

## Anticipating PEACE

Text: 2 Peter 3:8-15a (with emphasis on 14-15a)

Before Jesus came, before the Word was made flesh, God's people were holding to a promise. Despite military defeats, despite being prisoners of war, despite divisions in God's kingdom, despite economic hardships, and despite disappointment, they were waiting for the Prince of Peace of whom we read in Isaiah 9 this morning. They expected an earthly kingdom of peace such as prophesied by such as the psalmist in Psalm 85:8 where God would speak to God's people.

Today is the beginning of the second week of Advent, usually having the theme of PEACE. It's ironic that we should talk of peace when we are in the midst of hectic shopping, an accelerated social schedule, family tensions, and often, depressing weather. How are we to experience peace in such a frantic, trying season?

# We Are PROMISED Peace

- Luke 2:14
- *14) "Glory to God in the highest places and on the earth, peace to humans toward [whom God shows] good will."*  
--Pastor Johnny's Translation



But the promised peace isn't just for this season where the angels promised the shepherds in Luke 2:14: ***"Glory to God in the highest places and on the earth, peace to humans toward [whom God shows] good will."*** (Pastor Johnny's translation) The promised peace is supposed to be experienced

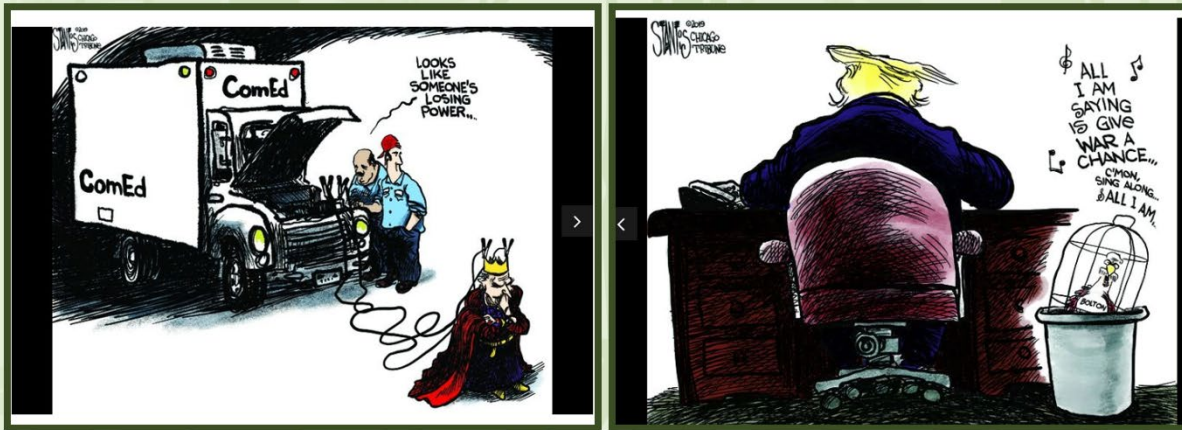
between ourselves and God, within ourselves, experienced within God's people, and transferred to those who might believe by example and sharing.

## So Many Lack PEACE About...



Some of us don't feel at peace about our careers. Some of us don't feel at peace about our school efforts. Some of us don't feel at peace about our relationships. Some of us don't feel at peace about our finances.

# Or Even Politics!



Some of us don't feel at peace about the corruption in our state politics as illustrated by the FBI's investigation of Speaker Mike Madigan and the number of Democratic legislators it has already brought down or the dysfunction in our national politics as evidenced by the President, as of July of this year, having firing more members of his cabinet in less than one term than any other administration in history. Naturally, that includes the hawkish John Bolton who just released his tell-all book.

Some of us don't feel at peace about our health, our chances for survival. Yet, we celebrate Jesus as the Prince of Peace, we recognize peace as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and your pastor often ends his benedictions with "Go, in God's peace." Why do we talk so much about peace when God's people lose money, jobs, relationships, hope, direction, and purpose? Is there something we're missing?

Well, the Christians in the first century didn't feel like they had as much peace as they needed, either. They were getting very impatient because Jesus was supposed to have brought the Kingdom of God and they expected Him to come back any day to destroy everything and start all over. So, 2 Peter puts the delay and the lifestyle of those who don't feel peace in perspective. Let's read.

