

## **Fundamental Belief #25**

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is near. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times. (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21.)

I love this truth! Jesus is coming soon! Today we are reminded of this glorious reality from 2 Peter 3. 2 Peter 3 pushes us to greater confidence in the second coming. There are two words in this chapter that we are going to hang our thoughts on. The words are *promise* and *scoffers*. They first occur in verse 3 and 4.

**2 Peter 3:3-4** ...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? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

There is the voice of the scoffer and there is the voice of promise.

There are a lot of ways to approach the study of the second coming. When I preach on this topic, I don't struggle with what to say. I struggle with what not to say. So, my prayer this week was for God to narrow down for me what aspect of his coming I should focus on. It is such a major Biblical theme that the first task in studying it is to decide the scope of the study. I had to make that decision this week. I pulled up my previous sermon notes on the second coming. When I printed them off, the stack of papers was nearly ½ an inch thick. And these are just the sermons that I have personally preached on the topic. As an example of how much there is to this topic, I will give a summary of the studies I have in that collection.

I found notes from an evangelistic series I preached in Douglasville Georgia in 2010. I preached Mark Finley's series called Revelation of Hope. What would you imagine I talked about? If you have been to an Adventist prophecy series, you have a good idea of the studies we covered. We studied the prophetic timelines that tell us that the second coming is near. We went through Matthew 24 and reviewed the signs of his coming. There are signs in the religious world, in the political world, in the social world, in the natural world and so on. We studied the timing of his coming. I offered support for a post-tribulation, pre-millennial second coming! That is, that Christ is coming after tribulation and before the millennium. I preached about the manor of his coming. It will be visible, literal, climactic, and audible. See I was preaching to the Bible Belt and they were familiar with the idea of a secret rapture. So I made the point to show them from the Bible that there was nothing secret about it. We focused on the second coming for many nights. We studied the beast and the three angels' messages and the godlessness in the last days and

we exposed spiritual Babylon. Night after night we studied these topics and most of them touched on some aspect of the second coming.

I have notes from an evangelistic series I did in Pettersburg, West Virginia in 2017. This time I wrote my own series, and I framed every single message with the teaching of the second coming. The first week was all about the reality of his coming, the signs, the prophecies, and the promises. We focused more on who is coming (Jesus) than what is coming (tribulation). We reminded ourselves why he is coming (to take us with him). The second week we talked all about preparing for his coming. We went to 2 Peter 3 to ask how we should live in light of his soon return. We talked about the call to purity. We considered these 10 virgins and the call to be ready and to be watchful. We talked about the deceptions and the spiritual confusion and the call to keep the commandments of God and hold to the faith in Jesus. We asked what it means to hasten his coming. The third week we talked about the results of his coming, the righteous raised and the wicked destroyed. We continued to the millennium and judgment and our eternal home.

I have led in studies where we took charts explaining the rapture theory and compared them to scripture. You know that it is commonly taught that the rapture and the glorious appearing are two separate events and that the two have irreconcilable differences. There are Biblical reasons why I don't believe that. And I have preached those sermons.

I preached a series on this history of Adventism. I have preached from Acts 1 about the same Jesus coming in the same way he left. I have noted how Jesus redirected his followers to not focus on times and dates but to go live spirit-filled lives.

I have preached on John 14, when Jesus says that he will go to prepare a place for us. I have studied the cultural imagery of the Jewish engagement custom and how Jesus was speaking as a groom preparing for his bride.

I once made a spreadsheet of all the recurring words and themes in the Bible passages about the second coming. It was massive. I noticed recurring messages like, do not be afraid, be watchful, be eager...

You see, there is just a lot that could be considered about the topic of the second coming.

Any of these studies would be meaningful to dive into again. But this week as I prayed about what angle to share from, I landed on the certainty of the coming of Christ. I felt God saying, "Just tell them I am really coming back. Assured them that I made a promised and I will keep it." God has put it on my heart, I trust we need it. I want to emphasize the best I can, that Jesus really is coming back! I struggled, briefly, because there is more "meat" to a message that covers the debated points of theology surrounding the second coming. Then, I spent my week talking with many of you. I listened as you told me about discouragement. I heard how that family member is struggling with doubt. I heard how you feel far from God. I heard the word "hopeless". Then I heard Jesus say again, "Just tell them I am really coming back."

