

It's About Time
II Peter 3:8-9

In the 8th episode of its first season, Burgess Meredith plays the role of Mr. Bemis, a henpecked husband lost in the world of books. At work his mind is focused on his latest novel shortchanging a customer at the window of the bank where he labors. At home his wife nags about wasting his time reading. She plays a cruel joke on him one evening asking him to share some poetry from a book he has been reading. Excitedly he opens the book only to find that his wife has taken a marker and crossed out all the words. At work the next day he takes his lunch in the only place where he can find solitude with which to appease his thirst for reading – in the bank vault. Nestled in the corner of the vault he sees a newspaper headline that moments later become reality – “H-bomb capable of total destruction”. The building shakes and he is knocked unconscious. He wakes and emerges into a city he finds totally destroyed with not another soul alive. Although he has food for a lifetime the loneliness is almost unbearable. Contemplating the tragedy of his situation he sees in the distance the city library. In it he finds that all the books have been preserved through the destruction. Now Mr. Bemis has time enough at last. Poised next to the tower clock that has fallen with hands standing still are piles of sorted books for him to consume at his leisure. The irony in his situation comes when he stumbles and loses his glasses without which he cannot see. Shattered lenses are all that remain for a man thought to have all the time in the world. Rod Serling's concluding monologue reminds us that “Mr. Bemis...the small man in the glasses who wanted nothing more than time.”

Time has been defined as “the indefinite continued progress of existence and events that occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future. Time in physics is unambiguously operationally defined as "what a clock reads".

Man's perspective of time hangs ominously in the sky as the sun makes its way from one horizon over to another only to repeat the daily cycle. The constant ticking of clocks is a reminder that time marches on without retreat, seemingly inconsiderate of anything or anyone that might like more of it. Never to be repeated time always advances. We take a test or sit in a doctor's office waiting and wonder why the clock seems to be moving so slowly.

We think about the time wasted sitting in a traffic jam.

We wonder why time seems to fly when we're having fun.

We set our clocks to wake us.

We set our clocks to take our pills.

We set our clocks to bake a cake.

Clocks are set to measure the duration of a game.

Calendars are marked to schedule time for an appointment or mark an anniversary.

Everything we do is measured in or by time.

Time is all we know. Time is what we have in limited supply. The duration of time we will spend here on earth.

Our passage today is one that is concerned and connected with time, not one that is measured in the Twilight Zone, but time as it is measured in God's universe. This passage is a comparison between man's and God's perspective of time.

From our passage today I want to look at four things about God as it relates to time. Peter's words serve both as a message of encouragement and a warning. These verses are a message encouragement.

Here's what I want for us to see today.

God's perspective about time is different

God's promise through time is decreed

God's patience in time is deliberate

God's purpose for time is determined

I. GOD'S PERSPECTIVE ABOUT TIME IS DIFFERENT – v. 8

We see once again as we did in verse 1 that Peter

refers to them as “dear friends”. The KJV expresses the richness of their relationship in the term “beloved”.

It is a term we discovered from verse 1 that speaks of a deep and abiding love because of a mutual relationship in Christ.

Recall from verse 1 that it is a term of endearment. Being in Christ there is an affection toward other believers that stems from love developed in us through the Holy Spirit for each other.

We also noted that it was a term of empathy. Because Peter had also suffered for his faith, he could empathize with them in the persecution they were encountering. Empathy is the ability to feel and understand the experience of another because you have encountered the same kind of thing in life. Let’s not confuse empathy with sympathy. Empathy says I feel your pain. Sympathy says I’m sorry you’re in pain. Empathy has been where you are. Sympathy can only see you where you are because it has never been there. Peter knew what they were going through because he had been in their sandals as well. Empathy is taking to heart the principle of II Corinthians 1:3-4 that we are able to comfort others with the same comfort we have received from God.

