

“The End of History”

2 Peter 3:3-14

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on July 1, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

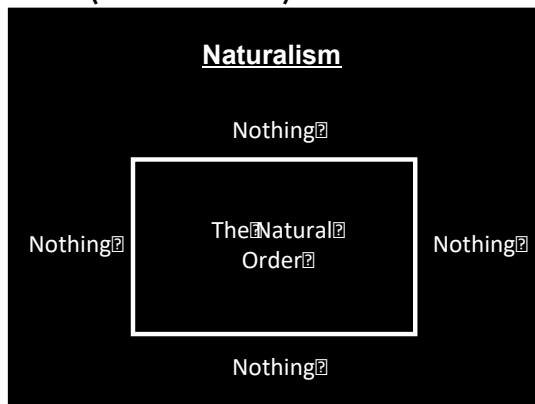
INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** This past week I posted an article on Facebook. It was about Trinity Western University losing its case to start a law school. This was all based on the fact that TWU has a covenant that students must sign, which, among other things, says that students will not engage in sex outside of marriage including homosexual relationships.
 - A long time atheist friend of mine responded to my post saying, **“The most unfortunate part, however, is that TWU had a real opportunity to rethink, revisit, and rewrite its covenant in line with the right side of history. . . . It’s such a shame. What a waste.”**
 - Being on “the right side of history” is a trump card in any argument. It implies that to disagree with the dominant view of culture means you are ignorant, uneducated, and not up to date.
- As the Western world becomes increasingly secular, Christians are facing increased opposition for their beliefs. Some people oppose in a civil manner but more and more it seems that opposition is one of scorn.
 - In 2012 there was an atheist march in Washington D.C. in which ten thousand people attended. Richard Dawkins, today’s most famous atheist, gave a speech in which he said, **“when I meet someone who is religious my first inclination is to say, ‘I don’t believe you.’”** He then said, **“mock them, ridicule them, in public ... religion makes specific claims about the universe that need to be substantiated and need to be challenged and, if necessary, need to be ridiculed with contempt.”**
 - Now let me be clear: not everyone is as harsh as Dawkins. What is clear is that opposition to Christian beliefs is increasing. How then should Christians respond?
- We are doing a series entitled, “Living in the Light of the Future.” The Bible’s answer to how we should respond is to live in light of the second coming of Jesus Christ. This great future event is the key to living rightly in the present, to responding properly to those who oppose us, and to understanding what it means to be on the right side of history.
 - But of course it is right here that we again face the ridicule of the world: “Do you seriously believe that a man who died 2000 years ago is going to magically appear in the sky and end the world as we know it?”
 - How should Christians respond? Well, things were no different in the first century. Peter is writing to Christians who were being mocked for their belief in the second coming of Jesus. And so Peter writes to strengthen our belief in the second coming of Jesus in order that we might live rightly in the present.
- He does three things in this passage. First, he tells us what to do when people ridicule the idea of Christ’s return. Second, he tells us what Christ’s return will be like. Third, he calls us to ask some questions in light of what he has said.

SCOFFERS ARE DESTINED TO COME

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First, **what to do when people ridicule the idea of Christ’s return.** When this happens Peter calls us to remember four things.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** First, **when people ridicule the idea of Christ’s return, remember that scoffers are destined to come.**
 - **READ 2-3 - you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.**

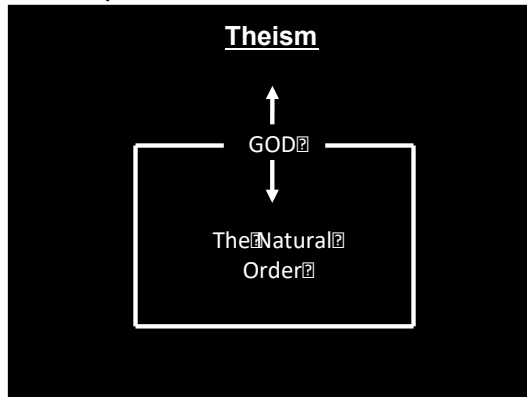
- In order to strengthen us Peter begins by giving us a warning. Quite simply he is saying, **“Don’t be surprised that people mock and ridicule. Scoffers must come.”** What is a scoffer? As one man says, **“A scoffer is someone consumed by disdain for something or someone. A scoffer usually projects a certain intellectual arrogance and social snobbery. Indeed, a scoffer will not listen to or heed wise counsel or anything like that.”** Scoffers poke fun, ridicule, and mock.
 - This is surely one of Satan’s greatest attacks against Christianity today. Speaking very generally, people in our culture used to make arguments against the existence of God in a somewhat civil manner. But in the last decade or so we have seen a rise in aggressive opposition.
 - One method of attack today is to simply ridicule it, putting on par with belief in the Easter Bunny, thereby marginalizing it as intellectually deficient. Peter says, **“Don’t be surprised, scoffers must come.”**
- Peter now draws our attention to one specific thing they ridicule. **READ 4a - They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming?”** You remember in Acts 1:11 after Jesus ascended into heaven, the angel said, **“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”** The only problem was that time was quickly passing by and there was no sign of his return.
 - So people scoff but their scoffing at Christ’s return is merely the symptom of something bigger, namely a worldview that does not believe in the intervention of the supernatural. **READ 4b - For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”**
 - They don’t believe that Jesus will break into history because they don’t believe such supernatural things happen. The universe just keeps going as it always has.
- The worldview of these scoffers is similar to many people today. It is what we call ‘naturalism’. What is naturalism? **(SHOW SLIDE 4)**