Do you remember what the two words are that we are focusing on in 2 Peter 3? Scoffer and promise. The voice of the scoffer and the voice of the promise have messages for all of us. The promise says, "Jesus is coming." The scoffer says, "It sure is taking him a while." The promise says, "it's certain." The scoffer says, "maybe it's not." The louder the scoffer gets the more we need to listen to the voice of promise. Which voice is louder?

Sometimes we agonize over the details to such an extent that we forget how incredible it is to know that Jesus really is coming back. We might get so preoccupied with how he is coming or when he is coming that we overlook the wonder that he is coming. He really is!

The second coming is not just a teaching from the Bible. It is a promise from Jesus. We might scoff at a promise that is made by someone who is unable to carry it out. We scoff because they have proven to over promise and underdeliver. The trustworthiness of the promise is established by the credibility of the one making the promise. Consider who is making this promise. This is a promise made by God.

We are going to have a Bible study now. As we go through 2 Peter 3, reflect in your own faith. There is a promise and a scoffer. Which voice is louder?

**2 Peter 3:1** This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder...

In verse one, Peter says he is *reminding* the reader. The second coming is not a new teaching. It is one that all of scripture has been vocal about. It is a reminder. You may already know that Jesus is coming. We need our minds stirred up in reminders. It is not a stirring up that confuses you but one that gets you all excited.

The promise is a reminder. Just in case your confidence is a bit shaky, I want to remind you that the graves really are going to burst open! Just in case you are starting to think that it sounds a bit more like fairy tale than fact, I want to remind you that we really will be given immortal bodies! Just in case you feel a need for a backup plan if the second coming doesn't happen, I want to remind you that the things of this world really will burn up! Just in case you have fallen into despair, I want to remind you that you really will see your loved ones again!

**2 Peter 3:2** ...that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles...

The promise was made through the holy prophets. We have the promise directly from Jesus but not only from him. When Peter says "holy prophets" he is referring to the Old Testament. It is hard to precisely count how many times the Bible refers to a single subject, but with the second coming it is a lot. Here are the stats that are commonly quoted. The New Testament is full of teaching on the second coming. Of the 27 books, 23 teach about it. Seven out of ten chapters in the New Testament and one out of every 30 verses refer to the second coming. But the Old Testament is full of the promise too. There are 17 Old Testament books that teach on the

second coming.<sup>i</sup> For every Biblical reference to the first coming of Christ there are 8 references to his second, totaling 1,845 references. The holy prophets labored to ensure that the voice of the promise was loud. Peter wants us to remember their predictions.

**2 Peter 3:3** ...knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

We are to remember the predictions of the holy prophets because there is an increasing voice of the scoffer. There are people and spiritual forces intent on causing you to question the things that you know. Which voice is louder?

Verse three makes me think of Kent Sandvik. He told me how he liked to use this verse. When Kent interacted with someone who was opposed to some aspect of Biblical truth, a scoffer, he would thank them. This was so unexpected that it would prompt them to ask for an explanation. He would explain that their scoffing reinforced his belief in the Bible because they, themselves, were a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. The Bible predicts that there will be scoffers in the last days. It is the last days. Their scoffing adds credibility to the thing they are scoffing at. Most of us cannot deliver that message as effectively as Kent could. But it really is true. When you see scoffing you see a fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

**2 Peter 3:4** 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.”

Notice that the scoffers focus on the promise. They know that there is a promise. They cast doubt of if the promise is trustworthy, but they know that the promise has been made. Don't miss this. The promise of the coming of Christ is so clearly given in the scriptures that even the critics don't try to deny that it has been promised. They question the timing of the promise because they have no respectable argument questioning the existence of the promise.

These scoffers are not scoffing at the existence of God in general. They are targeting the promise of the second coming. All truth is under attack. The devil especially wants to strip away your confidence in the second coming because the loss of hope will deflate your entire spiritual experience.