The third idea we noted from the term “beloved” is that it is a term of encouragement. It doesn’t matter who we are or what our experience is, we all need encouragement. Paul tells the Thessalonians in his first letter to encourage one another and to encourage the downhearted (I Thessalonians 4:11:5:14). Anyone who is depressed, distressed, and discouraged needs encouragement. Stress can come from your job, home, marriage, kids, finances, illness, injury, fill in the blank – there will be stress. We all need encouragement.

His opening words are a reminder to his readers not to forget something very important. Remember that

in the previous verses Peter stated that scoffers forgot some very essential things about the past and God’s intervention in the past. They didn’t think Christ would return because everything continued as it always had forgetting that God had stepped in and created everything and then had intervened by destroying it because of man’s wickedness.

Peter essentially is saying that these scoffers may have conveniently forgotten some things but don’t you forget one very important truth when it comes to God. He doesn’t measure time the same way we do. In what he says next Peter draws a comparison between God and man when it comes to time.

We are often stressed out by time. We check our calendars to see if we have time to fit one more activity into our day or week.

The upcoming Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays will require more time for shopping, cooking, baking, work or family gatherings and celebrations.

The boss sends an email requesting time to meet or a deadline to finish a new project.

Rain pushes back the time we were going to work outside to finish up projects.

Homework takes time.

Meals take time.

Laundry takes time.

We need more time. If we could we would add another hour into our day just to finish up what we can’t get done in 24 hours or to get more done. We would add another day into our week because we just don’t seem to have enough time. We fill our time with stuff and leave little room for the unexpected.

We don’t have time for a flat tire.

We don’t have time to be sick.

We don’t have time for the mower to break

We don’t have time (and you fill in the blank).

If there is one character we may be most like it’s the White Rabbit in Lewis Carol’s book Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. He appears in chapter one muttering to himself out loud “Oh dear! Oh

dear! I shall be too late!” He has been described as time-conscious, hurried, confused, and fidgety. In the movie version you can hear him singing:

“I’m late! I’m late
For a very important date!
No time to say hello, goodbye,
I’m late, I’m late, I’m late,
I’m late and when I wave,
I lose the time I save.
And well, so on goes the song.

Like White Rabbit we always seem to be running behind.

So it comes as no surprise that we think God’s perspective of time is like ours. After all, time is all we know. We are never without it. It marches on whether we want it to or not. Somehow we wish we were like Joshua who called on God to stop time so Israel could finish the battle. Poof! Everything stands still so we can get more stuff done.

But we learn from our verse that God doesn’t measure time the same we do. As a matter of fact, God is not bound by time or putting it another way He is outside of time. He is eternal, having always existed. He is the One who created time. Before Genesis 1:1 there was no time. We read there “In the beginning God...” On day 1 we read that God made light to separate the darkness. Now where this light came from we are not told because the sun, moon, and stars were not yet created until day 4. This light could very well have been His own glory that provided the light that separated the darkness. We read the following description about the New Jerusalem from Revelation 21:22-24: “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.”

We measure everything by time because that’s all we know.

We take the car in for repairs and ask the mechanic how much time it will take.

We calculate how much time it takes to drive to a certain destination.

Taking his cue from Psalm 90:4 Peter says “Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”

The Psalmist put it this way: “For a thousand years in Your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.”

In verse 2 of that Psalm Moses identifies why God is outside of time, why He is not bound by time. He writes: “From everlasting to everlasting You are God.”

Because God is a Spirit He exists in the spiritual realm rather than the physical realm as we do, He is not bound by its limitations.

Both II Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2 speak of God existing before time.

Verse 8 makes it abundantly clear that time is of no consequence to God. He does not rush. To Him a day and a millennium are the same. He sees the end from the beginning all at the same time. He sees eternity past and eternity future. So when it comes to the pending judgment spoken of in the previous verses or of the second coming of Christ we may think that He is slow, that He is taking His sweet old time when in reality it is happening as He planned before the existence of time itself.

Greek scholar A. T. Robertson says “God’s clock does not run by our time pieces.”

John Phillips notes “God...gathers all of time, past and future, into an eternal present tense. He is the I AM.”

