

The Folly of the Scoffers

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[0 : 00] Well, we come now to our Bible reading, and perhaps you turn with me to the second letter of Peter, chapter 3, and you'll find this on page 1019, 1019, in our big church Bibles.

We continue in this short but great little letter of the Apostle Peter to the churches. In which he seeks very affectionately to encourage them and to warn them and arm them against false teaching.

He said a lot about that in the second chapter, but he continues on that same line here in chapter 3 as well, but with other elements included. So 2 Peter, chapter 3.

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them, I'm stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Knowing this, first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, Where is the promise of his coming?

[1 : 22] For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. 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, and that by means of these, the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

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. 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 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.

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.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

[2 : 55] But, according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you're not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us this evening.

Amen. All right.

[4 : 23] Well, let's turn to our 2 Peter chapter 3 again. And the title of my sermon tonight is The Folly of the Scoffers. The Folly of the Scoffers. Page 1019 in our church Bibles.

Now, I said a week or two ago that Peter's great purpose in writing this second letter is to fortify his Christian readers against false teaching. Now, the first letter is rather different.

That's designed to fortify them against persecution. But this second letter is concerned primarily with false teaching. Peter wants his readers to be aware of it, to expect it, and therefore to arm themselves against it because forewarned is forearmed.

Now, the second chapter, which we've been reading together over the last couple of Sunday evenings, describes false teaching and false teachers. And it shows the link between false teaching and immoral living.

And then Peter brings the chapter to an end with a rather shocking proverb that he quotes from the book of Proverbs. Look at the final verse of chapter 2. The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.

[5 : 40] Now, that is a disgusting proverb, isn't it? It makes your stomach turn to read it or to think about it. But Peter, knowing that the average Christian reader is, and I certainly speak for myself, rather dull and half asleep, he wants to shock us into realizing just how damaging and wicked false teaching is.

This second chapter is by design a shocking chapter. It makes us say, I never thought it was quite as serious as that. But Peter is saying, yes, it is as serious as that.

False teaching doesn't merely damage churches, it destroys them if it's not checked. So that's been his theme in chapter 2. Now, as we turn the corner into chapter 3, the apostle is still very much driving in the same direction.

He's going to tackle another aspect of false teaching and false thinking. You'll see he speaks in verse 3 of scoffers coming in the last days. And that word scoffers speaks not merely of opposition to false teaching, but of ridicule, a contemptuous attitude towards true Christian teaching.

So what do these sneering and ridiculing scoffers say to the Christians? Peter tells us here in verse 4, I'll paraphrase it just a little bit. They say, where is this promised, so-called alleged return of Christ?

[7 : 04] We haven't seen him. It's 30-odd years now since his ascension, his alleged ascension into heaven. In fact, ever since the first people began to die, everything has just gone on and on and on in exactly the same way.

Silly old Christians deceiving yourselves like that. Ho, ho, ha, ha. But Peter tells us at the end of verse 3 just what lies behind this scoffing opposition.

He says, the scoffers who come will be following their own sinful desires. That's what motivates them. They're not driven by the word of God. The thing that determines their position is something unworthy, something ignoble, their own sinful desires.

They want just to go on sinning without reference to God because they don't want to have to give an account of themselves to a returning savior. But by contrast, he says to his readers in verse 2, I want you to remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

So do you see the contrast here between two completely different positions, two completely different ways of life? People will either follow their sinful, self-centered motives, and that's going to keep God firmly out of view, or they will listen to the teaching of the Old Testament prophets and to the Lord Jesus as he speaks through the New Testament apostles like Peter and Paul and John.

[8 : 30] And what Peter is seeking to do here, as he puts it in verse 1, is to stir up his readers' sincere mind. And the word translated sincere really means pure and unadulterated.

That is to say, unadulterated by false teaching. I want your minds, he's saying, to be uncontaminated uncontaminated by the corrosive effects of false teaching. Now in chapter 2, Peter mentioned a number of different things that the false teachers believed and did.

Here in chapter 3, he focuses on just one thing, and that is the return of Christ and the arrival of the new creation. So he's contrasting two views.

The scoffers deny his return. It's never going to happen, they say. Peter, however, says that it certainly will happen in due time as the Lord works his purpose out.