## 2 Peter 3:8-9

8) *But this you mustn't overlook, people I care about, that **one day** for the Lord is as a **thousand years** and a **thousand years** is as **one day**.* 9) *The Lord is not **stalling** the promise, as some consider **stalling**, but **longsuffering** on behalf of you; He does not want anyone destroyed but rather everyone to reach a turn-around point [lit. repentance, beyond the mind].*

*--Pastor Johnny's translation*

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You may wonder why the passage is emphasizing this matter of time. As a biblical illustration, did you ever think of Genesis 42 where Joseph recognized his brothers, but his brothers didn't recognize him? When he revealed himself, he pointed out how God's time schedule was such that Joseph experienced a lot of individual trials and problems in order to feed God's people at the critical time. Not only did he point to this principle in Genesis 42, but he went to Genesis 45 to demonstrate it again.



1=1,000 & 1,000=1  
Delay DOESN'T Mean "Stalling"

• Βραδύναι

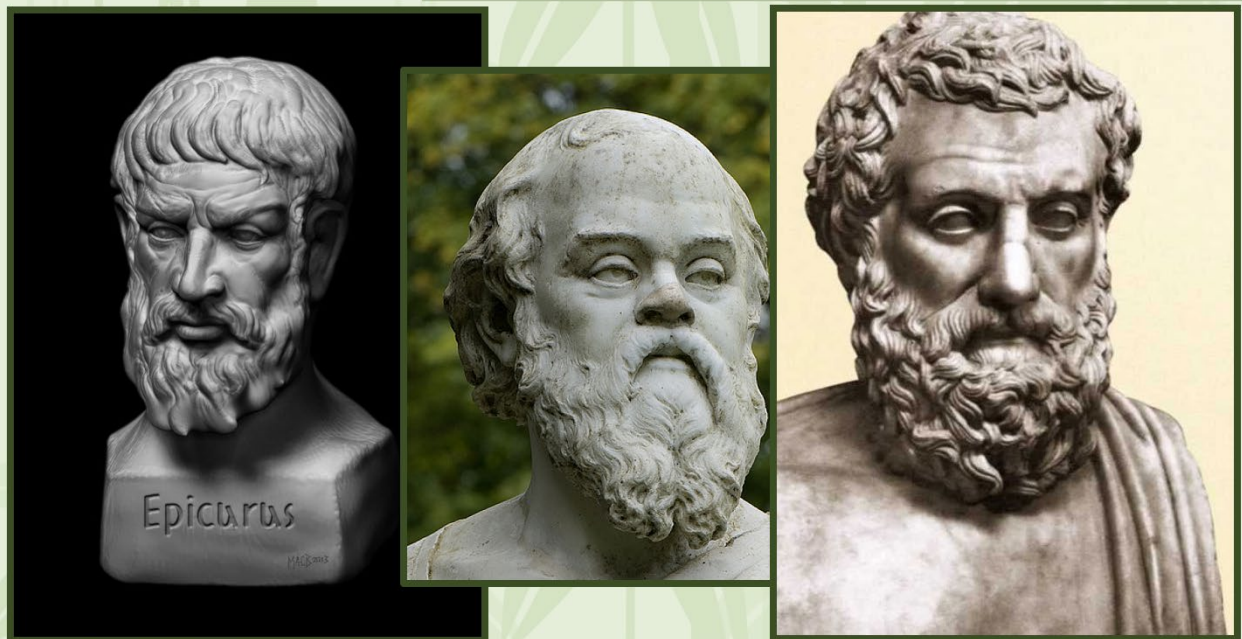
reminds me of the panda as a symbol of China, ancient gifts to royalty,



black and white markings believed to have represented the "balance of yin/yang," laid-back personality suggests peace, patience

The words I translated from verse 9 as "stalling" would be closest to the idea of a bear suggesting a slow-moving, even clumsy person. I like that because, in China, pandas were often given as gifts to the emperors or used in symbolism from the Han Dynasty forward. Even though they were a symbol of peace and patience, wealthy Chinese would place sculptures of bears to guard their houses in an animistic Feng Shui. Well, the words I translated as "stalling" come from the root meaning to "slow" something in order to delay it. And the "bear" idea isn't far off because, while it may look slow and clumsy, it is fast and powerful when it needs to be.