- Here we see a closed box. Inside the box is everything that exists in the natural order that we call the universe. Notice there is nothing outside the box. There is no God. There is no supernatural realm. Carl Sagan sums up naturalism with his trademark slogan, **“The universe is all there is or ever was or ever will be.”**
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** So naturalism is the belief that the natural universe is the sum total of reality.
- This attempt to explain the world in completely natural terms is the dominant mindset today. And so today people scoff because they believe the universe is a closed box and therefore any belief in the future coming of a supernatural being called Jesus is seen as totally ridiculous.
 - And under a constant barrage of such thoughts even Christians begin to falter. But Peter says **when people ridicule the idea of Christ’s return, remember that scoffers are destined to come.**

GOD HAS INTERVENED AND WILL DO SO AGAIN

- Peter then adds a second point. In the second place we must **(SHOW SLIDE 6) when people ridicule the idea of Christ's return, remember that God has intervened in history before and, therefore, can do so again.**
 - **READ 5-7 - ⁵ 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, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ 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.**
 - His argument is this: God exists, God has acted in history before in creating the world and in destroying it with a flood. Therefore, it is not strange to believe that God can intervene in history again. You see, at rock bottom, a disbelief in the return of Christ is actually a denial of the existence of God. For if God exists then he can intervene in history anytime and in any way he pleases.
- You see in opposition to naturalism is what we call theism. Theism is the belief that God exists. **(SHOW SLIDE 7)**



- Here again we see a box that contains the whole natural order that is the universe. But notice that something exists inside and outside the box, namely God. In Christian teaching, God created the box and everything in it.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 8) Theism then is the belief that there is a supernatural being (God) that exists within and beyond the natural universe.**
 - Since God exists both within and beyond the universe he is free to act within his universe. It is not illogical at all to believe that God can act within the universe he created.
- While Heather and I were in Australia we both read a fantastic book that I would recommend to all of you. It is by Antony Flew and is entitled, "There is a God: how the world's most notorious atheist changed his mind."
 - Flew died in 2010 but he was one of the most influential atheist and naturalist philosophers of the 20th century. For 50 years he wrote books and articles attacking belief in God and defending atheism and naturalism. But Flew was an honest intellectual and he said he would always follow the evidence where it led. It was in his 80's that he said the scientific evidence for the existence of God became overwhelming and he changed his mind.
 - Flew writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 9) "I have followed the argument where it has led me. And it has led me to accept the existence of a self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, and omniscient Being."**¹

¹ Antony Flew, *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York, HarperCollins e-books, 2007), 155-156.

- He says that naturalism cannot answer three major questions. First, How did the laws of nature come to be? Second, how life originated from non-life? He argues that it is unscientific and illogical to believe that rocks can eventually produce even one cell of life even if left for billions of years. Life does not arise from non-life. Finally, he says naturalism fails because something cannot come from nothing. We know the universe is not eternal so where did that first atom come from?
 - Once Flew affirmed the existence of God he then faced the next big question: has God revealed himself in history? Can we believe in things like miracles, in things like God becoming a man in Jesus, and in the return of Christ?
 - In the very last sentence of the last paragraph of the book Flew writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 10) “Is it possible that there has been or can be divine revelation? As I said, you cannot limit the possibilities of omnipotence except to produce the logically impossible. Everything else is open to omnipotence.”**²
- So what he is saying is that if God exists it is perfectly possible and rationale to believe he would reveal himself to us. That is what Peter is saying as well. God exists. God created the world. God intervened once to judge the world. It is therefore perfectly logical to believe he will do it again with the coming of Christ.
 - So all of this completely changes what it means to be on the right side of history. The right side of history is defined by whatever Jesus will judge to be the right side. The only way to be on the right side of history is to belong to him.
 - So remember that scoffers will come and second, remember that God has intervened in history before and, therefore, can do so again.

REMEMBER GOD’S ETERNAL NATURE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 11) Third, when people ridicule the idea of Christ’s return, remember that God judges time differently than we do.**
 - **READ 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.**
- The point is that God does not judge time like we do. He is outside space and time. He is outside the naturalistic box. A.T. Robertson says it well, **(SHOW SLIDE 12) “God’s clock does not run by our timepieces.”** In other words just because we think it has been a long time, to God it may just seem like a day. Commentator Michael Green says, **“even the delay of a thousand years may well seem like a day against the black cloth of eternity.”**
 - Therefore the argument that time rolls on and still nothing happens is invalid because it is thinking that is trapped in the box. **“Get your mind out of the box,”** Peter says. **“Quit being so narrow minded. Just because some time has passed does not mean that he is not returning.”**
 - When people ridicule the idea of Christ’s return, remember that God does not judge time like we do.

