

Introduction

I love science fiction. As with any genre of fiction, there are certain tropes in science fiction that are often used. A trope is a literary device. In the world of sci-fi you often find the idea of time travel. In his novel “11/22/63” Stephen King—yes, that Stephen King—wrote about time travel, but not with advanced technology. A man has access to a portal that sends him back in time to a specific point in 1960, just three years before Kennedy’s assassination. That novel was made into a thought-provoking eight-episode miniseries.

I don’t want to give any spoilers because it’s an amazing show to watch. The premise is that this man can enter this time portal and travel back to that specific moment in 1960. He can stay “in the past” for as long as he wants, while being able to come back to the present day, always at the specific time he left. He enters the portal to stop Kennedy’s assassination. He discovers that his actions in the past can change the future. The problem is he cannot know what the real outcome of his actions will be until he returns to the present. If the outcome is not the desired outcome, he can reenter the portal and reset the timeline to the default, which includes Kennedy’s assassination, but allowing him to make changes again.

What I find so very interesting about this novel and the mini-series based on it is the folly of limited knowledge. If you could go back in time and make one change, what would the outcome of that change be? There are things I wish were different in my past, yet without those things I experienced, where would I be? God has used those experiences to shape who I am today. I simply don’t know enough to be able to say that I would be better for not having those experiences. Far better to trust the one who sees the whole thing—not just the entirety of *my life*, but the entirety of human history.

In our text today Peter shows us a profound truth about the timelessness of God. We’re in 2 Peter 3, verse 8.

2 Pet
3:8–10

² Pet 3:8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ 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.

2 Peter 3:8–10

Timelessness

In verse 8 Peter tells his readers, “Do not overlook this one fact, beloved”. He used the word “overlook” just a few verses earlier for the false teachers. In verse 5 he says “they *deliberately* overlook this fact”. They willfully, intentionally, and in all ways *on purpose* overlook this.

Ordinarily overlooking something is not intentional. You look *over* something, or you look *past* something. You don't mean to! It just sort of happens. You don't notice the thing. You maybe lose sight of the thing. The false teachers were not looking past something accidentally. They were deliberately *ignoring* this one thing.

Dan shared last week that the false teachers were claiming there would be no future judgment. By denying future judgment they were deliberately ignoring a prior judgment. Specifically Peter points to the flood in Noah's day. Peter said they deliberately overlook the fact that the ancient world "was deluged with water and perished". The ancient world was judged. What makes the false teachers think such global judgment won't happen again? They intentionally ignore this inconvenient fact.

Peter warns his readers to not overlook something. It is the same word for overlook, but he doesn't add the qualifier "deliberately". He warns them to be vigilant, to act so as to *not* overlook this thing. Think of how many times Peter has used similar and related language. He says in chapter 1 verse 9 that if one lacks the virtues he lists it is because he has "forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins". Therefore, he says in verse 10, "be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election".

To that end, in verse 12 of chapter 1 he says he "always intend[s] to remind you of these qualities" and "to stir you up by way of reminder". In verse 15 he declares he "will make every effort so that...you may be able at any time to recall these things". He reminds them that none of the apostles and prophets made up stuff. Instead, they reported what they heard and saw from the Lord. In chapter 2 he reminds them that God did not spare the angels who sinned and is holding them for the day of judgment. Then in chapter 3 he says he is writing this second letter and in both letters is "stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandments of the Lord".

This is when he says the false teachers had deliberately overlooked the previous worldwide judgment. Peter does not want his readers—those who are beloved—to overlook this one fact. It's not hard to get the sense that Peter wants us to remember! He has a specific thing in mind here in verse 8, however. Do not overlook *this one fact*, beloved. What fact?

He says with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Peter is not suggesting that God experiences time *differently* than we experience time. Peter is saying God simply *does not experience time*. He is putting this in terms that you and I can sort of comprehend. A day with the Lord is the same as a thousand years, and a thousand years with the Lord is as a single day. This is not meant as some sort of time warp. God is simply outside of time. He is timeless.

When we say God is eternal, we don't simply mean that God lasts forever. We mean that God exists in an eternal present. He told Moses his name: I Am Who I Am. When God acts in human history, to us it is either that God acted in the past, or God is acting in the present, or that God will act in the future. When God acts, however, God acts in his eternal present. All of human history is available to him, for he is outside of time. He is *timeless*. Think of what Jesus said in John 8. The Jews were challenging him and then Jesus said something profound—something that caused them to try to kill him on the spot:

John
8:56–58

Jn 8:56 "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and

have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

John 8:56–58

Jesus is not saying, “I’m older than Abraham”. Abraham lived about 2,000 years before Jesus. Having taken on the form of a human, Jesus was limited by time in every way that you and I are limited by time. No human has lived for 2,000 years. That’s not Jesus’ point. We know this because the Jews immediately sought to stone him. In chapter 10 of John they take up stones to kill him again and explain why: he, being a man, makes himself God. When he says, “Before Abraham was, I am”, he’s making the same claim: he is YHWH God of Israel.