So we have a denial of the return of Christ contrasted with an assertion of his coming back. Now this raises an important question for Christian believers, and it's this.

[9 : 39] Why do we believe that Christ is going to return? On what grounds do we believe that he's coming back? The great historic creeds and confessions of the Christian church all include prominent assertions of belief that Christ will return to judge the living and the dead.

We believe that he will return. But the question is, what is the ground of our belief? Much in the Christian faith makes sense to us because it echoes our personal experience so closely.

Think, for example, of the teaching in the Bible about sin. When we've become Christians, we don't have any difficulty in believing the Bible's teaching about sin because we're so conscious of the sin that lives in our own hearts.

We think, for example, of Jesus' teaching about sin. He says, from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, envy, false witness, and so on.

And we say, yes, that's me. That's exactly the sort of thing that my heart produces. So what Jesus says about sin tallies exactly with our own experience of life.

[10:49] Or think of the Bible's teaching about forgiveness. We all have experience of forgiveness. We've all been at one end or the other of it. We've all been forgiven various things, which we've done, and we've all offered forgiveness, given forgiveness, to people who've hurt us.

So when the Bible describes the forgiveness given by God to men and women, we know, roughly speaking, what the Bible is talking about. We've experienced forgiveness at a low level, at the level of our relationships with other people, so our minds can quite quickly grasp the much more glorious level of forgiveness that God is willing to give to us.

But, something like the return of Christ has no counterpart in our normal experience of human life. We've experienced sin, and we know something about forgiveness, forgiveness, but the return of Christ is in a different category altogether.

By definition, we have had no prior experience of anything like it. On what ground, then, can we believe that the Lord Jesus is going to return to the earth in glory and power?

Well, let me ask another question. How do we believe the truth about anything? The normal answer is by research and testing and experiment. And this is certainly true in the study of history.

[12:10] For example, I believe, with a very great degree of assurance amounting to certainty, that the Second World War in Europe ended in early May 1945.

I wasn't there myself, but I believe that on the basis of various books and articles that I've read and programs that I've seen or listened to on the television or the radio and conversations that I've had with various people, including my own parents who were around at the time.

And any person who seriously doubts that the war in Europe ended in May 1945 can very quickly have those doubts resolved because there's so much material out there available.

Well, how do we come to believe that certain things are true in the fields of physics or chemistry or astronomy? The answer is by research, by testing, and by experiment.

Think of the physicist. The physicist comes up with an idea or a theory. Eureka, he says. No. He says, possibly, Eureka.

[13:13] But I must now devise a series of experiments by which to test my theory. So he sets up various machines and contraptions, and he creates ideal conditions in his laboratory, and he sets the experiment going, and then he records his findings.

He repeats the experiment soon afterwards. He perhaps modifies the conditions. He consults learned papers. He discusses his ideas with learned friends just in case they're able to spot a flaw in his work.

And then finally, months and perhaps years later, when he's really confident about it, he presents his findings to the world. Now, if he's wise, he'll bear in mind that he just might be disproved at some future point by a latter-day Einstein, but he and his friends have considerable confidence that they now know something which nobody knew in the past.

In this world, then, we come to know things and believe things on the basis of research and testing and experiment. But we shall never come to believe in the return of Christ on those grounds.

There are no data available in this world which could possibly help us. There's no telescope, however powerful, that could sight him coming from millions of light years away.

[14:32] The finest libraries in the world contain no ancient books or learned papers which could establish or prove the fact of his future return. So on what ground do Christians believe that he will come back?

There is only one ground, and that is revelation, God's revelation. And there's only one place where we can discover God's revelation, and that is the Bible.

Bible. We come to believe these wonderful things because we read them in the Bible, and we come to trust the Bible because as we get to know it better, we become increasingly convinced of its

integrity, its truthfulness, and its unity.

There is no book on earth like it. It carries a unique power, and its effect upon us as we believe its message is to bring us to life.

As the Psalms put it, and I quoted this earlier, the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. So as our souls come to be deeply revived by the Bible, we have no difficulty in believing the truth that it reveals, truths which could never be demonstrated by historical or scientific research.

