

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**2 Peter 3:3-9** *Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> For 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, <sup>6</sup> and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. <sup>7</sup> But by the 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.*

Jesus once told His disciples a parable about two servants. The first one, Jesus calls a wise servant, and the second He calls a wicked servant. The master in the parable is traveling in another country. He has been away for a long time, and no one knows when He's coming back. The first servant is alert and watchful. He carries out his duties faithfully. He knows that his Master could return at any moment, and he wants to be ready for Him the instant He comes back. But the second servant is different. The long delay has done something to him. "There's plenty of time before the master comes back," he thinks to himself. "Maybe he's not coming back at all! I think I'll spend some of his money on myself. I think I'll spend some of His money on myself. I think I'll get drunk, and while I'm at it, maybe I'll abuse some of my fellow-servants; that ought to be fun. After all," scoffs the wicked servant, "who's going to tell me no?! I'm in charge here! The Master's never coming back!"

Maybe you remember this parable. If so, you may recall that things don't end well for the wicked servant. Jesus' words are chilling: the Master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of. He will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and nashing of teeth, Jesus says. (Mt. 24:50-51)

The point of that parable is similar to the point Peter is trying to get across in our text for today. It is our Lord Jesus who is the Master "traveling in a distant country." So far, He has delayed His return. The question is: what does that delay mean? Some people think it means that we don't have to worry about Judgment Day, or that there won't be any Judgment Day at all. But there will be. And from our perspective, as followers of Christ, it is desperately important that we be alert and watchful, ready for His return. The theme of this morning's sermon is simple:

## **Christ Is Coming Back for Judgment**

This statement typically prompts one of two reactions:

- I. Unbelievers scoff, willfully forgetting the evidence of the past
- II. Let us repent, grateful to escape the Judgment to come

As our text begins, we sort of catch the Apostle Peter in the middle of a sentence. To make sense of verses 3-9, you have to hear the urgent exhortation that comes immediately before it, in verse two. Peter says, "**remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and**

**Savior through your apostles...**" (2 Peter 3:2) "This is vital!" Peter says. You have to pay very close attention to what? To the words of the holy prophets and the words of the Apostles and evangelists. We have a short term for that—we call it "The Bible." You Christians pay close attention to the Word of God, both what it says and what it teaches.

Why is that so important? Because **Christ is Coming Back for Judgment!** And it's sad, but when He gets here, there will be great multitudes of people who just aren't ready. In fact, Peter says not only will they be not ready, but they'll have spent a lot of their lives making fun of the people who are ready. He says that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "**Where is the promise of His coming?**"

In the last days, scoffers will come, says Peter. They will ridicule the Christian faith. "*You say Jesus is coming back to judge the earth? Well, where is He? It's been a long time. It's been two thousand years, and He's still not here!*" Which means they don't think He's ever coming back. And the evidence they use to support this view is history. "*Just look at history!*" they say. For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation. You see the logic? "*Spring is followed by summer, summer is followed by fall, fall is followed by winter. Day after day, year after year. Nothing ever changes! Nothing ever has, so nothing ever will. Why worry about Judgment Day?*"

But there's one glaring error in that logic, and Peter points it out. He says that there was one time in the history of the earth where everything changed—the great flood, by which the world perished, being flooded with water. Think of how many people must have scoffed at Noah. Here's this old man, *miles* from the nearest water, spending years and years building a huge boat. He must have been the laughingstock of the neighborhood. People no doubt ridiculed and made fun of Noah and said that nothing would ever happen. And for a long time nothing did happen. Jesus says, "*They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage—everything went on as normal, until when? Until that day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.*" (cf. Luke 17:27)

And destroyed them all! On that day, all things did not continue as they were. On that day all things changed, and the world was destroyed. Why is that important to us now, in 2021? Because Scripture warns us that another big change is on its way. A change that will make the great flood look like a day at the beach. **Christ is Coming Back for Judgment.** The world that now is, with its ungodly and its scoffers, is reserved for punishment, as Peter says, "***The heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.***"

Yes, **Christ is Coming Back for Judgment.** And as long as this world endures, unbelievers will scoff, as in the days of Noah, willfully forgetting the evidence of the past. But for us believers, it should not be so, and may it never be so! Let us be different! Let's take full advantage of this interval before our Lord's return. Let us repent, grateful to escape the Judgment to come.

What's the reason Jesus has delayed His return as long as He has? In the first place, it only seems long to us. It's not long to God. In fact, as Peter explains, God is outside time altogether. "***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.***" God is eternal. For Him, yesterday and tomorrow are the same thing. Eternity is a concept that we just can't get our human minds around, tied as we are to time and the sequence of events in this world. The best we can do is to realize that **Christ is Coming Back for Judgment**, and that His arrival could be at any moment.

