

## Hastening His Return?

In most of **2 Peter**, and especially **chapters 2 & 3**, the apostle Peter writes to warn his readers about the things which will happen in 'the last days'. It seems to me that all the New Testament writers lived in constant expectation that they were in the final generation before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to take up his kingdom on earth. It seems that, down the ages, believers have often had this same awareness and it is no different today. Possibly a majority of born-again believers feel that they will live to see him come back with the clouds of heaven, "in just the same way as you have watched him go into heaven." (**Acts 1:11** and **Daniel 7:13-14**)

On the other hand, those same believers may often be found in one of two 'camps', each of which carries enormous dangers.

The first one is currently fashionable, borne along largely on the wave of some parts of the so-called 'charismatic movement'. This says that the church is to 'take' the world in the last days, and expects that there will be massive areas of secular society which will be taken over by Christians in preparation for the return of the Lord Jesus. Phrases like 'bringing in the kingdom' and 'the government of God' seem to be commonplace.

I cannot find this 'dominion theology' in the New Testament. It sounds very attractive, perhaps especially to young and/or idealistic Christians, but it leads to false expectations. Many of us have seen more than enough of the results of false hopes being dashed. The outcome is almost always disillusionment, often cynicism and total abandonment of faith. Some who hold this theology justify it, at least in part, on the basis of **2 Peter 3:12**, and argue that by taking over and 'Christianising' society they are "hastening the coming of the day of God". Peter makes it clear in **2 Peter 3:10-13** that the old has to go before the new can be established, and there are enough references in the New Testament to show us that the kingdom will not come until the King returns and that, when he does come, it will be first of all for judgement and the process of putting "everything under his feet". (See **1 Corinthians 15:23-28**)

The second 'school of theology' is what Peter attacks without reservation in **2 Peter 3:3-7**. The present version of this in many church fellowships is that 'it has always been done like this', and there is perhaps no area where this false teaching is more common than in the whole question of divisions among Christians. It is abundantly clear from the New Testament that no division is acceptable to the Lord, but we have summoned an army of excuses which we use to try to convince ourselves (and the Lord??!) that it just cannot be done. Like the 'mockers' in **vv.3 & 4**, we use this argument as a justification to just get on with what we want to do.

I make no apology about going on 'like a broken record' about the need for real working unity in the Body of Christ, and for stressing that local unity is what really matters. While the church in a locality remains 'divided against itself', it remains very largely unable to fulfil its role as the visible dwelling place of God in that locality - and I am NOT talking about buildings! This is not only about denominational or sectarian divisions. It is also about broken relationships between individual believers. They are both vital areas where we seem to fail habitually. Satan hardly needs to do any more than keep us on this 'roundabout' to make us totally ineffective.

While we refuse to act as one body, whether individually or corporately, we obstruct the Lord's purposes in preparing us as the Bride he has chosen for his Son and, without the Bride making herself ready, there can be no marriage, no marriage feast, no new start, no announcement that "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he will reign forever and ever." (**Revelation 11:15**).

We too readily adopt the same attitude as the mockers whom Peter describes. The Lord has made it clear that he will return for a Bride who has made herself ready. (**Ephesians 5:25-32** , **Revelation 19:7-8**) We say, in effect, "Sorry, Lord, it can't be done. Perhaps you don't understand the difficulties we have in breaking down the barriers between Christian groups and individuals - we just can't do what you say". Perhaps we have not realised that 'can't be done' is not an option. The Lord doesn't ask us whether we are prepared to go along with this nice little idea of his, he says that it is going to be

accomplished and seeks our co-operation. He prayed in those terms in **John 17**. Is his prayer not going to be answered, then?

‘Praying for revival’ is not a valid alternative. The New Testament is filled with exhortations for us to live in the good of what our Father has given us in Jesus, not to sit around asking him to wave a magic wand!

Perhaps the greatest need we have is the need for reality in our walk with God. Without the conviction that what the Lord Jesus has done for me is actually true and real, it can be all just so many words to occupy my time and my mind, a little game that I play on Sundays (and some weekdays), but with no actual connection to the real world that I live in.

Our Father has set us free from the debt and guilt of our rebellion and failure, through the blood of Jesus shed for us. He has freed us from slavery to sin, legalism and the world's way of doing things through Jesus's body broken for us. He has breathed new life into us through the power of his resurrection and poured out the Holy Spirit on us by virtue of Jesus taking his place at the Father's right hand. Do we realise that we are to take hold of all these to prepare us for what he wants to accomplish through us as the Bride of Christ, to share his glory and reign with him in a real, practical way? A wedding day is more of a starting line than a goal!

I have been struck recently with a fresh understanding of the word used for ‘truth’ in the New Testament. Its meaning is far closer to ‘reality’ than the rather dry way in which we often use the word ‘truth’ in a Christian context. The word for truth itself (aletheia) is a negative version of a word that means ‘hidden’ or ‘escaping notice’, so we could almost translate it as ‘that which cannot escape notice’ or ‘self-evident fact’.

Try applying that sort of meaning to **John 4:23-24**, where Jesus says that worship needs to be in spirit and reality. Or look at **Ephesians 4:15**, usually translated as “speaking the truth in love” but perhaps more fully as “being real in love” or “lovingly dealing with facts” in our relationships with each other!

Watchman Nee wrote wisely that we can never speed up the work of God but we can all too easily delay it. Perhaps we need to look again at Peter's exhortation to us to be "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God", in the light of this potential that we have to slow down God's purposes. The only 'hastening' that we can do is by the removal of delays - delays caused by our lack of obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

There is a paradox here. There is a day coming which the Father knows, on which the Lord Jesus Christ will return to this earth in glory. The date is fixed and certain but unknown to us. On the other hand, it is clear that we can affect when that day will be, by our obedience or disobedience!

Peter holds this apparent paradox happily enough in this chapter. He says that the day of the Lord will come like a thief, when no-one expects it and when mockers are saying that nothing is going to change, but he also says that we can affect the speed with which the day arrives. Where do we start? Certainly on the personal level, seeking to put right broken relationships, especially with fellow believers but with everybody as much as it depends on us. (**Romans 12:18**) This is essential. If we try to dodge round this aspect to do other things instead, we will miss out on what the Lord wants to do with us in his Body.

Then perhaps on the 'group level', to begin to regard other believers in our area as actually part of the Body, just as much as those in 'our own fellowship'. Making real friendships personally, joining in with what they are doing where we can, encouraging our leaders to get together with leaders of other local groups, maybe arranging to function together more in worship, Bible study, prayer, evangelism, and even over a cup of tea!

Let us ask the Lord what we can do to hasten his return!

Dave Taylor      14 November 1999

Further copies can be downloaded from [www.justonecandle.uk](http://www.justonecandle.uk)