[15:44] So we believe in the return of Christ because that great future event is revealed to us in the scriptures. Here in 2 Peter chapter 3, many times in the teaching of Jesus himself, many times in the letters of Paul, and in many other places.

In fact, all the greatest truths, not simply this one, but all the great truths of Christianity are revealed to us. We wouldn't and couldn't know them except by revelation. So we wouldn't know that it was God who purposefully created the heavens and the earth unless Genesis chapter 1 revealed it to us.

We wouldn't know, we couldn't know that Jesus was divine, as well as human unless the Gospels and the Epistles taught and revealed that fact to us. When many of Jesus' contemporaries certainly did not believe in his deity.

Who is this, they said? This is the carpenter's son. We know his brothers, James and Jude and Simon and his sisters. Who is he claiming to be? Then again, it's only by biblical revelation that we understand the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross, how it was that he bore our sins.

He bore the penalty we deserved. He died in our place there. Do you remember that children's song? Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

[17:05] If it weren't for the Bible, we would never have guessed that the cross was the place where Jesus showed his love for us. How could we have understood that? We would just have thought of it as a cruel miscarriage of justice, not as the supreme purposeful demonstration of love.

Real Christianity has always involved believing and accepting and submitting to the revelation of the Bible. Does this mean, then, that our approach to truth is put under an impossible strain because we accept some things by revelation, but other things by research and experiment? No. It all depends on what branch of truth and reality we're thinking about. Knowledge of things in this world come to us by this world's means and methods, by reading and research and experiment. But the truths of God, which by their nature are not accessible to research, are truths that we come to accept because we trust that what the Bible says about them is what God says about them.

And this is Peter's position here. He believes that Christ is coming again because Jesus revealed it to him. Jesus had often spoken to him and the other apostles about his return.

[18:23] So Peter believes this by revelation from Jesus. But Peter also supports and buttresses that central revealed truth by telling us various other things.

So let's look at these supports together. Three things. First, Peter tells us that scoffers will come. And he tells us what the heart of their scoffing and ridicule will be.

Look with me again at verses three and four. Knowing this, first of all, it's a first importance. Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

They will say, where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. Now that phrase, the last days there in verse three, scoffers will come in the last days.

That phrase is always used in the Bible to describe the whole period of time between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus. The last days doesn't refer just to the last decade or two before Christ returns.

[19:30] It's the whole period from the ascension of Jesus to his return in glory. So here is Peter writing in about 60 AD and he is living as much in the last days as we are today.

So in verses three and four, Peter is encouraging his readers, encouraging us. Look at the beginning of verse three. Knowing this, first of all, this is a matter of first importance.

You must understand that sin-driven scoffers, ridiculers, will come in the last days and they will express their scorn with all sorts of barbed criticisms of Christian truth.

And in particular, says Peter, they will poke fun at the teaching about Christ's return. So this means for us that when we today, when we find ourselves listening to this kind of scoffing, it's a demonstration that Peter's message has been right all along.

It would be rather worrying if Peter had said, in the last days, friends, everything is going to get better and better. People will flock more and more into the churches as the centuries roll on. [20 : 36] There'll be a growing sense of worldwide anticipation at the thought of the return of Christ. You'll see little groups of people chatting at the street corners saying, do you think it might be today or perhaps next week?

But that's not what happens, is it? What is happening today is exactly what Peter promised would happen. If you were to stop ten people in turn on Socky Hall Street on a Saturday morning and ask their views on the return of Christ, most of them would look at you as if you were a complete weirdo. Somebody might even say, I think Arnie Schwarzenegger is going to be back before Jesus is. So it's encouraging to us to find that our situation today is exactly as Peter prophesied that it would be. Peter's prediction about scoffers buttresses his central point about Christ's return. The Apostle Paul says some very similar things in his second letter to Timothy in chapter three.

He writes again about the last days. Understand this, Timothy. In the last days, people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

[22 : 00] That's what the last days are like, says Paul. Jesus says many similar things in Matthew chapter 24 about the opposition that his people will have to endure in the last days after his ascension.

He says this, they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another and many false prophets will arise.