Jesus didn’t say, “Before Abraham was, I *was*”. He said, “Before Abraham was, *I am*”. Jesus is making a claim to be YHWH—I AM WHO I AM. This also means that Jesus, the Son of God now in human form, is, right now, before Abraham. We are about 4,000 years from Abraham, and Jesus is, right now, before Abraham. That is, the Lord is presently with Abraham in what we perceive as 4,000 years ago, and the Lord is with us right now, and the Lord is with us—presently, from his perspective—ten years from now. Fifty years from now. The new heavens and the new earth are a present reality to the Lord for he is outside of time.

In Psalm 139 the psalmist writes that if he ascended into heaven the Lord is there and if he sunk to the bottom of the sea the Lord is there. He says there is nowhere he could go and not be in the Lord’s presence. It is just as true that there is no *when* he could go and not be with the Lord. All of human history is directly and immediately available to God because he does not experience time. Barry Cooper put it quite succinctly.

Barry
Cooper
quote

By contrast, the entire sweep of history, not to mention everything either side of it, is immediately and always accessible to God.
Barry Cooper, The Eternity of God

God doesn’t time travel; he is simply present at all times. Peter urges his readers to not overlook this one fact: God is outside of time. Neither a thousand years nor a single day have any controlling effect or limiting effect on God. God can reach into the year 1026 at the same time he reaches into 2026. It’s all available to him.

Peter is not engaging in a bit of philosophical musing just to entertain us. He has a point, and his point is in verse 9.

Promise

In verse 9 Peter declares, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness”. As who counts slowness? As Dan shared last week, scoffers be scoffing. They deny the coming judgment because, in part, it hasn’t happened yet. That’s a strange reason, but that’s what they were saying. *Scoffers be scoffing*. In verse 4 they said, essentially, final judgment hasn’t come all this time, therefore, it ain’t coming. Everything is continuing on just as it has from the beginning of creation. This is not a good argument, and obviously not a good argument. I have never turned 55 before, not once in all my years on earth. Not a single time. Therefore...?

Notice closely what Peter says. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his *promise*—singular. Not promises, *promise*. Why is promise singular here? Earlier in the letter he mentions promises, plural. In chapter 1 verse he wrote,

2 Pet 1:3–4 2 Pet 1:3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.
2 Peter 1:3–4

Here Peter mentions God’s “precious and very great promises”. These culminate in *the* promise: “through them you may become partakers of the divine nature”. Think of other texts that speak of this.

Phil 3:20–21 Phil 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
Philippians 3:20–21

Rom 8:29–30 Rom 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
Romans 8:29–30

1 John 3:2 1 Jn 3:2 Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.
1 John 3:2

This is the singular promise Peter means. It is the final, glorified state of all those God in Christ through his Spirit will transform. We will partake of the divine nature, as Peter put it. We will be like God in some profound way that you and I cannot begin to fathom. The singular promise is the outcome of all the other promises of God. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:20, all the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus, and this Yes culminates in our complete and utter transformation.

Here’s where this promise becomes even more profound. The singular promise is the fullness of our salvation. Peter says the Lord is not slow concerning this promise, “but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance”.

Before we look at this more closely, I need to clarify something here. We often use this verse for evangelism of the lost. We should care about the lost. The title of our series is “Exiles: Faithfully Present In a Foreign Land”. A significant part of being faithfully present is testifying to the grace of our Lord Jesus. As Peter said in 1 Peter 2:12, we must keep our conduct among the nations honorable so that they may see our good deeds and glorify God. In 1 Peter 3:15 he says we must honor Christ as holy, always being prepared to make a

defense to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in you. That is, we must always be ready to proclaim the good news to anyone with whom the Lord opens a door.

That's not Peter's point here. He has already given his scope: the Lord is patient *toward you*. The context is the fulfillment of his promise of complete and total transformation, of our salvation. The Lord is patient toward you, the believers to whom he is writing. He continues: "not wishing that any should perish". He does not mean here that he is not willing that *anyone* should perish. Remember his scope: he is patient toward you, not wishing that any *of you* should perish. He continues: "but that all should reach repentance". Again, God loved the world and sent Jesus. Whoever comes to Jesus in faith Jesus promises he would never cast away. That's not what Peter is saying *here*. God is patient toward *you*, not wishing that any *of you* should perish, but that all *of you* should reach repentance.