His divine perspective on time is different from ours and Verse 9 gives us the reason.

We see then God’s promise for time is decreed.

II. GOD'S PROMISE FOR TIME IS DECREED – v. 9a

“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness.”

Between you and me and the measurement of time as we understand it, we think God is slow. We think that God is delaying. We wonder what's holding Him up. God seems to be taking His time. We might even conclude that God isn't going keep His word.

God promised to make Abraham into a great nation. From Abraham's perspective, God seemed to be taking a long time to fulfill it. He and Sarah decided to hurry things along because the internal childbearing clock was winding down. They decided to move God's clock up. At 86 Hagar bore a son for Abraham. It wasn't until Abraham was 100 that Sarah had a child. It was 25 years.

God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. Neither is His time our time. Turn to Genesis 15:12-16.

We read here that God told Abraham that his descendants would live in a foreign land and would be there 400 years. The purpose was that the sins of the Amorites was yet not full. They had not reached the depths of degradation for which they would be judged. It could be that God was also waiting for them to repent. But after 400 years God knew that their hearts would continue to harden for which they would be judged and He would use Israel to judge them.

In Revelation 6:10 we read that those martyred for their faith asked how much longer they would have to wait before their blood would be avenged.

From man's perspective God seems late. Man can surmise, wrongly so that His delay may mean He has changed His mind. We may incorrectly interpret His delay as an inability to carry it out. God neither changes His mind nor is He powerless

to keep His promise. Why? It's because He is God and He does not lie.

Numbers 23:19

Lamentations 3:22-23

In Genesis 3:15 God promised to Adam and Eve that a Redeemer would come. It was centuries later before that fulfillment was realized in the coming of Christ through His advent.

In John 14:3 Jesus promised His return.

In Acts 1:11 the angels promised Jesus' return.

In I Thessalonians 4:16-17 Paul reiterates the promise of Jesus' return.

I John 3:3 says that we will see Jesus.

2,000 years later and we are still waiting. What is His delay? Why is He taking so much time? No wonder the scoffers were mocking the promise of His return. From their perspective because it hadn't happened yet, it wasn't ever going to happen.

But be encouraged Jesus is coming again someday. But “the Lord is not slack or slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness.”

The Message reads that “God is not late as some men understand lateness.”

Our microwave mentality has a difficult time with God's timetable. Never forget that God keeps His promises.

Hebrews 10:23 says the One who promised is faithful. Every one of His promises will be kept just as He said.

He has promised His peace in our anxiety.

He has promised His comfort in our loss.

He has promised His strength in our weakness.

He has promised His presence in our loneliness and times of trial.

He has promised His forgiveness for our sin.

He has promised His eternal life for our faith.

He has promised His joy in our sadness.

He has promised His Son's return because it has been decreed. We don't know the year, the month, the day or the hour, but the promise is sure.

Jesus is coming to earth again; what if it were today?
 Coming in power and love to reign; what if it were today?
 Coming to claim His chosen Bride, all the redeemed and purified,
 Over this whole earth scattered wide; what if it were today?

Glory, glory! Joy to my heart 'twill bring.
 Glory, glory! When we shall crown Him King.
 Glory, glory! Haste to prepare the way;
 Glory, glory! Jesus will come some day

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Never doubt God's promise.
 He who is outside of time will step back into time to fulfill His word.
 What seems like a delay to us is really His patience.
 His patience in time is deliberate. He has a reason.

III. GOD'S PATIENCE IN TIME IS

DELIBERATE – v. 9b

“He is patient with you.”

Among the fruit of the Spirit that is being developed in the believer is patience. Bear in mind that this is of divine origin. We can't produce it aside from the work of God's Spirit in us. Patience is as much an attribute of God as is His omnipotence or omnipresence or His omniscience. His patience is as much a part of who He is as is His being eternal and we can say that His patience is eternal. It will never run out or fall short.