Just the same phrase that we have here. False prophets will arise and lead many astray. So both Jesus and Peter and Paul all say the same thing and that's an encouragement to us because when we see so much opposition to the Lord's church and to Christian teaching, we can be reassured that Jesus and his apostles accurately forewarned us that this would happen.

When I was a youngster in the soft sappy south of England, I used to look at those pretty little parish churches, you know the sort that you get on postcards, pretty little sweet churches in counties like Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

And I used to think how lovely to be the vicar of a church like that. What a golden and delightful way of life going around saying God bless you to all the old ladies.

[23 : 19] and presiding over the annual church faith in the vicarage garden. I'm delighted to see how many pots of jam people have donated this year, Mrs.

Trumpington. But I discovered that real Christian life is not like that at all. Simon Peter tells us exactly what to expect. So when people deny Christ and scoff at the idea of his return, we don't need to take offense at God.

We simply realize afresh that the Bible tells the truth. Scoffers will come, says Peter, and they have come. So that's Peter's first point as he encourages us to hold fast to the teaching that Christ will return.

Now secondly, Peter shows us the flaw in the scoffers' argument. Verse 4, they say, where is this promised coming?

For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. Now here's the flaw exposed. 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, and that by means of these, the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

[24 : 38] So Peter shows us where the scoffers make their mistake. He says there at the beginning of verse 5, they deliberately overlook this fact. Now that's a telling phrase.

They're not innocent, Peter is saying. There is a fact of Bible history which they know very well, but they are deliberately drawing a veil over it. Now this deliberate ignoring of facts is a favorite tactic, and I guess all of us use it at times.

It's a branch of self-deception. We suspect that something is true, but we don't want it to be true, so we manipulate the facts and present a false argument. It's just the kind of thing that goes on during an election campaign.

A politician stands up and with a very confident loud voice announces that if his party wins the election, X billion pounds will be allocated to this or that department, and the face of Britain will be

transformed.

So vote for us. But a canny observer on the other party or on the other side says, but Mr. So-and-so, you're presenting a false picture here because you are deliberately overlooking a factor of which you are fully aware, and you know it.

[25 : 51] As the old saying goes, there's none so blind as those that don't want to see. So Peter is saying there's a fact here, but the scoffers don't want to see it. They are deliberately ignoring it.

But they're not pulling the wool over Peter's eyes. They're simply deceiving themselves. So let's see what they're saying and how they're wrong. What they're saying in verse 4 is that nothing could ever alter the stable progress of world history.

Ever since the fathers fell asleep, which means the very first people who inhabited the world, ever since the earliest days, all things are continuing happily and stably, just as they were from the beginning of creation.

In other words, the world is a reliable, unchanging entity. It has always gone on without interruption or catastrophe. And its future will surely therefore be the same as its past.

But Peter says, no, you are deliberately overlooking the great flood. The world has not simply gone on unchanging from its first beginnings. God deluged the world with water back in the days of Noah.

[27 : 02] Your so-called unchanging continuum was devastatingly interrupted by God because he was judging the world's wickedness and rebellion. A pattern has been set.

The God who intervened back then shows that he's able and willing to intervene again. That first judgment was a judgment by flood. The second judgment, the final one, will be a judgment by fire. Now, what do we sophisticated 21st century people make of this? Perhaps the values of modern secularism have crept more deeply into our thinking than we've realized.

When Peter talks like this, do we secretly think that we're looking at the more way out fringes of biblical teaching? Well, we're not. This is right at the center of the Bible gospel.

This is not fringe material for the wackier Christian. This is the consistent teaching of the Bible about the greatest event of all, the return of the Lord Jesus to save his beloved people and to judge and destroy his opponents.

[28 : 09] And it's clear that Peter's words about the flood are again based on Jesus's words. Jesus taught the very same thing and Jesus would have taught Peter. There's no need to turn this up, but it's all there again in Matthew chapter 24, where Jesus speaks at length about his return.

He speaks of the Son of Man himself coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he goes on like this. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage right up to the day when Noah entered the ark and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away.

So it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Now that is a terrifying picture. It's a tragic picture. Those people back then were unaware, says Jesus.

They were just getting on with the regular business of life, eating and drinking and marrying. If they heard Noah telling them the reasons why he was building his great big boat, they paid little attention to him.

