scoffers come and they say, well, maybe he's not coming back.

[ 4 : 40 ] We know this from the context of the book. Chapter 1 of 2 Peter. Peter is addressing really the certainty of the apostolic teaching. He goes back to basics and says, everything we've taught you is true.

Chapter 1, verse 16. For we did not follow cleverly desired myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses to his majesty. This stuff I've told you, I didn't make it up.

I didn't come with my own idea of the gospel. I got it firsthand. You can trust the apostolic word. And then chapter 2, having reasserted the authority of the apostolic word, Peter goes on and introduces us to the false teachers who've come to usurp that apostolic word.

We're introduced to them, really, in chapter 2, verses 1 and 2. But false prophets also arose among the people. Just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the master who brought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality. And because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words. The apostolic word is reaffirmed in chapter 1.

[ 6 : 00 ] In chapter 2, we're given an introduction to who these false teachers are, to their character. And now in chapter 3, really, Peter is addressing the specific heresies they have, the specific challenge they're bringing to the church.

And it's this. Where is the promise of his coming? It's more insidious than just an attack from outside. And I'd imagine that this would have hit the church that Peter's speaking to particularly hard.

Peter makes it clear in verse 1, doesn't he, that this is his second letter. This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. The only other letter we have from Peter is his first letter. So it seems a reasonable assumption that he's writing to the same people.

If not to exactly the same people, then they'll be the same group of churches that he pastored to.

And we know from the book of 1 Peter that the Christians he's writing to are oppressed.

He calls them the elect exiles of the dispersion. They're spread out all across the ancient Near East. And they're isolated. They're marginalized. They're not in Christian societies.

[ 7 : 05 ] They're surrounded by pagan beliefs. They're feeling cut off, perhaps, from Jerusalem. They're feeling cut off from Christianity. And in 1 Peter, they need real encouragement.

And in the first book that Peter writes, he encourages them by directing them to the second coming of Jesus. Even now, if you are suffering with trials, yet just for a little while, he encourages them with the certainty of a future judgment and the second coming of Jesus.

He talks about the treasure, the imperishable riches that are hidden for us, waiting for the day when Jesus appears for a second time. So you can imagine, this church is really struggling with the claim that Jesus might not come back.

It's the only thing that's encouraging them to hold on. So why? If that's the only thing that would keep you hanging on when you're a persecuted church, why would any Christian deny that hope? Why would these false teachers come? Surely that would undermine and defeat the whole point of the faith they're supposed to be teaching. Well, there's a little phrase that gives them away in verse 3, doesn't it?

[ 8 : 19 ] That describes these scoffers. The scoffers will come in the last days scoffing, following their own sinful desires. These scoffers, we're told, are coming with their sinful desires in mind.

The reason they come with this challenge is not because they've found a new truth, not because they've worked something out that Peter was too dense to understand, not because they've got some new revelation, but it's because there's some motivation there.

They want to get away with something, frankly. We get a snapshot into the attitudes of these scoffers in chapter 2, verse 19. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption.

For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defiance of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome.

The last state has become worse for them than the first. These are people who want to justify a libertarian living, a life free from law, free from regulation, free from any morality, on the grounds that it satisfies their sinful desires.

[ 9 : 32 ] Their motivation is not truth, it's their sinful desire. At the end of the passage, we're looking at today 2 Peter 3, did you notice that slightly awkward phrase, where we find that Peter found Paul difficult to understand?

Quite an encouragement, really, isn't it? It's right at the end, verse 16. Peter says, doesn't he, there are some things in Paul's writings that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures.

And I think this really helps us understand what the specific false teaching would be. Martin actually referred to it this morning, in Romans 6. Do you remember if you were here, Martin was talking about how Paul teaches grace so strongly that people might be tempted to think that sin might even be a good thing.

We have a God who forgives, who forgives our sin no matter how bad we are. But why don't we just keep on sinning? If grace is so great, if God is so merciful, why don't we just keep on sinning? And it seems to be that that is the real challenge here. Look, Jesus isn't going to judge us. Where is the promise of his coming? He's not going to judge us for this sin. We can carry on as we have been.

