

[2 Peter 3:8-15](#)

In my teens, one of my favourite pop songs was 'I'm Not In Love' by 10cc. It was cleverly arranged and produced, and it had wry and touching lyrics that even clicked with a fifteen-year-old.

However, I heard both the single version and the album version on the radio. The single was a four-minute butchered edit of the full six-minute album track, and so I saved my pocket money to buy the album.

The album – 'The Original Soundtrack' – also contained much darker material, not least a song called 'The Second Sitting For The Last Supper' in which the band mocked the Christian hope of Christ appearing again in glory.

Two thousand years and he ain't come yet
We kept his seat warm and the table set
The second sitting for the Last Supper

It's a hope for which many people mock us. It's a hope with which numerous Christians struggle.

Perhaps sometimes it touches on those never-quite-disappeared childhood traits, remembering the times as little ones that we sat in the car while our parents drove, and within five minutes were asking, 'Are we there yet?'

The third chapter of 2 Peter can give us help in understanding God's purposes and responding appropriately. What these verses tell us is that when we understand God better, we shall also understand better how to live.

So firstly, *understanding God better*:

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

This verse, which takes some words from a psalm, tells us two things about God which get taken up in the next two verses. If a thousand years are like a day to the Lord, then he acts over a long period of time. But if the reverse is also true, that a day is like a thousand years, then God also acts suddenly and quickly.¹

We see the long-term patience in verse 9:

⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The slow – to our eyes – acting of God is a mercy to the human race. He doesn't want to wrap things up without people having a full opportunity to repent and put their faith in his Son, Jesus.

So if someone mocks us as Christians for the fact that Jesus has not returned, we can remind them that he is hanging back to give them the chance to hand over their lives to him. 'Why hasn't he come?' we might reply. 'Because he's waiting for you.'

They may or may not appreciate that answer! But it is consistent with the merciful and gracious character of God. The offer of salvation is not a quick, instant, blink-and-you'll-miss-it event. It is there on the table and stays on the table even for the most recalcitrant of sinners.

God is patient. Jesus hasn't forgotten to come again, because he hasn't forgotten the sinners he loves.

But as well as the long-term patience of God there is also his ability to act suddenly and quickly. Verse 10:

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

God may be patient, but he will not suffer mocking. He will 'come like a thief'. Christ appearing again 'like a thief [In the night]' is a common New Testament image for his return in glory. No-one expects that a thief is coming: you need to be prepared in order to avoid suffering loss.

It's no good, then, having a casual attitude to God which says, 'I'll live just how I like, and then I'll repent at my leisure on my deathbed.' That is to treat a patient and merciful God with contempt, and to forget that he is also holy.

And – although in some cases it can be emotional manipulation – the old line of the evangelists that asked, 'If you were to be hit by a bus tonight, do you know what would happen to you eternally?' makes a good point to those who would be casual with God and disregard the fact that he can act suddenly and quickly.

So I think we can put these two apparently contradictory elements of God's character together and see where that leaves us with our Advent hope. God is patient, because he longs for everyone to repent. Yet he will not be mocked by those who treat him casually, and one day he will come both suddenly and quickly. He will even do that before the end in individual people's lives.

Therefore **secondly**, we look at ***understanding better how to live***:

Just as there were two elements to understanding God better, so there are two corresponding ways to live in the light of that as we await our Advent hope of Christ's appearing again in glory.

In response to God's sudden and quick action, not least in his glorious return, we read verses 11 to 13:

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Forty years ago, I went to Spring Harvest for the first time. On the first evening, a preacher named Stuart Briscoe said that he believed in 2 Peter 3 when he saw the atomic bomb fall on Hiroshima. Then he knew it was possible for the heavens to be destroyed by fire and the elements to melt in the heat (verse 12).

But we do this a dis-service if we think that Christ's sudden and speedy return is only about destruction. For we go on to read of the hope expressed elsewhere in the New Testament, not least by Paul in his letters and John in Revelation, that Christ's goal is to bring 'a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells' (verse 13).

This is why Christ will come again in glory: to bring a new creation, where righteousness dwells.

And so the way to live in the light of that is to live in righteousness now. Christ calls us to live now as a sign of his new world that is coming. Live according to the new creation, not the surrounding culture.

What would it mean to live in righteousness now? Well, the English word 'righteousness' might be a little misleading here. Often we take it just to refer to matters of personal morality. But the Greek word means not only personal righteousness but social righteousness – justice, if you will – as well.

So our personal moral conduct needs to come more closely in line with what Jesus calls it to be. But so do our actions in society.

[Abraham Kuyper](#) was a Dutch Christian theologian and politician – in fact, he became Prime Minister. He put it this way:

'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!'

Is there any part of our lives where we don't want Christ to cry, 'Mine!'?

And then there is the way we live in response to the patience of Christ. This comes at the end of the reading:

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him.

'Our Lord's patience means salvation.' As we saw earlier, that patience means salvation in the opportunity for repentance, and so another way we live in the light of Christ's coming is to offer the Gospel.

But it's also the climax of our own salvation. For our salvation is not just the forgiveness of our sins through the Cross, it is also the transformation of sinful lives by the Holy Spirit into those that live righteously as we've just been saying.

And it is also that our salvation will be completed when Christ appears in glory. For when righteousness dwells, sin will be abolished. Peace will reign. All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well, as Mother Julian of Norwich said. This is part of our great hope.

To conclude – Christ's appearing in glory seems to be a long time coming, but it is because God is patient. The chance is there for repentance, and the Church must announce that.

But Christ will still come suddenly and quickly. Let us be prepared by living according to the pattern of his great future.

¹ My understanding of these two contrasting elements is owed to Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Volume II*, pp376-8.