Peter reveals the reason for our Savior's delay in our text: ***"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."*** The reason Christ hasn't returned yet isn't because He's slack, it's not because He's lazy. It isn't that He's not paying attention, or that He's forgotten us. The reason is that He's merciful! Paul told Timothy, ***"[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*** (1 Timothy 2:4) This period of time before Christ's return is a time of grace, a time for all people to hear the Word of God, repent, and believe in Jesus as their Savior for eternal life. That's what God wants. He wants it so much, in fact, that ***"He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*** (John 3:16) **Christ IS Coming Back for Judgment,** and this current time of waiting is your time of grace.

Sadly, many people manage to spend all the time while ignoring the grace. There's a story told about a comedian from the 30's named W.C. Fields, a comedian notorious for his wayward lifestyle. Near the end of his life, he was hospitalized and very ill. A friend came to visit him and was surprised to find him thumbing through a Bible. He asked, "What are you doing?" Fields replied, "I'm looking for loopholes!" It's funny in a way, but it's also sad. So many people do the same thing when faced with death—they search frantically but vainly for a way to escape the Judgment they sense is coming.

Maybe W.C. Fields' friend was a Christian. I hope so, because then he could have told him: there is a loophole. A very big loophole. In fact, the entire Bible is about this loophole, and the loophole's name is Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth to provide us with that way of escape. It's not the easy way and it's not the popular way, as Jesus said. ***"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*** (Matthew 7:13-14)

You really can think of Christianity as an escape. Escaping by God's grace! The dreadful day of Judgment is coming soon for this wicked world. Perhaps you recall the Station Nightclub fire back in 2003 in Rhode Island, one of the deadliest fires in US history. I remember that being prominent on the news when I was young. One hundred people lost their lives when a rock band's pyrotechnic display got out of control and started a fast-moving fire. Ironically, most of the victims perished just a few feet away from safety, right in front of the double doors of the main entrance. Sadly, those doors were locked and barred the way of escape for those who perished. The tragic thing is that there was another, smaller door just around the corner in the kitchen, a door that was wide open, and through which a few people did manage to escape.

Does that bring anything to mind? A cataclysm is coming on all the world. And there is a way to escape, but it's not the way most people think. Most people, if they even think about Judgment Day at all, think that they'll be saved by their good works, because they "always tried to be a good person." But you can't escape destruction that way. Those doors are locked. The book of Romans locks them as tight as a vault, when it says that ***"by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God's] sight."*** (Romans 3:20) But there's another exit. God has made a way for every human being to escape that dreadful judgment over sin, and that way is Jesus Christ!

Think about what a blessing now belongs to you! You—out of all the multitudes of this world!—you have found the narrow gate. It's the only exit that lets you escape the Judgment to come! While countless thousands are perishing in unbelief, God has put faith in your heart to trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. You know you're a sinner, yes, there's no doubt about that, but you also know that God

sent Jesus to provide the payment for your sins. And He did! On that cross-topped hill outside Jerusalem one dark Friday, Jesus offered up the one sacrifice that would cover all your sins—He offered Himself!

You know, Jesus could have escaped, too. He had many opportunities. In the Garden of Gethsemane, with armed men about to arrest Him, He asked Peter, ***“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”*** (Matthew 26:53-54) Jesus didn’t escape, because He wanted to make a way for *you* to escape. Jesus took the judgment for your sin upon Himself, so that no Judgment would remain for you. He died, He rose again, so that you can one day rise to everlasting life. The writer to the Hebrews says, ***“We see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”*** (Hebrews 2:9)

Dear fellow Christians, rejoice that your name is written in the Book of Life, and that you will one day join your Savior in heaven. But until that day comes, let’s recognize the time that we’ve been given and make the best use of it. Let’s follow the advice of Paul, who told the Romans, ***“You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”*** (Romans 13:11) Let’s spend each day repenting over our sins, in contrition laying them before our Savior for forgiveness. And by all means, let us reach out with the good news to other, to anyone we can reach, with prayers that God may shine in their hearts to show them also the way of escape in Jesus Christ.

There’s an old Italian proverb that says, “Once the game is over, the king and the pawn go back into the same box.” The same Judgment Day awaits every human being. This world is coming to an end. When that end will be, the Lord has not revealed to us. Sometimes, we look around us at the sinful world in which we live, and we wonder how long the Lord can endure such rampant wickedness. Sometimes we hear the scoffing of the world’s “experts,” its scientists and philosophers and college professors, and they’re all telling us the same thing: “Your faith is nonsense. There is no God to whom we’re responsible, and there is no Judgment coming.”

But God will have the last word. And once the game is over, the king and the pawn go back to the same box. We’ll all stand before Christ’s Judgment throne, and there will be no scoffers there. There, Paul says, ***“At the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** (Philemon 2:10-11) **Christ Is Coming Back for Judgment.** So let the unbelievers scoff, willfully forgetting the evidence of the past. We won’t make the same mistake. With faith in Christ and eternal gratitude for the gift of His life for ours, let us repent daily of our sins, and receive our Savior’s pardon. We will escape death and hell. And we will spend eternity singing the praises of our rescuer. God grant it in His name. Amen.

***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.