Remember what he said in his first letter to these same believers.

1 Pet
1:3-5

1 Pet 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:3-5

Do you see the certainty in these opening words of his first letter? All those who are in Christ are in Christ because God has acted, and they will remain in Christ because God continues to act. He caused us to be born again and he guards us through faith *for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*. What is that salvation? It is partaking of the divine nature, of our final glorification! It is the promise of God that God is not slow to fulfill!

Still Working

Let's follow Peter's point. He urges them to not overlook this one fact, namely, the timelessness of God. God is not bound by time. He is outside of time. He is, therefore, at work throughout all of time, from beginning to end. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Before Abraham was, God *is*. God's work, then, is a singular work that applies to all of human history, all at once. God is not working so much in a series of events but as one, united whole, a singular effort to bring about the fullness of our salvation.

You and I are bound by time. We experience God's work as a series of events, and from our finite, limited perspective, it seems like a whole lot of time passes in between each event. These events are markers for us, and they make us aware that time has passed. From God's perspective, however, he is simply acting to save us. He is not slow to fulfill his promise. He experiences the fulfillment of it in the same instant he makes the promise.

I've said a number of times over the years that God's promise is as good as fulfilled the moment he utters the promise. This is because God, being outside of time, utters the promise and fulfills it at the same, well, *time*. Imagine time like a ruler. From our perspective God points his finger at one end of the ruler and makes the promise. Then, a "foot" later, God

points at the ruler at the other end and says, “Done”. From God’s perspective he points at both at the same time. Promising and fulfilling are the same to him.

Peter says God isn’t slow to fulfill his promise *as some count slowness*. Yes, his promise takes time, and the false teachers were using this to argue that since judgment has not come, it’s not coming. They were denying the faith once delivered. But God is not slow! He is working even now to ensure that the promise and the fulfillment come together. He is still working to ensure his promises will be fulfilled. There is no way they cannot be fulfilled, ultimately concluding in the fullness of our transformation.

This fullness comes in the resurrection when the Lord Jesus raises us up. From God’s perspective we have been crucified with Christ. From God’s perspective we have been raised with Christ. From God’s perspective we are united with Christ. Jesus was born over 2,000 years ago. From God’s perspective this takes place even as *our* resurrection takes place. God doesn’t wait for it. It happens as he utters the promise.

Because God sees the entire timeline of human history all at once, and because God is present, right now, at every point in human history, and because God is the one at work in you “to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13), Paul can also say to the Philippians, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). His work is his work throughout your life, throughout all of human history.

When God first saved you, he also acted to bring your salvation to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It’s all a present reality for him. It’s sort of like a puzzle that God gives you. It is a complete puzzle, one that he sees in its entirety, yet the puzzle must still be put together. We may not see the full picture of the puzzle and we may wonder if there are missing pieces. The timelessness of God assures us there are no missing pieces and the puzzle is a complete puzzle, and he knows exactly what the final picture looks like *because he’s looking at it right now*. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians,

1 Thess 5:23–24 1 Thess 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. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.
1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

May God sanctify you *completely*. That’s partaking of the divine nature! May you be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. When is that? It’s at the end of time, yet, “He who calls you is faithful; *he will surely do it*”. In 1 Corinthians Paul speaks of this work of God.

1 Cor 1:7–8 1 Cor 1:7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
1 Corinthians 1:7–8

God will sustain you to the end, he says. Why? How? To him there is no time! You and I wait for the revealing of Jesus, for we are bound by time, but God is not! He can promise to sustain us to the end, because he himself is the beginning and the end! He knows he will sustain you to the end because he is, right now, at the end! He sees the completed whole, the accomplished action, the fulfilled promise. Why? What did he say on the cross?

John
19:30

Jn 19:30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
John 19:30

What is finished? It is. All of it. The entirety of our salvation. While Jesus' human nature is very much limited by time, he is still the eternal God. He experiences the fulfillment of his promise even as he utters the promise. Jesus knew the purpose for which his Father had sent him was finished. The promises of God find their Yes in Jesus, and the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, the very outcome of all the other promises. Your salvation is complete in Christ! He did it! He accomplished it!

Take heart, Christian! He began the good work in you and he will bring it to completion. Your life and your salvation is in God's hand, and he sees the entirety of it, and he is with you in every moment of your life. He's not waiting for certain things to come about; he's actively working in your life.

But the Day of the Lord Will Come

Peter here is not simply writing a word of encouragement to the believers. It is that! We ought to take great comfort from the timelessness of God. As Piper says, God is doing 10,000 things in your life and you may be aware of three of them. Now we see that he's doing all 10,000 things all at the same time; we just have to wait to see them since we experience time.