We need to talk about the scoffers. I set out on the internet to find alarming statistics about scoffers. I was surprised by what I learned. Take a guess what percentage of Americans believe in the second coming of Jesus. You have your number in mind?

According to a 2022 Pew Research study, 55% checked the box indicating they believe.<sup>ii</sup> That is a much higher number than I would have guessed. I didn't even realize that 55% of America believes that Jesus existed.

The statistic is encouraging in that the advent hope is alive in our country. It is also discouraging. As I processed that the majority of America believes that Jesus is coming back, I asked myself

why our culture doesn't feel like it has an adventist majority. If more than half of the people around us share the blessed hope it seems like we would live better than we do.

These questions led me to another thought that I had not previously considered. What if the scoffers are professed believers? Perhaps the disconnect between the majority of believers and a hopeless culture is that so many of the people who check a box indicating that they believe Jesus is coming back, *don't actually have that hope burning in their hearts.*

The text appears open to this interpretation. Verse 4 points out two truths that the scoffers are aware of and seem to agree with. Remember, they are scoffing at the promise which shows that they know about the promise. They don't just know that those Christians believe in a second coming. They know that the basis of that belief is a promise. They are familiar with the advent hope. The second truth they affirm is creation, "all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation". Their very words to scoff the promise suggest that they believe in creation. To be fair, I am not sure how many people in the 1<sup>st</sup> century had any alternative view of creation. But these scoffers seem to accept it. And Peter says that they will talk like this in the last days. In these days there are plenty of people who don't believe in creation. The text continues to highlight multiple truths they overlook or forget. These scoffers are informed of the believer's perspective. Sure, there will always be outspoken critics outside the church, but my point is that the scoffing is not just external, it is internal too. There are scoffers among the 55% who checked the advent box.

I am not too threatened by scoffing social posts. My faith is not impacted by the publications of outspoken atheists. I expect them to scoff. The real threat is the internal voices of scoffing. The voice of the promise is most threatened when another "believer" scoffs, when someone close to me spreads doubt, or when the voice of the scoffer comes from within me.

I feel the need to be vulnerable about my faith struggles. They don't make me look like a spiritual giant. One of the blessings of my recent sabbatical is that it gave me the clarity to detect the voice of the scoffer within me. You get a lot of time to reflect when you walk a trail all day. When I reflected, I saw doubt and cynicism in myself. I knew before the sabbatical that my faith was passing through a dry spell. But on a deeper look, I realized that I didn't have much confidence in the things I professed to believe. I still believed them. But I was trusting in them at a "more likely to be true than not" level. The question, "what if it's not true?", kept appearing in my mind for truths as fundamental as the existence of God. If I was taking a survey, I would check the belief box. In my mind I questioned it. I don't share this to alarm you that you pastor is a wreck, but to remind you that your pastor is real. The voice of the scoffer and the voice of the promise are real for me to. I have been reminded just how easily we are influenced by the voice of the scoffer. Just like you, I have to choose which one to listen you and how high the volume should be.

I didn't really detect that there was a faith crisis in me until I took time to step away. I saw that I lacked the joy, peace, and enthusiasm that true belief would have produced. When the voice of the scoffer was the loudest it caused me to question if the thing I was giving my life to was not

as I had preached it to be. This scoffer snuck in. I didn't invite it. I didn't want it. And I didn't even detect it until I stepped away. I was a believer. I would have told you that Jesus is coming, but in my head, I might have said, "but there is a chance that he won't". I would have preached that the dead will live again but the voice of the scoffer added, "at least I hope so". I would have sung a song of praise to God for forgiving my sin but the voice of the scoffer might have been there saying, "do you really think you can trust that?" I still prayed but the scoffer asked, "are you sure that does anything?" I could give a Biblical defense for all the beliefs I hold but the scoffer was there to remind me that there are a lot of people out there who also believe they got it right and they don't agree with me. The voice of the scoffer still speaks to me, but the volume has been turned way down. Because I have been listening to the voice of promise.

