

Second Sunday in Advent – Epistle

REGARDING THE PATIENCE OF THE LORD AS SALVATION

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Second Sunday in Advent

Analysis by Steven C. Kuhl

8 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. 9 The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. 10 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.

11 Since all things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, 12 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 will melt with fire? 13 But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

14 Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

DIAGNOSIS: Ignoring Day of Judgment to our Doom

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Living for the Present (v. 11):*

The Second Coming Unfulfilled Means the Second Coming Unnecessary “Peter” (in whose name and memory this letter is written) writes to “remind” (1:12, 3:1) the congregation of one of the most basic promises of the gospel, a promise they are treating as dispensable and unnecessary—namely, that “Jesus will come again” (3:1). But are we any different? Why else do we need the Season of Advent with its perennial reminder of this important promise. Also recall the weekly reminder of the Promise (capital “P”) and its constitutive parts (or promises, small “p”) in the Eucharistic Prayer: “Christ has died” as promised and fulfilled, “Christ is risen” as promised and fulfilled, “Christ will come again” as promised though yet to be fulfilled). The initial issue has to do with the apparent “slowness” of the Lord (v. 9) in fulfilling the promise that Christ will come again. Here they are—second, maybe third, generation Christians—and here we are—second millennium Christians—and still, no fulfillment! Christians are dying, including Peter himself (1:14), and still no fulfillment! Could the Second Coming be that important? If so, then why the delay? The problem Peter sees is this: The congregation is living as though there is no Second Coming as though the Second Coming is unnecessary. They live in the absoluteness of the present, as though this world is permanent (v. 11), in “the desires of the flesh” (2:18) and as “slaves of corruption” (2:19), as though there is nothing more to the Promise than what is seen. But are we any different?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *“Forgetful of the Cleansing of Past Sins” (1:9): The Second Coming Unnecessary Means Repentance Unnecessary (cf. 3:9)*

In the opening paragraphs of this precious letter, Peter

describes this dismissal of the promise of the Second Coming as a kind of “nearsightedness and blindness” (1:9). But just how nearsighted or blind are they/we? Their problem is not that they seek some divinely revealed blueprint for the end of the world, as the “Left Behind” series presents it. After all, who knows how or when the world will end? Peter said it well, it comes “like a thief” (v. 10). The problem is that the delay of the Parousia has caused them not only to doubt the Second Coming as an event, but also to understand it as part and parcel of God’s One Promise to save them. And here is the proof, says Peter: As they dismissed the promise of the Second Coming, they also became “forgetful of the cleansing of past sins” (1:9), the Promise itself. Along with living for the present they also lacked repentance; essentially they dismissed the forgiveness of sins as unnecessary. And because forgiveness of sins became unnecessary, so did the whole promised history of Christ, not just his promised Second Coming, but his accomplished dying and rising, too.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *“The day of the Lord will come” (v. 10)*

How could these people have come to doubt their need for repentance and forgiveness? Answer: Because false teachers (2:1) came in and exploited their impatience, flattered their egos, and gave them a false promise to believe in: Namely, that there is no such thing as a Day of Judgment and, hence, no need for a Second Coming-indeed, any kind of coming. Unfortunately they preach this to their doom, for “the day of the Lord will come . . .” (v. 10). As Peter describes it, “They [the false prophets] deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God ... the present heavens and earth [were not only created by God, but] have been reserved for fire, being kept until the Day of Judgment and destruction of the godless” (3:5-7). Peter spends a lot time in this letter pointing out how the reality of the

Judgment of God has been exhibited in the history of the world (2:1-22). Indeed, he takes that history of judgment as evidence of how One Day (a.k.a. “the Day of the Lord,” v. 10) that judgment will be so concentrated that it will bring this world as we know it, the heavens and the earth (3:9, 13; 3:7), to an end. All will “perish” (v. 9). Peter speaks thusly neither because he revels in scaring people, though he may accomplish that, nor because it is simply the truth, which it is. For there are times when the truth shouldn’t be spoken, especially if it only makes matters worse. Rather, he speaks about it because he knows of an “escape” (1:4), a “rescue” (2:9) and he doesn’t want his audience to miss out on, including us.