Peter is saying more than this. God is not slow to fulfill his promise. He is patient toward you, not willing that any of you should perish, but that all of you should reach repentance. That's great. God is working to bring about the fullness of your salvation. Then he says in verse 10, "But".

Even as God is working to bring about the fullness of our salvation, the day of the Lord will come like a thief. In the Old Testament the expression "the day of the Lord" referred to that great day, that terrible day on which the Lord comes in judgment. Isaiah used this expression: "Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!" (Isaiah 13:6).

Jeremiah said, "That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, *a day of vengeance*, to avenge himself on his foes" (Jer 46:10). Ezekiel said, "For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations" (Ezek 30:3). The prophets had long predicted that day. Notice how that day will come: "like a thief".

Peter doesn't mean that when the day of the Lord comes no one will notice. A thief breaks in and gets out while avoiding being seen. Peter means only the first part. A skilled thief doesn't barge in the front door during supper. He waits until no one is home or maybe waits until they're sleeping. The point is a thief comes when no one expects him. That's the end of Peter's metaphor, however. The day of the Lord will come when most are not being vigilant to watch out for it. On the day, however, the Lord announces his presence.

He says the heavens will pass away with a roar. That's not quiet. The day of the Lord comes like a thief, but then announces itself with a roar. The heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, he says, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. When final judgment comes, and it will come, it comes with a profound finality.

Remember the false teachers Peter is dealing with were claiming judgment was not coming. Peter said they deliberately overlooked the fact that judgment had already come once. In the time of Noah God sent a flood and with that flood brought judgment on the entire earth. Similarly, on the day of the Lord when the final judgment comes, this time it comes with a purifying fire. We'll look at this with more detail next week.

Here's his point: because God is timeless, he is not bound by time. Because he is not bound by time, time does not in any way limit him or constrain him. God is free to act at any point because he is present at every point. For the believer, this timelessness of God is a great comfort. For those who stand in rebellion against him, it ought not be a comfort, for judgment can come whenever God chooses.

Church, we long for that day. Each one of us laments the evil in the world. The reality of that day means evil has an expiration date. Each one of us laments the suffering in the world. The reality of that day means suffering has an expiration date. Each one of us will, barring the Lord's return, pass through that greatest enemy, death. The reality of that day means death has an expiration date.

Peter is saying in this text that we cannot allow *our* perception of time to discourage us. Our perception of time is necessarily finite and limited. We have trouble remembering what we ate for supper last Tuesday, and we have no idea what we will be doing next March. God sees it all, for God is present at each and every moment. Bede the Venerable wrote about this.

Bede
quote

Given that in God's eyes all time is the same, it is impossible for him to delay his promise, for in any case he already predestined it before the foundation of the world. The only reason it has not yet arrived is that he needs time to gather in all the elect, whom he also predestined before time began. Hence we read in the Apocalypse that the souls of the martyrs long day and night for the coming of the day of judgment and resurrection and have heard that they must wait yet a little while until the full complement of their fellow servants and brothers is reached.

Bede the Venerable, On 2 Peter

When he says God *needs* time, he means time from our perspective. We are limited, finite creatures. We experience the flow of time. God unfolds his plan throughout time, that you and I might experience the fullness of his plan. God reaches into our existence to bring about his purposes. For those who are in Christ, these purposes include the final outcome of our salvation. For those who are not in Christ, who steadfastly refuse to trust the Lord, these purposes include the final judgment where, as Paul says in 2 Thessalonians, they "will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thess 1:9).

Application

We do not need a portal that can send us back in time in order to fix the evil or suffering we've experienced. We do not need a portal to make right all the evil that has taken place in this world. Instead, we need to remember. As Dan shared last week, we need to focus

on the signal that is God's truth, for in focusing on the signal we can get past all the noise. The noise is a distraction, one that seeks to cause us to forget. God does not want us to forget. He wants us to remember.

What we must remember is he is the one in whose hands we are. Because he is timeless, we rest in his unchanging strength. We look to him through the noise, to see him and only him. We must fix our gaze on him for he is steady and immovable. He is eternal and unchanging. He is our Rock, our foundation, the one who grants us steady footing in an ever-shifting world.

Whether we're struggling because of the false teaching in this world or we're struggling because of difficult circumstances, God is an ever-present reality. He is the one who walks across the pages of time in a single step. He is the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega. He is with us every moment of every day, throughout eternity.

You and I can rest in his strength for his promises are as good as fulfilled the moment he utters them. It's only—only!—a matter of time before we experience the fullness of our salvation. It's coming, church. Until it's here in its fullness we rejoice in our Savior for he is, even now, in our midst.