# Pagan Background



This idea of a delay in divine judgment would have been quite familiar to early Christians because pagan philosophers also had a problem with the concept. A group of pagan philosophers, the Epicureans, were rivals first to the Jews and then to the Christians. The Epicureans used the idea of a “delay” in divine judgment (that is, the wicked getting away with so much) as an argument against the existence of the gods, much less God. They perceived the delay as meaning that God *couldn't* remove injustice or God was unwilling to bestow justice.

In fact, another philosophical rival of the church was a neo-Platonist named Plutarch. In his tract, “The Delay of Divine Judgment,” he used the very words we see in 2 Peter. He said “The delay and procrastination of the Deity in punishing the wicked appears to me the most telling argument by far (548), ...” against God’s providence. The word translated delay is the one we have here. He goes on to say, “...his slowness destroys belief in providence (549). The word translated “slowness” is the same one we have here. Aeschylus uses the same verb to speak of battle tactics in his “Seven Against Thebes” when he has a character say, “[Even] if a hand not delay as per a spear thrust, victory is a gift given by God to mortal humans.” (lines 624-625).

I suggest to you that if the pagans felt like the lack of judgment and clear-cut intervention from the gods in general was an argument that the gods didn't care, how much more would it have been a problem for God's people? After all, they had been taught that God was love and that God was in charge and yet, they couldn't help but wonder if God was really as powerful and/or involved as they thought He was.

## 2 Peter 3:10-13 (Pastor Johnny's translation)

*10) But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will **disintegrate** with a whoosh [burst?], the elemental building blocks will burn to **disintegration**, and the earth and all its works will perish. 11) Since all this will **disintegrate** in this way, what sort of people should you strive to be? [Be those with] a holy and reverent life, 12) **anticipating** and eagerly pursuing the coming Day of God when the heavens will be set on fire and **disintegrate**, and the elemental building blocks will burn and melt. 13) But we **anticipate** new heavens and a new earth according to His promise, where righteousness will live.*

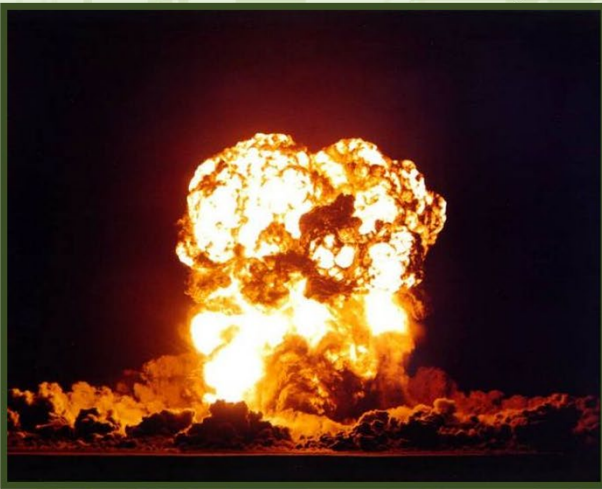
Now, I want to very quickly read the next few verses and make a short comment or two before I get to the heart of the idea of PEACE in God's kingdom. Let's pick up with verse 10.

*10) But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will **disintegrate** [lit. "loosen" or "be paralyzed"] with a whoosh [sonic boom? Burst?], the elemental building blocks will burn to **disintegration**, and the earth and all its works will perish. 11) Since all this will **disintegrate** in this way, what sort of people should you strive to be? [Be those with] a holy and reverent life, 12) **anticipating** and eagerly pursuing the coming Day of God when the heavens will be set on fire and **disintegrate**, and the elemental building blocks will burn and melt. 13) But we **anticipate** new heavens and a new earth according to His promise, where righteousness will live. (Pastor Johnny's translation)*



My repetition of the disintegration idea in the highlighted words shows that the idea of causing something to be untied or loosened could indicate the undoing of the atomic bonding that holds the material elements of the world together. They aren't exactly the same word, but they all share a common root idea of loosening.

