

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, May 3, 2015**

**THE ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH:  
THE RETURN OF THE KING (2)**

**2 Peter 3:1-15**

I said it last Sunday. I'll say it again today: *Jesus. Is. Coming. Again.* I don't know when. But I know that Jesus, the true King of heaven and earth, will return to this world. And when He does, He will make everything right. The fact that He has not returned yet is not a sign of negligence or procrastination or indifference on His part. His delay is not due to a lack of love or compassion for us. It is not because Jesus does not have the power to follow through on His promise to come again.

The reason for the delay, as Peter tells us, is actually God's mercy. The reason the day of Christ's return has not yet happened, Peter says, is because the Lord "is patient with you" (2 Peter 3:9), and "our Lord's patience means salvation" (3:15) for all who will come to Him in repentance and faith. Listen to verses 8 and 9 from *The Message* paraphrase: "God isn't late with His promise, as some measure lateness. He is restraining Himself on account of you" – that is, on account of *us*, on account of you and me and a world filled with people who are just as lost without Him as we are, or were. He is "holding back the end because He doesn't want anyone lost. He's giving everyone space and time to change."

Until you take your final breath, or until the Lord Jesus returns in the fullness of His glory and power, whichever comes first, there is still time to change. There is still time to repent, still time to turn away from every known sin in your life. Because God is merciful and patient with you, there is still time to come home to Him. There is still time to believe the unbelievably good news of the gospel, to put your trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of your life, and to receive from Him the forgiveness of all your sins – all of them, past, present, and future; peace with God; and the gift of eternal life with Him. Until Jesus returns, or until you come to the end of your journey in this mortal life, it is not too late.

Because of God's mercy toward us, there is still time. Because of God's love for this world and His desire for the world to know of His love, He has given us time. Plenty of time. And there is still time. But we don't know how much time there is. We don't know how much time remains for any of us. We don't know how many years, or days, or hours we have left. We don't know if the time that remains before the return of Jesus is long or short. Whether long or short, we do know that every day we live brings us a day closer to the day of Christ's return. Or, if He tarries, one day closer to the day of our death.

Make no mistake: *Jesus. Is. Coming. Again.* As we saw last Sunday, we have His own word on it (see Matthew 24-25; Mark 8:38). We saw the promise of His coming again given by two angel-messengers from God in Acts 1:11 at the time of the ascension of Jesus into heaven. In several of his letters in the New Testament, Paul writes of the promised return of Christ with eager anticipation and joyful hope (e.g., Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:14-58; Titus 2:13). The certainty of His coming again is also affirmed by the author

of the Letter to the Hebrews, who writes in Hebrews 9:27-28: “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many. And He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to all who are waiting for Him.”

In addition to these, the apostle John urges us in 1 John 2:28, to “continue in Him” – that is, in the faith, hope, and love you have in the Lord Jesus Christ – “so that when He appears, we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.” Not *if* He appears, or *in case* He decides to come back, but *when* He appears. *When* He comes again. And, of course, John writes of the greatly anticipated return of the Lord Jesus in the opening verses of the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 1:7, he says:

Look, He is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him;  
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him.  
So shall it be! Amen.

*Jesus. Is. Coming. Again.* Whether His return will be good news or bad depends on your perspective. It depends on whether or not you are ready for Him. It depends on whether or not you are looking for Him and living for Him or living for yourself. It depends on whether or not you are following Him. It depends on whether or not you are on His side.

The title of today’s message (and last Sunday’s also) is *The Return of the King*. It refers, of course, to the kingship of Jesus – His royal crown, and title, and throne, and sovereign authority – over the totality of the world in which we live, and over the whole of creation. You may recognize the title of this message from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien, either from reading the books or seeing the movies based on the books, or both. *The Return of the King* is the title of the last book in the trilogy. I’m sure that some of you know Tolkien’s stories far better than I do, so feel free to correct me (later) if I’m off base in anything I’m about to say about *The Return of the King*.

The king in the title is Aragorn, (pronounced “Aragon” in the movie), the rightful heir to the kingdom of Gondor, who must return from exile and defeat the forces of Sauron, the Dark Lord of Mordor, in order to gain control of the kingdom. Along the way, Aragorn must resist the temptation to take possession of the ring with all the powers it holds, and the temptation to use those powers for his own purposes and personal glory. Aragorn’s victory over Sauron inspires the Hobbits, led by Merry, Pippin, Frodo, and Sam, to stage an uprising of their own against a corrupt and oppressive wizard who has taken control of their homeland in the Shire. With the return of the king and his victory over Sauron, a new era of peace comes to Middle Earth.

In His first coming to us, Jesus, like Aragorn, had to face and resist temptations from Satan in the wilderness, including the temptation to use the powers of His deity for selfish purposes (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). That He was tempted in every way, just as we are, but never gave in to temptation, and that He had to endure suffering when He was tempted, means that Jesus is not only our true and rightful King but also our faithful, compassionate, and perfect

high priest, who is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, because He knows what it is like to be tempted (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15).