[ 10 : 49 ] We can carry on in our old ways. It's as if they're saying, look, you followers of Peter, we've gone back to Paul, and you're just, you're taking it all a bit too seriously. Jesus is not coming back to judge.

He's not going to stop you from enjoying your life. Do you know, there probably is no God. Why don't you just stop worrying? Stop worrying, calm down, and enjoy your life. It's the same as our bus posters, isn't it?

And it's actually the oldest lie in history. It's the oldest lie in history. We can find it right back in Genesis. Turn with me quickly to Genesis chapter 3. Genesis chapter 3.

Eve and Adam are in the garden. They're in the garden that God's created for them. And the serpent, Satan, comes to them. And we read, Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God made.

He said to the woman, Did God actually say to you, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden? Where is the promise of his coming?

[ 12 : 00 ] Did God actually say to you, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, But God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, Neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die. You will not surely die. Where is the promise of his coming? He's not going to judge you.

That's not the kind of God you've got. You shall not surely die. There probably is no God. There probably is no judgment. Why don't you calm down and just enjoy your life?

That's the lie of those of us posters. That's the lie that's being faced by the church here. And that's the lie that Satan would come to us today. And it's not a first century problem, is it?

We hear that snake voice in our ears from all sorts of corners, don't we? We hear from the world around us, Not just on posters on the street, Not just from blatant, aggressive atheism, But from the general culture of our society, don't we?

[ 13 : 03 ] A society that says, Well, if it hasn't hurt anyone, Then there's nothing wrong with it. There's no judgment. There's no final comeuppance. Frankly, if you can get away with it, Why not? It might be fun.

We hear it from our society, don't we? You shall not surely die. Where is the promise that is coming? Shockingly, sometimes we hear it from the church, don't we?

We hear it from obvious liberalism sometimes. A church that completely denies that certain things are sins. But we can hear it as well from people who call themselves evangelicals.

Every problem in church history, it seems, I'm sure church historians will correct me, But it seems to be on an overemphasis of one truth over another. And there seems to be a massive habit at the moment of saying, Well, God is love.

Talking so much about love that we say, Well, you shall not surely die. Where is the promise of his coming? We can emphasise love so much that there's no judgement anymore. And I think there are

some evangelicals who can fall foul of that.

[14:04] We hear it from the world, we hear it from the church, But don't we most often hear it in ourselves? When we're sitting at home, And we know that we're committing the same old sins again. But we also know that we've got away with it yesterday.

We got away with it the day before, So we say to ourselves, Well, you shall not surely die. Where is the promise of his coming? Jesus hasn't come back yet. He probably won't come back for a week or so.

So I'll wait. I'll wait. I'll sort this out another time. It's the same devil lie, isn't it, that we hear. There probably is no God. Where is the promise of his coming?

You shall not surely die. That's the problem we're facing here. So, how does Peter deal with it? How does Peter address this problem? Well, we get a very blunt response in verses 5-7.

Frankly, it's very blunt. There's a very direct answer here. This challenge, this statement, relies on a willful ignorance of the truth. A willful ignorance.

[15:06] Just find my page. The challenge the scoffers bring, we read in verse 5, is because they deliberately overlook a fact.

They deliberately overlook a fact. You can't bring this challenge, you can't promote this lie without deliberately overlooking the fact. What is the fact?

Well, let's read. They deliberately overlook this fact 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, the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

By that 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. What is it that's being overlooked here?

What is this willful ignorance? Well, they're overlooking the word, aren't they? They're overlooking the word of God and the certainty of it. Did you see? The earth is created by God's word.

[16:16] The heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God. God created through the word. And then, at Noah's time, God destroyed through the word.

And that by means of these, the word, the world that then existed was deluged by water and perished. God created by the word. He's destroyed by the word in the past.

And now we read verse 7, but by that 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. God created through his word, the word of power.