[29 : 20] They probably thought he was a crackpot building that great ark and announcing a catastrophic intervention of God by water. But Jesus says it will be just the same before his return.

People will simply be going about doing their normal thing. There will be two men, he says, working in the field, but they will suddenly be separated, one saved, the other lost.

There'll be two women grinding corn to feed their families and they too will be separated, one saved, one judged and lost. Therefore, he says, stay awake, be prepared.

You don't know the day of your Lord's return. He says it will be like a thief coming in the night. In other words, it will happen when it is least expected. Now, Peter is exactly reproducing his master's teaching here.

The flood, he says, is a foreshadowing of the return of Christ. He even mentions the thief analogy here in verse 10. So it's a cluster of ideas that hold together and it shows that the apostles were faithfully passing on the message they'd heard from Jesus himself.

[30 : 26] This is not Simon Peter in a wacky moment. This is the heart of Jesus' teaching, which Peter is not allowing his readers to forget. As he puts it in verse 1, I'm stirring up your uncontaminated mind by way of reminder.

Keep thinking of these things, he says. So the flaw in the scoffer's argument is in the words of verse 5, a deliberate overlooking of a fact.

Now, is not that the flaw in the position of everyone who is wanting to avoid the teaching of the Bible? The Bible describes the greatest of all facts, the great facts which alone explain human existence and the way to human happiness.

And the facts are, well, the greatest of them, the creation, the fall of man, the flood, the calling of the people of Israel, the coming of Christ himself, his incarnation, his teaching, his miracles, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and the future fact of his return.

Those are the great facts that underlie and explain the history of the world. But the natural heart of man wants to overlook these facts and indulge in fantasy.

[31 : 44] Think, for example, of a man who's preparing to go on holiday. Imagine him getting ready. He's packing his bag. What shall I take, he says? Swimming trunks, fishing rod, waterproof trousers, boots, maps, sunblock.

How about a few books? There might be a rainy day or two in the highlands. So he goes to his bookshelf. Ah, he says, I'll take this. Here's an Ian Rankin. That's exciting. I'll take a J.K. Rowling. Yes, a little bit of culture.

Jane Austen, pride and sensibility. Oh, and there's my grandmother's Bible sitting there. Well, I shan't take that, of course. Why, of course?

Because grandmother's Bible contains a number of facts which I would prefer to overlook. If I take grandmother's Bible with me, it would force me to think about God. And if I have to think about God, I'm going to have to think about repentance and obedience.

And I wish neither to repent nor obey. So I shan't take the Bible. So that man is deliberately overlooking the facts and therefore he's deceiving himself.

[32 : 50] All unbelief is at heart self-deception. But the facts are, says Peter here, that God deluged the world in the past, not because he took pleasure in destroying life, but because the wickedness of human beings had reached such a pitch of ugliness that the world had to be called to account.

And that prototype intervention will be repeated at the end, says Peter, this time not by water, but by fire. So as Peter presses home his teaching about the return of Christ, he reassures his readers and us today by telling us first that scoffers will come and therefore let's not be surprised at all at all the unbelief that we see around us.

And secondly, that the scoffers deliberately close their eyes to the facts of history. And then third, Peter assures us, reassures us by reminding us of the power of God.

And his power is seen in this, that he controls the decisive events of world history by his word. Just look again at verse five.

The fact overlooked by the scoffers is the fact that the word of God created the world in the first place and then brought the deluge. Peter is simply restating Genesis at this point.

[34 : 12] Genesis one, God said, let there be light. And there was light. And then God said, let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters. And he made the expanse and he called the expanse sky.

And God said, let the waters be gathered together in one place and let the dry land appear. And it was so. God called the dry land earth and the waters he called seas.

And so it goes on. God speaks and the wonderful earth, not to mention the stars and the planets, come into being. But the flood happens too, not because of a series of odd atmospheric conditions, but because God commands it.

And that's clear from the Genesis account. God says to Noah, in seven days time, I will send rain on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights and every living thing that I've made, I will blot out from the face of the ground.

And that's exactly what happened. On that day, the account goes on, all the fountains of the great deep burst forth and the windows of the heavens were opened and the rain fell upon the earth for 40 days and 40 nights.