REMEMBER GOD’S PATIENCE WITH SINNERS

- Fourth, **(SHOW SLIDE 13) When people ridicule the idea of Christ’s return, remember God’s great patience with sinners.**
 - **READ 9, 15 - 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. . . . And count the patience of our Lord as salvation.**

² Ibid., 214.

- The return of Christ is delayed for one reason, to leave open the window of grace a little longer. In his grace, God does not just destroy sinners right away. No, he patiently waits not wanting anyone to perish but all to come to repentance.
 - In his prayer in John 17 Jesus said that God **“granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.”** He said **“I revealed you to those whom you gave me”** but there were more whom the Father had given him, most of whom still had to be born.
- Jesus said, **“other sheep I have that are not of this fold. I must bring them also.”** He is referring to a people that he is going to call out from the Gentile world...you and me. And then Romans says the end of time will not come, **“until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”**
 - Why has Jesus not returned? Simply put, he has many more sinners to save. There are more whom the Father gave him who will come. The fullness is not yet full. His delay in coming is a sign of mercy. The window of pardon and grace still stands open.
- So when the world scoffs we must remember that scoffers will come, that God has intervened before and so can do so again, that God judges time differently than we do, and that he has not yet returned because He is patient with sinners waiting for them to come to repentance.

THE DAY OF HIS COMING

- Having told us what to do when people ridicule the idea of Christ’s return, Peter now turns in the second place to tell us **(SHOW SLIDE 14) what Christ’s return will be like.**
 - **READ 10, 13 - 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 . . . But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**
- **(SHOW SLIDE 15) First, the Day will come unexpectedly.**
 - As Jesus said, **“No man knows the day or the hour.”** You cannot predict it so don’t even try.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 16) Second, there will be a cataclysmic renovation of the natural order with fire.**
 - **“With a roar”** – this is an onomatopoeic word, a word that sounds like its meaning. Like the word “buzz.” The greek word is **“rhoizedon.”** It emphasizes the sound of hissing air before a crash, like a bomb whistling through the air before it hits.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 17) Third, this renovation will result in a new heaven and earth for God’s people. READ 13 - But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**
 - In what sense is the earth ‘new’? It seems that there is continuity with the present earth in that it can be called ‘earth’ and yet a radical discontinuity in that it is called ‘new’. I used the word ‘renovation’ before because it seems that God is not going to utterly vaporize earth and then create a brand new one but will take this present earth and renew it with fire. Most commentators believe this is the case for at least three reasons:
 - First, the word for **“new”** is not **“neos”** which means new in time or origin, it is **“kainos”** which means new in nature or quality.³
 - Second, in Romans 8 Paul speaks of creation longing for the Jesus’ return so that it can be set free from its bondage. It doesn’t make much sense to speak of the present creation being set free from bondage if it is annihilated. It seems rather that this present creation is in bondage, but on that day will be set free in the sense that it will be re-created into something greater.

³ J. Behm, “Kainos” TDNT, III, 447-49.

- Third, the parallel could be made with our bodies. God is not going to discard our old bodies and give us brand new ones; he is going to transform our present bodies to be like his glorious body.
- Whatever the answer it will be a glorious future for God’s people. This is the realized hope of Isaiah 65, **“Behold I will create a new heavens and a new earth.”** This is the realized hope of Revelation 21 where John sees a new heaven and a new earth where God comes down to dwell forever with his people.
 - So that is a description of that future day.

APPLICATIONS

- Finally Peter applies this to us. There are **(SHOW SLIDE 18) two questions we must ask ourselves** in light of what has been said.
- First, **(SHOW SLIDE 19) have I repented?**
 - The window of grace is still open. God delays this day that you and I might turn to Jesus and be saved. Have you done this?
- Second, **(SHOW SLIDE 20) am I living in light of that future day?**
 - How do we live in light of that future day? Look at verse 11 and 14. **READ 11, 14 - ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness. . . ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.**
 - This future day is to have a moral impact on our lives. Are you living a holy life? Are you prepared for his coming? Will you be found faithful?
- This must of course be applied broadly across our lives but let me zero in on just one area and that is how we respond when faced with ridicule for our beliefs. I know many of you struggle with this as family members, friends, or colleagues heap scorn on your Christian beliefs.
 - Dawkins may call people to mock and ridicule Christians but we must not respond in kind. In Peter’s first letter he talked about Christians suffering for doing good and then wrote:
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 21) “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”**
- This is especially true with our interactions online. It is so easy to lash out from behind a keyboard. It is so easy to say things online that you would never say in person and to just react. Here are some ways I have tried to apply this through my online interactions. First, pray for the person. Second, pray to know how to respond in a way that pleases the Lord. Third, wait to respond. Think on your response instead of just firing out thoughts. Fourth, respond with grace and truth.

CONCLUSION

- As Christians we agree that it is critically important to be on the right side of history. The only question is who defines what is the “right” side of history.
 - If following Christ puts us on the wrong side of history from a cultural perspective then we will accept it for we believe that Jesus is the Lord of history and will one day return to judge all people. The only way to be on the right side of history is to belong to him and to live our lives in light of that future Day.
 - **Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness. . . ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.**