He has brought judgment before by his word. And now it's that same word that comes to us in judgment, that promises that Jesus will return to bring the ultimate hope of Christians with him and to bring judgment upon our world.

Essentially, the point that Peter makes here is that God doesn't cry wolf and it's foolish to think he does. If God says he's going to do something, he's going to do it. He's shown us how he is in the past.

[17:28] We've seen in the past. Did you notice in the Scoffler's statement, they actually get it wrong, don't they? 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.

They've got that wrong, haven't they? They've forgotten Noah's flood. They've forgotten history. They're deliberately overlooking the fact that when God has promised judgment in the past, it's come. And now we're in the same situation.

God has promised judgment. It really will come. God doesn't cry wolf. Where is the promise of his coming? Peter is asked. And he says, well, I don't know.

It's not mine to say. I don't know where it is. But I know that it's his promise. So it's going to happen. It's not mine to say when. But it's his promise.

So I trust it. There's an implicit reference in the background here, isn't there, to Noah. And to Noah's attitude towards a promise of God for judgment.

[18:30] I think it illustrates the kind of faith that we as Christians, living in this period, waiting for the coming of Jesus, should have. I don't know if you've ever thought about it, but it would have taken a long time to build the ark.

It's a big boat. You can work it out. Well, you can try and piece it together by the ages of Noah and his sons. And it looks like it may have taken Noah around about 100 years to build the ark.

Now, that's a little inaccurate because you have to guess at some of the ages. But it was a long time to build the boat. And I would imagine he would have looked absolutely mad to everyone around him, wouldn't he?

Building a big boat a long way from water. It wasn't even a dry dock. He's building a huge boat for a flood that he's been promised by God. You can imagine that every time a little rain shower comes, people are loved in it.

Hey Noah, here's your flood. Is it going to flood us this time? You can imagine that people would have come to it and said, well, come on, where is this flood that you're so busy preparing for? We've barely seen a rain cloud this year.

[ 19 : 32 ] Where is this flood? Where is the promise of this coming? He would have looked absolutely ridiculous. You'd imagine at times in that 100 years or however long it was, he would have doubted.

Well, maybe I have got this wrong. Maybe I misheard. Maybe I did this wrong. But he trusted in the word of God, didn't he? He continued on what looked like a foolhardy scheme.

He built his boat. And only he and his family survived. He trusted in the word of God when it looked frankly ridiculous to the world around him. How much more should we trust?

You think Noah, Noah had so little of the world's history in place to see. Perhaps, perhaps he knew about Adam and Eve in the garden. Perhaps he knew of the handful of dealings God had had with people before that.

But he didn't know about the covenants. He didn't know about God's grace to his people Israel.

He'd never even heard Jesus' name. He hadn't seen the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

[ 20 : 34 ] He hadn't seen how our Lord has time and time again come to us and been faithful to us. And yet he trusted. How much more should we as his people who've got all this knowledge, all this evidence of his faithfulness to us, trust that if God has said he's coming, he's coming.

Where is the promise of his coming? Well, we don't know. We don't know. It's not ours to know. But it's his promise. So, we'll trust it. That's Peter's direct response.

But perhaps it's leaving us a little underwhelmed. It gives us confidence, doesn't it? God's word is certain. We know the second coming is coming. It gives us confidence.

But it doesn't necessarily give us comfort, does it? You can imagine the church that Paul's writing to sitting there and thinking, well, that's all very well, but where is he now? Where is he now while I need him?

This is a suffering church. I imagine a church perhaps not dissimilar to the church in Nigeria at the moment, Egypt, Syria, where people are persecuted for their faith.

[ 21 : 47 ] You can almost hear them, perhaps, singing the word of that hymn we sung earlier, the serpent's brooding crease, the power of hell broke but bold, the conflict thickens, faith is low, and love is waxing cold.

How long, O Lord, our God, holy and true and good? Wilt thou not judge thy suffering church, her sighs and tears and blood? Where are you, God?

Okay, you're coming, but why are you delaying? You can imagine them saying to Peter, well, okay, Jesus will return, but why hasn't he returned yet? Has he forgotten us?