[35 : 24] It's because God commanded it. So Peter's point is that the word of God both created the world and brought about the flood. God's word, therefore, both creates and destroys.

Now verse seven, by the same word, that same powerful word from the mouth of the same powerful God, the heavens and the earth that now exist are, and look carefully at verse seven because it

contains startling information.

What is the purpose of our world continuing? Why do things go on? Why are we still here in 2017?

Well, think of Britain. Think of the crops growing in our cornfields.

Think of the cattle which provide us with milk and beef. Think of the industry that provides us with heat and power and cars and roads and airplanes. Think of all the activity that takes place all over the world every day.

What is its purpose? To feed us? Yes. To provide us with equipment and comfort and pleasure?

Well, yes, in the short term, those things are right, and we can be very thankful, we should be thankful, for the fertility and the resources of the planet.

[36 : 38] But in the longer term, verse seven is telling us that God's purpose in prolonging the life of the world is to bring it to the day of judgment and destruction.

That's the startling thing. Look at the verbs there. Stored up and kept. Stored up for fire and kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Not the godly, not those who belong to Christ. We who are Christians have a different future. And verse 13, names that future for us. The new heavens and the new earth where righteousness dwells.

Thank God for that. Thank God for the salvation that promises such a wonderful future. But let's be under no illusions about the old world, the world in rebellion, the world that reaches out for any book but the Bible.

That world is stored up for fire and kept until the day of judgment. And that fire and judgment will be set loose by the same word that brought the deluge and by the same God who sent our Savior.

[37 : 50] Well friends, the question is, will we dare to believe these extraordinary, wonderful things about God? Look back again to verse 1. What Peter is doing is writing like this to stir up our minds and to stimulate our minds to be sincere in our faith, to be unpolluted by the pressures of the world around us.

The presence of the scoffer and that presence is felt by us every day, it will always mean that those who are scoffed at will be made to feel that our position is ridiculous.

Think of an older Christian in the church and perhaps the way people might talk to him or to her. Here you are, you've reached an age of considerable maturity, you've worked hard, you know the world, now here you are living in retirement, enjoying your pension and your rose garden and you honestly believe that Christ is going to come back.

Well think of a much younger Christian. How do friends who are not Christians think of the young Christian or speak to him or her? You are a student at a really good university.

You appear to have a reasonably good brain between your ears. After all, you wash yourself, you dress nicely, you're well organized in your work and your study. But did I hear you say that you think the world is stored up for fire?

[39 : 13] I suppose you mean a nuclear war when you say that kind of thing. No, I don't. I mean for the day of judgment. Now do we dare to speak like that?

Do we dare to allow the Bible's teaching to sink into our souls and fashion our lives?

Fundamentally, do we dare to be unashamed of the gospel? Remember Jesus' words about his return.

He says, whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

The one of whom Jesus will be unashamed when he returns is the one who holds to his teaching. And Peter's teaching is Jesus' teaching.

Peter has taken the words of Jesus and is representing them to a later generation of Christians, including us today. This third chapter of his letter is part of the gospel and it is a glorious gospel.

[40 : 16] But Peter is assuring us that scoffers will come and they will scoff at us for believing a revelation which cannot be proved or demonstrated by the tenets of worldly wisdom or research.

We will only persevere as Christians lifelong if we're prepared to receive the brickbats and the rotten eggs of the scoffers.

Peter is calling on us to keep our minds pure and uncontaminated by all these falsehoods. The world in its present form is continuing because by the word of God it is stored up for fire and kept for the day of judgment.

But we who belong to the Lord are waiting for new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. And we shall think more about that, God willing, next week.

Let us pray together. Amen. At the very end of the Bible, the Apostle John writes this about Jesus. [41 : 31] He who testifies to these things says, surely I am coming soon. Amen, we reply. Come, Lord Jesus. And indeed, Lord Jesus, we ask that your return might be hastened.

We ask that we might quickly see that day when your glory and your power and magnificence and salvation and love are all revealed to our hearts and we're able to see you face to face and enjoy your company.

But in the meantime, dear Lord, keep us faithful to this wonderful revelation and help us, we pray, never to be ashamed of it. And we ask it for the sake of your truth and your great name.

Amen.