## Day of the Lord Day of God



- ANTICIPATE
- Προσδοκῶντες
- For evil?
- For good?



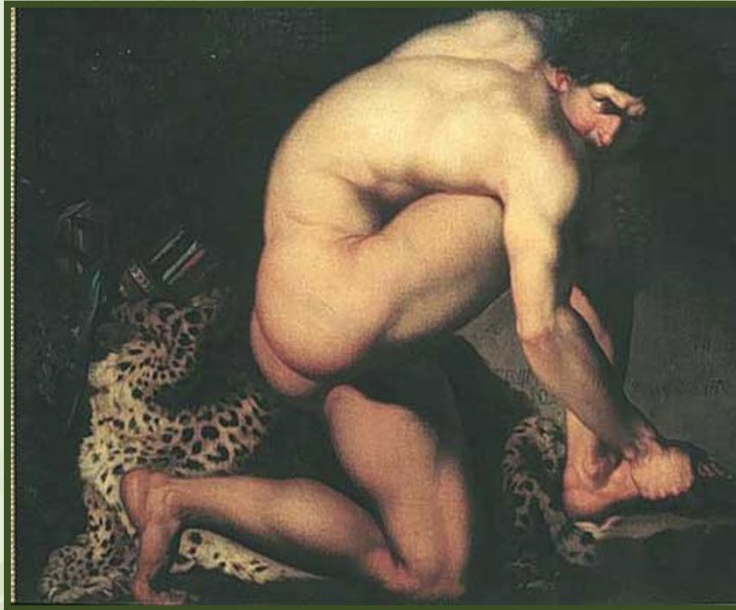
Yes, I know it sounds like nuclear holocaust—all that whooshing, booming, burning, melting, disintegrating makes it sound exactly like that's what's going to happen. It certainly fits the description, but I don't want you to dwell on the potential destructive force of God's judgment. How well I remember being in junior high school in October, 1962 when JFK was having his stare-down with Nikita Khrushchev over the missiles in Cuba. Even at the Pacific Missile Test Range, the missiles in the silos were being armed with nuclear devices. We were truly on the eve of destruction, but somehow God was longsuffering and let us get this far.

Instead, I want you to concentrate on the verb "anticipate." The Greek verb looks like this and it's used in verse 12, 13, and as we'll see in a moment, verse 14. It means to expect, to be on the look-out for, to anticipate, to be prepared for something that is sometimes evil and



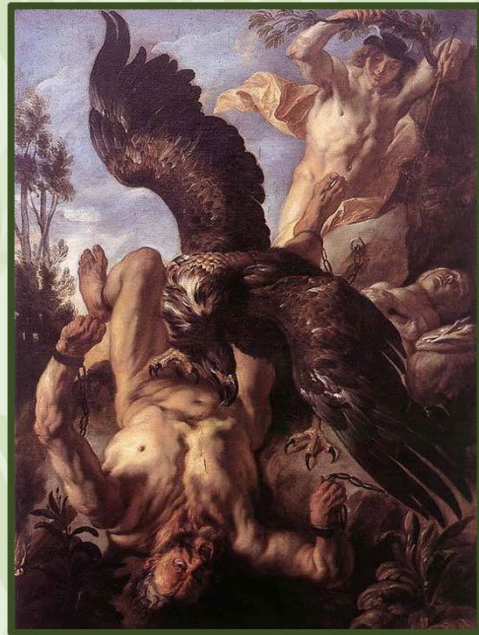
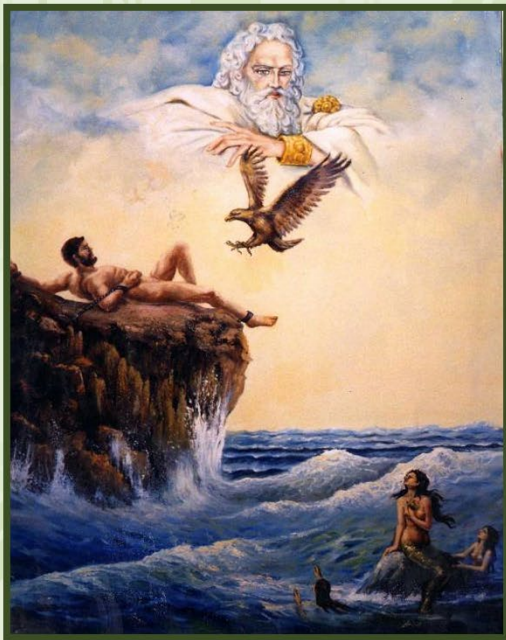
sometimes good. It's a somewhat common verb in Greek as I'll try to demonstrate from some Greek dramas.