Does he not care that we're suffering? Why hasn't he come back? Well, Peter nips this in the bud, really, in verse 8, by reminding us of the difference between God and man.

Verse 8, Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. It's a very poetic way of saying, look, guys, God isn't constrained like we are.

[ 22 : 52 ] It's a very poetic way of saying God is not a man to be stuck behind roadblocks, to be held back by accidents. He's not a man to be forgetful. He's God.

If God's delaying, he hasn't forgotten. He's not being held back by something stronger than him. He's God. If God's delaying, it's got to be deliberate. If God's delaying, it's got to be because he's waiting for something.

But then, what is he waiting for? We need him now, don't we? But why has God not come back? We read it in verse 9, don't we?

The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but he is being patient towards you. God hasn't forgotten you. He's not just decided he doesn't care about you.

[ 23 : 55 ] He hasn't got other priorities in mind. He's not forgotten you, Peter says to the church. He's waiting for you. He's waiting until you're ready. He's bearing with you.

He's showing you grace. See, the problem in this church is that Christians are clinging to their sin. They're saying, well, we like Jesus, we like the Bible, we like God's word, but we like the world, we like our sin, we like those pleasures that we've always enjoyed.

And they're clinging to them, they're not giving them up. And God is being patient with them. Do you notice the scoffer's lie is a particularly dangerous experiment?

The scoffer's lie is a really bad experiment, dangerous and bad, because it's based on a really flawed judgment, a really flawed, messy logic. Let me try and explain it in an analogy.

Imagine if I went to Australia. I never will, because I'm scared of animals that would kill me. But imagine if I went to Australia with all its big bad bugs and things, and I were to go to the beach, and I were to want to go swimming, and there was a sign up saying, danger, sharks.

[ 25 : 09 ] Imagine if I said, well, okay, there are sharks, there might be sharks, but I'll believe they're a danger to me when they've bitten me. I'm going to go swimming. I'm going to keep on swimming, and if they bite me, then I'll believe there's a danger.

It's not great logic, is it? Because by the time I've found out whether there is a danger or not, by that logic, I'll have lost a leg. It's terrible logic. I will only know whether the danger is real when it's too late.

And it's exactly that logic that's being used by the scoffer here. Well, I sinned yesterday. I sinned today. I'll probably sin tomorrow. God's never judged me for it.

So when God starts judging me, then I'll believe. But it's foolish, isn't it? It's too late. So God's giving them time.

It's a foolish logic, and perhaps we use it all the time, don't we? We use it when we sit there, and we think, well, there is this sin that frustrates me. There is this habit I have that I know God doesn't approve of, but I'll sort it out when work isn't so stressful.

[ 26 : 16 ] I'll sort it out when the kids have left home. I'll sort it out when I retire. Where is the promise of this coming? You shall not surely die. It's that same false logic, the logic that gets my leg bitten off by a shark, the logic that leads to really a shaky ground for any confidence.

And God is being patient with us, his church. As we use that logic day after day, God is being patient with us. He's waiting for us to repent. That's what Peter can say in verse 15.

This is not God's indifference towards you. This is not God's carelessness of you. It's not his lack of love for you. Verse 15.

Count the patience of our Lord as salvation. Count the patience of our Lord as salvation. You've got another day today. You've got another day today. Count it as salvation. Because it allows you to turn away from those things that perhaps keep you from it.

that perhaps you're not a Christian here tonight and maybe you find the things of the Bible interesting. You've heard the gospel and maybe very sensibly you're weighing up the probabilities.

[ 27 : 34 ] It's true. If there probably is no God then what are we wasting our time for? I would stress that that probability is based on a very poorly weighted dice. But the probabilities we might be weighing up, mightn't we?

If the gospel is true, if the word of God is true, then frankly life's going to have to change. Perhaps you're weighing that up. Well, can I encourage you not to follow the fool's logic?

There are lots of important things that you need to consider that Jesus has promised he will return to judge. And when he comes back it will be too late. The test of I'll wait till he's judged me is not good logic.