When Jesus comes again, all the glory and majesty that have been His from all eternity and that will be His for all eternity, will be on display for everyone to see. When He comes again, there will be no doubt that He is the King before whom every knee everywhere in the whole of creation will bow (Philippians 2:9-11).

Not everyone believes that Jesus will come again. Not everyone wants Him to return. Not everyone looks forward to His coming. Some are so dead-set against it that they openly scoff at the idea of Christ's second coming, just as Peter said they would (2 Peter 3:3-4). They mock Christians who take God's Word seriously and so believe that Jesus *will* come again. Which means that they mock people like you and me. They mock our belief in His coming again because it doesn't fit into their view of the world and, frankly, because if they believed it, they would have to change the way they are living.

Peter says these scoffers will come "in the last days" (3:3), which suggests that we are living in the "last days," or the "end times" right now. I believe we *are* living in the last days. I believe the last days actually consist of the entire period of history between the first coming of our Savior two thousand years ago and His second coming, whenever it will take place. Whether the time remaining in the last days is short or long, I don't know.

Some people who dismiss the Christian doctrine of the second coming of Christ do so because, they say, if Jesus were really coming back, surely He would have come back before now. And, they say, the fact that He hasn't come back yet means He isn't coming back. Ever. That is basically the reasoning of the scoffers in verse 4. Peter blows their argument out of the water in verses 5 and 6 by appealing to creation itself and to God's judgment of the world by means of the great flood in the time of Noah to show God's active intervention in the world.

Just because it hasn't happened yet, or just because it seems like we've been waiting an awfully long time, doesn't mean we should give up hope or stop believing in the promise of His coming again. God's view of time is not the same as ours. That is what Peter means in verse 8 when he says: "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." God doesn't operate according to human timetables. The truth is that we are so often in a hurry about this or that or some other thing in life that seems terribly important and terribly urgent at the moment. We are so often in a hurry, but God is not. It can be so frustrating, so exasperating, when you're in a hurry for an answer or for something to happen, but God is not. Impatience is one of the hallmarks of our lives. "The Lord," however, "is patient with you" (3:9). God knows what He is doing. He sees the big picture in a way we don't. In a way we can't. And He has His purposes that are a mystery to us.

So what is Peter saying to us? What is the Holy Spirit saying to us through Peter? *Jesus. Will. Come. Again.* No doubt about it. He could come at any moment. If He tarries, if His coming again seems like it is taking a long time, don't lose hope. Don't lose heart. Don't get discouraged. "The day of the Lord will come," says Peter. The return of King Jesus will

come “like a thief” (3:10). For many, it will come when it is least expected. It will catch many by complete surprise, totally off-guard and unprepared for His coming again. Don’t let it catch you unprepared.

When the day comes, it will be a day of judgment. A day on which many peoples and nations will mourn because they will receive the judgment they justly deserve for their unbelief, for their rejection of the grace and kingly rule of the Lord Jesus. A day on which the heavens will melt and the world as we know it will be destroyed in order to make way for a new heaven and a new earth (3:10). It may or may not be right to take Peter’s apocalyptic language literally. By its nature, apocalyptic language is often symbolic. What Peter is saying is that the promised day of the Lord will come, and when it does – when Jesus Himself returns – the present order will be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness rules instead of sin, and Jesus reigns supreme.

Friends, this is good news. It is great news for everyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ. His coming again is not something to fear, if your heart is settled in Him. Frederick Buechner tells us why: “The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will ring down the final curtain on history, and there will come a Day on which all our days and all the judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully” (Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*, 58). And He has taken all of your sin and guilt, and all of mine, upon Himself in His atoning death for us on the cross. Such amazing grace! Such amazing love! That He – the true King and Lord of all, the perfectly holy and sinless God – would die for me. And for you.

*Jesus. Is. Coming. Again.* Since He will come to judge the living and the dead, and to bring salvation to all who belong to Him and long for Him, Peter, in verse 11, asks the obvious question: In view of these things, he asks, “what kind of people ought you to be?” The answer: “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God ...” (3:11-12). And you ought to “make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him” (3:14). In other words, you and I are to make sure we don’t miss out on God’s amazing grace. And we are to live in a way that consistently expresses our undying gratitude and devotion to God for what He has done for us. We are to be ready at every moment to celebrate the return of our King. And, until He comes, we are to devote ourselves to the mission He has given us – to be His witnesses, to make disciples of all nations, to tell others of Jesus and His love, and to put His love and compassion into action to meet needs here, there, and everywhere.

*Jesus. Is. Coming. Again.* As Max Lucado has written, “For the Christian, the return of Christ is not a riddle to be solved or a code to be broken, but rather a day to be anticipated” (Lucado, *When Christ Comes*, 5). May we live every moment in this anticipation. In this joyful hope and eager expectation. And may we be about His business.

Until He returns or calls us home, Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.