

Eastwood Baptist (10AM, 6/1/'19) **STILL WAITING** (2 Peter 3:1-14)

Introduction It's the first Sunday of 2019, and Christmas Day is almost two weeks behind us. How do you feel about this? Satisfied, because you have enjoyed a happy Christmas and New Year season? Disappointed that this season is over? Relieved that it's over? Just plain tired? Possibly it depends on what sort of Christmas Day, and Christmas/New Year season, you had this year. Perhaps it depends on how much you had looked forward to Christmas. Do you count the days until Christmas each year with eager anticipation? Or do you usually count them with growing desperation over what you still need to do? Or maybe the approach of Christmas doesn't affect you much at all. Whatever your answer is now, I bet you counted the days in anticipation when you were a child. I certainly did. I really looked forward to my birthday (21st December) and to Christmas when I was a child. But there was a catch in having these special few days every year. When they were over, I had 360 days to wait before they came around again. I think that it was a bit like this for the first Christians, particularly Jewish Christians.

Peter Wrote to Impatient Waiters When Jesus was finally born, the Jews had been waiting for the Messiah for hundreds of years. And for those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah his birth was a wonderful event. It was even more wonderful for the followers of Jesus when he rose from the dead. And many of them assumed then that the completeness of Jesus' triumph as Messiah King was only just round the corner. Some of the Christians of the first generation believed strongly that Jesus was coming back as triumphant king within their own lifetimes. We see this in Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians Paul had to correct the thinking of people who believed that fellow Christians who had died had missed out on this great event. In 2 Thessalonians he had to rebuke Christians who had stopped working because they believed that Jesus would return within a very short space of time. But this didn't happen, and as time passed a different problem arose. Some Christians began to doubt that Jesus would ever return at all. This is the problem addressed in 2 Peter. **Read 2 Peter 3:3-4.** So what did Peter go on to say to help these people? People who had to wait all over again for the coming of the Messiah, for Jesus' Second Coming. What he said is likely to be helpful to us as well, as people who are still waiting for Jesus' return.

"Wholesome Thinking" (2 Peter 3:1-9a,10) The first thing which Peter called for was "wholesome thinking", wholesome thinking in line with the Old Testament Scriptures and with apostolic teaching. **Read 2 Peter 3:1-2.** So what does wholesome thinking look like in relation to Jesus Christ's return? It is balanced thinking, in line with Scripture. Such wholesome thinking never gives up on God's promises. **Read 2 Peter 3:3-9a.** God often seems slow to human beings, but God has a different time frame from us. When Noah was building his ark, most people didn't believe that a great flood was coming. But it came. When the Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah, many must have wondered whether he was really going to come. But he came. Yet when he came, at God's right time, many Jews rejected him. And we Christians haven't been much different. As the centuries have passed, some Christians have discarded belief in Jesus' Second Coming. More of us have continued to believe in our heads, but have lost expectancy in our hearts. To those of us

who feel this way, Peter says: “Don’t give up your hope. God hasn’t given up. God’s promises are reliable. Christ **will** return.” But there is an opposite error to be guarded against. **Read 2 Peter 3:10.** Over the centuries, there have not only been Christians who lost their expectancy. There have been others who have been so full of expectancy that they have even dared to name a day, despite warnings in Scripture against this. They have often misled other Christians, and brought Christianity into disrepute. Peter called for balanced thinking, neither giving up our expectancy nor over-expectancy. But he called for more than just balanced thinking.

“Holy and Godly Lives” (2 Peter 3:11-14) **Read 2 Peter 3:11-14.** This is the most consistent emphasis of New Testament teaching about how to wait for Jesus’ return. Jesus said that we should wait for him by serving him faithfully. Paul said that our hope in Jesus Christ should strengthen us to live well now. And Peter says the same. There are two very different types of inspections. Sometimes the inspector has to give notice, as with inspections of rented premises. Therefore the tenants are able to rush around before the inspection and make sure that everything looks OK. But there are occasions, such as where police have a search warrant, where no notice has to be given. Then people can be taken unawares, and have no opportunity to dispose of incriminating evidence. Jesus’ return is of the second kind, although his disciples should not need to think of him as an inspector. We don’t know when Jesus will return, so we can’t prepare for it by getting our lives in order at the last moment. In addition, Jesus sees how we are living all the time. The way to be ready for Jesus is not to study all the biblical prophecies carefully, and work out when he will return. The way to be ready for his return is to live the way he wants us to live all the time. In Peter’s words, “to live holy and godly lives”. But there’s still one more thing. It’s not as obvious as my first two points, but I believe that it’s there in the passage. And it’s important.

“Not Wanting Anyone to Perish” (2 Peter 3:9) What I have in mind is found in the one verse I have not yet read in full. It is what is implied by God’s own attitude. **Read 2 Peter 3:9.** God is patient, and God desires to see people saved. Surely we should imitate our God. All the time which God gives to his church before Jesus Christ returns is time for proclaiming the gospel. And all the time which God gives each one of us individually is time to play our part in proclaiming the gospel. And to keep on praying for people we know. And as we witness and pray, we need to imitate God’s patience. This can also be applied more broadly. Why stop with loved ones? People in our community are often more open to the gospel than we think they are.

Conclusion If we are Christians, we are “still waiting”. We are waiting for our Lord’s glorious Return. So let us wait well. Let us be expectant, without expecting to know the date. Let us live holy and godly lives, all the time. And let us use the time which God gives us to pray for people to come to faith in Jesus, and to bear witness to Jesus in both word and deed.