## Sophocles' "Philoctetes"



Sophocles used it to indicate something bad in line 784 of his play on Philoctetes. You may not remember Philoctetes, but he was a buddy of Odysseus and had earned the special bow of Heracles that had poisoned arrows. In irony, Philoctetes was bitten on the heel by a viper and, though he seemed to survive the initial attack, Odysseus didn't want to run the risk of having a sick man hollering and crying out on the deck of his ship, so he left him on an island to die. At one point, his son finds him still alive, but he looks down at his swollen foot that still has poison in it and says, "I'm **anticipating** worse to come." Then, he gives the bow to his son and hopes that it will offer him more benefit than it did him.

# “Prometheus Bound”



Aeschylus used the same verb three times in “Prometheus Bound,” twice for good and once for evil. First, the chorus asks if they should expect, **anticipate**, be prepared for someone to supplant and reign instead of Zeus, the so-called father of the gods. That’s a cosmic regime change, just as we anticipate in 2 Peter. Another time, Prometheus tells Hermes, messenger of the gods, that Hermes is naïve, a mere lad, if he expected, anticipated, was prepared to receive anything good from him. There, it implies the kind of anticipation a child might have in waiting to unwrap gifts at Christmas. But finally, Hermes bears the message to Prometheus to expect, anticipate, be prepared for NO END to his agony as the eagles, the giant r-o-c-s, ate his viscera every day.

I go through those examples to press upon you the idea that “anticipating” meant to be prepared for *either* the bad or the good. This scripture tells us to anticipate the certain fact that the Day of the Lord will come, the Day when God will clearly be revealed as in charge, but it also reminds us that it’s both bad news and good news. It’s bad news to those who have denied God, but the appropriate response from God’s people is to expect it to happen and to be ready by following the directions of the next two verses.

## 2 Peter 3:14-15 (Pastor Johnny's translation)

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*14) Therefore, people I care about, while you're **anticipating** this, get serious about being [or "be eager to be"] found spotless, unmarked, and at peace. 15) And consider the longsuffering of the Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you concerning the wisdom given to him.*

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# A Childhood Parable



I know I probably use too many illustrations from my childhood, but I want to share one that seems particularly relevant with today's emphasis on Jesus as the Prince of Peace who not only came to earth as Redeemer, but Who is coming again as Lord. As a pre-teen or early teenager, my friends and I liked to go over to each other's houses after church and do something fun till church time that night. One friend liked to ask his mom or dad to take us to the movies on Sunday afternoon. In those days, the matinees were much cheaper than the evening prices and it was a good deal. I never said anything to my dad about it because my friend's parents treated us and we were always back in time for church. I didn't see a problem.

But one Sunday night, Mike and I were talking about the Tarzan movie we had seen that afternoon when a girl in our class became wide-eyed. "You went to a movie on Sunday afternoon?!" she asked. She was horrified, making such a big deal out of it that I finally asked my pastor father. "Dad, is there anything wrong with going to the movies on Sunday afternoon, as long as you don't miss church?" My father wisely conceded that there wasn't anything particular in the Bible about it, but said that he wouldn't be able to do it because he would hate to be sitting in a movie theater on Sunday afternoon if Jesus were to come right then.



Now, at first, that was a very spooky image to me. I could just picture sitting there watching *Dr. No* (the first James Bond movie) or *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (a classic western with Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne) and having Jesus appear and come through the screen. And then, I stopped to think about it for a moment and realized, “You know, that would be pretty cool.” And then, I responded to my father with what I think is still the ethical logic I use today. “I don’t think it would matter if I was watching the movie on Sunday or during the week. If I would be ashamed for Jesus to come while I was doing it, I shouldn’t be doing it.”