How loud is the voice of the scoffer inside of you? What doubts is it whispering? What are the voices of the scoffers in your home? In your workplace?

**2 Peter 3:9** 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.

Verse nine answers the scoffer. The voice of the scoffer does not have to threaten us. And we don't just have to plug our ears to get it to go away. The answer to the scoffers doesn't just say "shut up and go away", it says, "your wrong". There are actual answers to the questions the scoffer launches at us. Spend some time reminding yourself of the promise by studying the work of good Christian's apologists. There are solid answers.

The scoffer bases its argument on the long wait for the second coming. Americans aren't very good at waiting. Just read the body language in the terminal next time your flight is delayed. The danger is that we think that the slowness of the promise reflects on the trustworthiness of the promise. Whatever other message the voice of the scoffer is saying, remember that there are good answers.

Here is the best part. Here is where the scoffing is exposed, and the promise is vindicated. When the scoffer doubts the promise because it is slow the Bible reminds us that the slowness is love. They pointed to it as an example of God's low level of integrity. The promised points out that is an example of his high level of love. Look behind the evidence of the scoffer and you will find that God's love is there.

The promise is reaffirmed in verses 10 and 13.

**2 Peter 3:10** But the day of the Lord will come...

**2 Peter 3:13** But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

You can scoff at it, but you can't stop it! It is not just a doctrine; it is a promise.

I have a little device called the Garmin Mini2. It is a GPS, but it does more than mark waypoints and track my movement. It has the capability of sending texts and coordinates and checking the weather by satellite. A 7-week family backpacking trip and a \$50 off coupon finally convinced me to buy one. But it was a different hiking trip that first convinced me I needed one.

The story goes like this. The Serenity Falls Cabin is in a narrow valley between two ridge, a few miles past Eklutna Lake. I had read about it and looked at it on maps, but I hadn't been there yet. Last February, I decided it was time. My wife and I had talked about spending a night away in a cabin. Our anniversary was coming up. She has this strange idea that she frequently reminds me of, that I am not romantic. I decided to take some initiative to show how sweet and thoughtful I really am. As a surprise to her I reserved a bunk at Serenity Falls Cabin. We could either make it a fun family trip or a romantic getaway. Now with this reservation there were a few things that could possibly diminish the romantic vibe. You may have heard that I reserved a bunk. A bunk is a whole lot cheaper than reserving the whole cabin. But there is always the possibility that you will be sharing the place with strangers. Not romantic. The redeeming quality is that Serenity Falls is far more remote than most cabins you can rent. That meant we would enjoy the peaceful time of a 12-mile hike through the snow to get from the parking lot to the cabin. There is not much else I could do to prove to her that I am romantic.

After I shared my plans, she was feeling like one of the luckiest women alive. I took my thoughtfulness a step further and decided to check it out by myself in advance to ensure that it would all be as perfect as it sounded. This trip was also a surprise to her, and myself. The February sunshine inspired a spontaneous trip. I called her around noon to let her know that I was going. I told her that I wouldn't be able to pick the kids up from school but failed to tell her when I expected to be back. I also failed to remind her that it was a 24-mile hike round trip. But if she had been paying attention, she should have known that it was a long hike and that she should expect me late. I hoped to run most of the way, but even at a fast pace, it was going to take a while.

It was a fantastic trip out. It was a little more challenging than I imagined running in the snow. It became clear that I was going to take more time than I anticipated. At the cabin, I had some food that I was able to get almost warm over the wood stove in the cabin. My clothes were wet on the inside from sweat and on the outside from snow. I almost got them dry by the heat of the fire.

I couldn't wait for them to dry completely, I had to get back. I knew it would get dark. I figured it was alright that I didn't have a headlamp because the snow lit the wide path. There was minimal danger. I just had to put in a little extra effort and accept that it would be late. All of this sounded fine to me, but my wife heard none of it. I didn't have reception.

I rather enjoyed the night hike. The snow was falling softly. I made it to the car before 9pm. I was feeling pretty pleased, and I was thoughtful enough to tell my wife about my pleasure, but, of course, there was no reception at the trailhead either.