PROGNOSIS: Regarding the Patience of the Lord as Salvation

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *“Regard the Patience of the Lord as Salvation” (v. 15)*

In light of this impending doom, Peter resorts to the only thing that he has at his disposal to “rescue” (2:9) his congregation from the dangers of God’s Judgment that will consume them in their unrepentance and dispose of this present life. That thing is the Word and Promise of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (v. 8). The substance and truth of this promise, (that is, that there is rescue from God’s Judgment), is the history of Christ himself, that “Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.” How can they call the Lord Jesus “slow about his promise” (v. 9) when he patiently endured the cross for them? How can they regard him who rose from the dead as unreliable in his promise when he rescues us from destruction and dissolution (vv. 10, 11, 12)? The Lord Jesus Christ is the One who, in his own history and in his own flesh, has already confronted the claims of the Day of Judgment that are against them/us. True, the death and resurrection of Jesus is not the culmination of the promise, but it evidence that the promise is true.

“According to the promise” (v. 13), the nature of the promise is cosmic in its dimensions: “new heavens and a new earth” will be established (v. 13). And for the culmination of that promise, for which we still wait (v. 13), Christ must come again. Christ is not “slow” in fulfilling the promise. Rather, says Peter, he is exercising “patience” for the world, for us (v. 9). He is giving us time to get ready for the final consummation of all things. That patience is on par with his patient suffering on the cross for us. That’s why Peter says, “Regard the patience of the Lord as salvation” (v. 15).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – “Repent” (v. 9) and “Wait” (v. 13).

Peter makes it clear that the delay of the Parousia does not mean Christ is remiss. Indeed, for Christ the passing of time is, since his resurrection, immaterial. “To the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like one day” (v. 8). But time is still material for us and for the rest of the world this side of the Day of Judgment. For we, and this world of ours, still need time to get ready for facing that Day. And how do we get ready? We do so by “repenting” (v. 9), that is, by letting go of all that is worldly and perishable, and by “waiting” (v. 13) in the Lord Jesus Christ—who has died, who is risen, and who will come again—to reestablish us in a new existence: “new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home” (v. 13). The couplet “repenting and waiting” is Peter’s way of saying, “Trust in nothing but the Christ-established forgiveness of sins and you will be saved from the Judgment to come.”

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – “Hastening the Coming of the Day of God” (v. 12)

Peter is well aware of how exhausting the wait for the day of the Lord can be. Indeed, he expects himself to die before it comes (1:14). Moreover Peter’s reference to “our beloved brother

Paul" (v. 15) may very well have in mind Paul's thoughts on this exhausting wait as expressed in his Letter to the Romans. There Paul writes about how the whole creation groans, along with us who believe, under the weight of its bondage to decay and sin. But then he adds a note about how that same creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the Children of God so as to obtain the freedom of the glory of the Children of God (cf. Rom 8:18-25). As strange as it may sound, the day of the Lord can be "hastened" (v. 12). That's because the timing of the Second Coming is based on Christ's patience, though not indefinitely, who is pictured as holding back the final Day of Judgment for the sake of the world's readiness (so that the world might repent and have faith, v. 9). We as Christians have an important role to play in this regard. For we no longer live for the present, exploiting it until it runs out. Rather, by repentance and faith we now, already, live in the promise of the Second Coming and, thus, we not only announce that day, but we hasten that day by summoning the whole world to repentance and faith. This we do by "leading lives of holiness and godliness" (v. 11) that reveal something of the life to come and that draws the whole world into longing for it. Is there a Second Coming? Of course, it has been promised! For "Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!" So, "as we wait for new heavens and a new earth where our righteousness will be at home" (v. 13), we also "strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish" (v. 14). Since peace and holiness is our promised future by faith, nothing can stop us from living that promise now in truth.