Count the patience of the Lord of salvation. Today he has given us time to repent. And to those of us who are Christians already I would encourage us to think about those things that perhaps we put off dealing with.

The specific sins, the sins we know about where we say well maybe I'll continue in that one because God's let me off so far. It's a fool's logic isn't it?

[ 28 : 41 ] We say to ourselves don't we so often where is the promise of his coming but we know God's word is true. It's a fool's logic. But perhaps there are more general things we've got.

I don't know about you I find myself regularly saying well I see I'm not that godly this week. Maybe next week. Or I say well I'll have more time for God when I finish these professional exams or I'll have more time for God when I've got the house or I'll have more time for God perhaps when the children move out perhaps whatever.

count the patience of the Lord today as salvation. Today God calls us to repent. Today God calls us to worship him with all of our heart and all of our mind and all of our soul.

Count the patience of the Lord as salvation. Notice just before we close there are two words in Peter's explanation here.

The first one is patience. It's a very important word patience and it's an incredible word. The patience of God is a glorious thing. I don't know if you've ever thought about it but patience is grace extended over time.

[ 29 : 47 ] It's grace that comes back time and time again. It's more than grace because it's grace that happens when we continue to mess up.

It's the grace that's forgiven us for every sin. It's the grace that's given us breath to live every day. Every day since we've been born we've been rebelling against God and yet God has given us grace.

He's shown his patience towards us. The patience of God is a glorious thing but notice that if patience goes on forever then it's not patience anymore. There's a word for patience that goes on forever and that is indifference.

If you keep on forgiving and forgiving and forgiving with no end then clearly you just don't care. imagine the parent around the dinner table and I don't know I'm not very I've never done parenting but I've been a child and I've thrown broccoli at my sister.

Imagine the parent at the dinner table and the child throws broccoli at the sister and the parent says well that's your first warning two more and you're on the stairs you're going up to your room the child throws the broccoli again second warning that's patience that's grace there second warning third warning now there are two options here aren't there the third time the parent can either send them up to their bedroom in which case they've shown grace throughout they've shown grace and then they've shown judgment so they've been patient or they can just say well yep you threw broccoli at your sister never mind that's indifference for patience to be glorious for patience to be really patient it has to have an end and that's what we're told in verse 10 God's grace comes back and back to us but the day of the Lord will come 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 exposed

[ 31 : 47 ] God's grace comes back to us time and time again but there will be a day when that finishes and you and I don't know when that is count the day count the patience of the Lord as salvation as we're told elsewhere today is the day of salvation we don't know about tomorrow we don't know about the day after and our God isn't an indifferent God he's a just and a holy God a God who is truly patient secondly and finally notice what God is waiting for is God waiting for holiness no is he waiting for godliness no is he waiting for perfection no not at all the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some counselors but is patient towards you not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance the bar is set as low as it could be God isn't waiting for us to have sorted everything out he's not waiting for the finished article is he he's waiting for us to be repentant for us to turn away from those sins even if we continue to mess up to turn away from the things that we love in the world which offend him and to worship him instead he's asking for a start and not for the finished article the bar is set as low as it could be as one hymn writer puts it all the fitness he requireth is to feel your need of him you don't need anything else

God's only waiting for repentance we see that don't we reflects in Jesus' life Jesus came to us as a human God in human flesh and did he wait till people were perfect before he went to sleep with them well no he ate with tax collectors and sinners he spoke with prostitutes he made friends with the lowest people and he offered them forgiveness and while we were still sinners he died for us God isn't waiting for us to be perfect don't hold back in coming to him because you think you're not the real deal you're not the finished article yet he's only waiting for repentance count the patience of our Lord as salvation let me read as we close Peter's conclusion really in verses 11 onwards since all these things are thus to be dissolved what sort of people ought you to be in lives of godliness and holiness waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of our Lord because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn but

according to his promise we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells let's close together by affirming and a new earth and a new earth and a new earth and a new earth and a new earth and a new earth and a new earth and a new earth and a new earth