Patience is sometimes translated longsuffering. It's term that implies waiting. It literally means to bear under and carries the idea of endurance and continuance.

In the Old Testament we read in Numbers 14:18 that “The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.”

This theme is echoed in Psalm 86:15 “But You, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”

(103:8; 145:8; Nehemiah 9:17)

In Romans 15:5 God is called the God of patience or endurance depending on your translation. God's patience stems from His love. If love is patient, love being that quality that is selfless, we can say that God, who is love, is selfless in every regard to Himself and therefore patiently loving toward mankind. His character of love then becomes the motivation for His patience.

God's patience is deliberate.

He is not delayed.

He is not detoured.

He is not derailed.

He is not distracted.

He is patient, even in the midst of blatant rejection and rebellion on the part of people.

We see certain injustices done to us or to others and wonder why God doesn't remove them and the dirt they are standing on. We want injustice swiftly dealt with. We want wrongs righted, sins corrected, people punished and we want it done right now. But God is patient.

Someone has said that the greatest demonstration of God's patience is the cross. Be glad for God's patience because it meant your salvation. It is deliberate.

I don't know about you, but I for one am grateful that He is patient. I'm glad that He didn't give me what I deserve. I'm glad He waited. In the remaining part of verse 9 we see God's purpose in time is determined.

IV. GOD'S PURPOSE IN TIME IS

DETERMINED – v. 9c

“Not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

There's a reason behind God's patience, behind His delay in sending the judgment He declared against a rebellious people who have rejected Him. If patience wasn't a part of His character, if love

wasn't the motivation behind His patience, He would be left with His justice. It would result in immediate judgment. We stand condemned and the only recourse would be to give us what we deserve.

His longing is that no one should perish. It's a word that means to destroy, to be ruined. It does not mean annihilation or a ceasing to exist. God does not delight in judging anyone to perish, He wants them to repent.

On the one hand Ezekiel 18 makes that abundantly clear that the soul that sins will die, he will perish, but we also see in that passage that it is abundantly clear that God doesn't want anyone to perish.

Ezekiel 18:19-23

God is grieved that anyone should or would reject Him yet we read in the Bible that many will even though they have been offered eternal life. The example of the judging flood of Noah's day provides us with that testimony. God waited over 100 years for people to repent and be saved by entering the ark and only 8 did.

Revelation 20:11-15

Revelation 21:6-8

The word "you" in our text does not mean universal salvation meaning that everyone will eventually be saved. But God does patiently wait so that as many as possible can repent. God's salvation is available to all who call upon Him.

Anyone who believes will not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

If you hear the Word and believe on Jesus you will not perish but has crossed over from death to eternal life (John 5:24).

And we have been given the privilege and responsibility to share that news with others. Our passage is not only a warning to those who have not trusted Christ it is an incentive to repent, one that is rewarded with eternal life. It is also as much a reminder to us to bear this testimony to others.

I have been convicted by the words of Bruce Barton

who wrote "If you don't have a tear in your eye, you have missed the point of God's patience. Stop wondering, start spreading the Word. Don't let any human reasoning deter you from your hope and your duty."

Don't just be satisfied that God in His patience brought you to salvation so that you won't perish. This passage should compel us to actively share the gospel with those for whom Christ died, those for whom God is patiently waiting. What if Christ's coming were today? How many of our loved ones or neighbors or co-workers or classmates would be left to face God's punishment? God doesn't want them to perish, He wants them to repent. He wants them to turn from their sin and receive Christ, the only hope for eternal life.

Tho millions have found Him a friend,
And have turned from the sins they have sinned,
The Savior still waits to open the gates
And welcomes a sinner before it's too late.

There's room at the cross for you,
There's room at the cross for you,
Tho millions have come, There's still room for one
Yes, there's room at the cross for you.

God's purpose in delaying is to patiently wait for more to repent and be saved that they not perish. We don't know how much time remains before His set time for judgment will take place. It really is all about time, limited time that someone may have to hear, believe, and receive. So, from our perspective we really don't have all the time we need.