## Anticipation Isn’t...

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- “God’ll get you for that!”
- Disengaging from planning for the future of you and your family
- Disengaging from political and ecological responsibility
- Getting rebellion out of our system
- Looking for an advantage for ourselves

And there’s the key! If we’re really **anticipating** the coming of Christ, we shouldn’t ever be doing anything we’d be ashamed for him to “catch” us at. Anticipating His coming isn’t like the Jews would have looked at the Romans and hoped for the Messiah to come and establish a kingdom and kill off their oppressors. It isn’t an attitude of “God’ll get you for that.” It isn’t an attitude of “Wow! That sinner’s gonna’ get hers [or his]!”

Anticipation isn’t an attitude of, “Jesus is coming again so I don’t have to plan for my family’s future.” It isn’t “Jesus is coming again so it doesn’t really matter how we exploit the resources of the planet.” It certainly isn’t “Jesus is coming again so I better sow all my wild oats before He

gets here.” And it certainly isn’t “Jesus is coming again and I’m going to put myself in a position to benefit the most from the new kingdom.”

## “No Stains”



So, what is it then? Let’s just look quickly at three words: spotless, unmarked, and at peace. The word “spotless” literally means “no stains.” I could have translated it as stainless, but I didn’t translate it that way because we don’t usually talk about people as “stainless.” We usually think of metal as “stainless.” Where do stains come from in life? They can occur from mold, but they usually happen when something that doesn’t belong there gets rubbed or spilled onto them. A nice dress shirt gets an ink blotch; a light carpet gets a coffee tattoo.

In human life, those stains are sin, rebellion, disobedience. Our lives get rubbed or spilled onto with some attitudes, some actions, or some circumstances where we are stained. But the blood of Jesus offers forgiveness and washes us clean of all stains. But what if it’s more organic? What if it’s a blemish or a scar that hasn’t healed over? What do we do then?

The idea of being unmarked fits with the idea of being unstained. In fact, the two words, spotless and unmarked, usually appear together in the Bible—referring to sacrificial animals presented to God. This seems very similar to Paul’s admonition to present our physical lives as

spiritual sacrifices. Ultimately, it tells us that Jesus forgives even those things we *think* we can't help—those things we *think* we were born with, those things we *think* are our parents' fault because of the way we were raised, those things we *think* we can't refuse because of our peers. Don't get me wrong. God wants to help us build the discipline to overcome them. And there are also those things that have left a scar—the consequences of sin or the result of being a victim. There are those memories and bad experiences that have marked us. But God can heal those, too.

And finally, we want the returning Christ to discover us “at peace.” It doesn't say that we are to be totally without conflict in our lives. 2 Peter presumes that we're going to face a bunch of it. But we aren't to be afraid of it. We aren't to be surprised when disasters come in this world, but we aren't to be afraid of such realities, either. God's peace calms us in the middle of upheaval. We aren't to be constantly worried and unsettled. Our peace comes from being grounded in God. Most commentators simply interpret this word as meaning to be reconciled with God. It does mean that. But if we are in a correct relationship with God, that grounding will give us inner peace and confidence to face any situation.

## Key Points

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- God's “time schedule” isn't ours
- God's delays are for our benefit
- Judgment and destruction strictly make way for the new heavens and earth
- The goal is “righteousness” between God and humanity and within humanity
- Anticipation means to live with the goal of being spotless, unmarked and at peace

And in the context of today's passage, having inner peace and confidence would tell us not to be agitated about the end of the world. We need to expect it and be prepared for it, but not panic about it. As we study today's passage, we remember how few people were ready for Jesus' first coming and need to wonder how ready we are for Jesus' second coming. And while we're waiting, we need to remember that:

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So, I have to ask you this morning, as we celebrate Jesus' coming to earth as a baby, His earthly debut as the Prince of Peace, are you ready if He should come back as triumphant Savior and Lord? Are you ready to receive peace, now and forever? In our Hymn of Response, we're going to give you a chance to do something about it.