Two miles down the road my phone started dinging frantically. I had reception and an attack of messages. I called my wife. Instantly, I sensed it was not time to tell her how pleasing the hike was. Clearly, she had not enjoyed the evening as much as I had. She was overcome with worry for my safety. At first, I tried to talk some sense into her. Yes, it took a little longer than I expected, but not much. Just do a little math. Consider the miles and pace and it is obvious that she should not expect me for dinner. She wasn't in the mood for math. That is when she told me that there as a search and rescue party on its way. The church prayer team was spreading the word. The troopers had been contacted. It was all so unnecessary. Can't a man go for a walk without the whole town getting involved. I questioned what she was thinking.

Soon I began to understand what she was thinking. The light snow that I found peaceful was a blizzard in the valley below. The troopers told her they didn't think they could make it up the road to the parking lot. There were reports of a car flipped over on the highway that matched the make and model of the car I was driving.

She was experiencing a storm, and she wasn't sure I was coming back.

All of that could have been avoided if I had my Garmin Mini2. The difference between her peace and anxiety, between her taking a bath and rescuing a search party was certainty in my return. I was fine. I was coming. But she didn't know that I was fine and coming.

When life deteriorates to blizzard conditions and God seems awfully slow in keeping his promise, our confidence in his promise is the difference between peace and panic. It is the volume of the voice of promise that gives us peace while we wait. If we have a promise to hold onto, we can rest while we wait. *Life gets awfully scary when we are not sure that he is coming.*

Jesus doesn't need a Garmin Mini2. He has seen to it that his promise is recorded all throughout the pages of the Bible. There are some points of theology that are obscure enough to question. The second coming is not one of them. Either Jesus is coming or the whole book is lying. Jesus understood what we would be feeling while we wait and he took measures to keep us from despair, he made a promise.

Trusting this promise impacts your quality of life. The voice of the promise must be louder than the voice of the scoffer. If we are sure he is coming, we can handle a whole lot without falling apart.

Sure, life is easier without financial struggle. But whether you suffer a big loss or accumulate considerable gains, Jesus is still coming back. Loss of relationships will be painful, but Jesus is coming! Death still stings, but Jesus is coming! Social morals are deteriorating, but Jesus is coming!

To the degree you are confident in how it ends you will be able to navigate how it goes. The voice of the promise must be louder than the voice of the scoffer.



Let's turn up the voice of the promise.

The voice of promise was loud for Peter. After he and John healed the man on their way to pray, a crowd gathered and Peter preached. What did he tell them? About a promise. That was the conclusion of the healing experience.

**Acts 3:19-21** Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. <sup>21</sup> Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

When he writes the letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, as a prisoner in Rome who was about to be executed, he is still holding on to the promise. There were other voices in that prison. There were other voices in the trial. But the voice of the promise was louder for Peter.

**2 Peter 1:4** by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

A large part of the letter is concerned with the voice of scoffers as Peter addresses false teachers that are deceiving the church. He can speak against the voice of the scoffers because the voice of the promise is louder in his ears. It sounds like this.

**2 Peter 1:19-21** And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The voice of promise comes loud and clear from Jesus, the one who was, and is, and is to come.

**John 14:1-2** Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.<sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

The voice of the promise is loud for the angels at Christ's' ascension.

**Acts 1:11** "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The voice of the promise was loud for Job. He went through a storm. He hear the voice of the scoffer loud and personal.

**Job 19:25** For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.

The voice of the promise came loud to John.

**Revelation 1:7** Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

The voice of the promise was loud for the writer of Hebrews.

**Hebrews 9:28** So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

**Hebrews 10:37** Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay.

The voice of the promise was loud to Paul.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-18** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The first promise after the fall was to give confidence in his victory.

**Genesis 3:15** I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

The last promise in the Bible tells us it is soon!

**Revelation 22:20** He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Which voice is louder for you? He is coming! Turn up the voice of the promise.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://davidjeremiah.blog/the-second-coming-of-christ/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/08/about-four-in-ten-u-s-adults-believe-humanity-is-living-in-the-end-times/>