SESSION OBJECTIVE: 2 PETER 3:8-13
To understand the difference between God's will and God's desire.

Time is Perspective

My wife Jessica and I were married in February of 2007. I think back to those times with both great fondness and also a sense of shock at how clueless we really were. We got the keys to our first apartment the day of our wedding, and spent our first night as a husband and wife in what would be our home for the next couple of years. It was truly a remarkable time of my life. That first year of marriage, I got Jessica the best birthday present I've ever gotten her: an 8-week old Yorkshire terrier that named Toby. He was a difficult dog that not many people liked (he was an ankle biter), but we loved him. He was our "booger" (that's what we called him the most). He passed away this year, in 2021. We had 14 year with him, and they were great. Interestingly, if we follow the ideas that have been perpetuated by veterinarians for as long as I can remember, Toby did not have 14 years with us; he had roughly 72-80 years with us. One year for us is roughly seven years to a dog. There are some distinctions made when it comes to size and a couple of other factors, but the general rule of thumb is a 1 to 7 year ratio. My little dog had a definite beginning and a definite end, but his experience to get to that end was longer for him than it was for me. Time is, then, in a lot of ways about perspective. This is especially true for us when it comes to God.

Peter makes the statement in 2 Peter 3:8: "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." In other words, God's relationship to time is different than ours because He created time and space and exists outside of it (Gen. 1:1; Is. 40:28; 1 Tim. 1:17). This was an important reminder for the people of God during Peter's time, because

already people were questioning whether or not Jesus would come back as He promised. People reasoned that it was taking too long. Peter seeks to remind them that while it may seem like a long time for us, it is a matter of days to God.

In this session we will examine the will of God and the desire of God, and how they are different, but I don't want you to forget this aspect of time because it's important. God will one day bring judgment to the world. Though He desires all people be saved, the fact remains that not everyone will be. The time for judgment is coming, and while it may seem like it's been too long for God to come back like He promised, we have to remember that time is all about perspective when it comes to God.

Why So Long?

Why has Christ not come back yet? It's a common question, and one that the people of God have been asking since at least when Peter penned this letter. Apart from the aforementioned details regarding time, there is another reason: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards you" (2 Pet. 3:9). God's delay does not reflect a lack of care for His people, but on the contrary, highlights it. God's delay comes from a place of patience.

The patience of God is an extension of His grace. God could at any moment He chooses come back and judge the world, but the fullness of time would not have run its course and thus those He predestined for faith (Rom. 8:38-39) would not have the opportunity to be saved. Paul says in Romans 2:4, "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" He goes on to say in Romans 9:22, "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" In other words, Paul is posing a question that he already knows and anticipates the answer to: What if God is not only allowing but enduring evil people to go on doing evil things for the sake of those whom He will save? Paul's underlying answer to that question is, *He is*. It is the patience of God that explains why Jesus has not returned. If He returns, judgment begins, and those whom He has not yet saved stand condemned. This brings up another discussion that Peter touches on, one that will be covered in the next section.

Will and Desire

The issue of time and patience with regard to judgment leads to a separate but connected discussion regarding the difference between the *will of God* and the *desire of God*. Peter says in verse 9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." God's desire is that all people would repent, and that consequently, none would perish. That is the heart of God. In 1 Timothy 2:4, Paul says that God, "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God is interested in the Gospel reaching every single person (Mk. 16:15; Matt. 24:14). God's loving intention as revealed in the Gospel is meant to be communicated to every person. This is the desire of God.

However, we also know that every person will not be saved nor obtain the knowledge of the truth. Jesus says, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matt. 7:13-14). Even Peter tells us that a coming judgment is imminent and the destruction of those who are disobedient to Christ is certain (2 Pet. 3:7). In his first letter, Peter wrote: "According to His great mercy, He

has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). So, on the one hand, God desires all to come to faith. But on the other, some will because He has made it so, but others will not because they have rejected Him. How do we reconcile these biblical truths?

My submission is that this space of seeming contradiction is explained by the difference between God's will and God's desire.

GOD'S DESIRE

God's desire is *what would happen if there was no sin and rebellion in the world*. People would simply choose to follow Him. They would desire life, peace, and relationship with Him. Beyond that, people would *not* wage sin and evil upon others, natural disasters would not occur, and death would be non-existent. God's desire can be imagined through the lens of Genesis 1-2, before sin crippled creation. However, because of sin, no one is able to follow Him of their own accord (Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:1-4), and so while God desires that all should come to faith and that none should perish, it simply is not possible after Genesis 3, not at least before Revelation 21. Though the world exists now in brokenness, God's desire is still intact, but it is not the same as God's will.

GOD'S WILL

God's will is *what actually happens in this fallen world*. Sickness, violence, death, rebellion, and destruction are all actuated in God's will, though they are not things He desires. He does not cause them to happen, but He does allow them to happen and can even work out His purposes in spite of them (Rom. 8:28-30). It does not mean that we are all robots. On the contrary, it means that when given the total and complete free will that we have, we move away from God of our own volition every single time (Ps. 53:1-3). Hence, God must predestine and cause some to be born again, otherwise *none would come to Him*. This means that there will never be an instance where someone wants to come to faith but can't because they have not been predestined. The want or desire to come to faith is the evidence that God has already been at work in that person's life.

In a perfect world, the will of God and the desire of God would move parallel to one another. You could imagine them as two lines moving in perfect unison together. However, because of the fall, the will of God and the desire of God shift away from one another. The will of God will be accomplished in the way He ordains it to be accomplished, but differently than His desire would dictate. Too often when it comes to the discussion of salvation, one of these two aspects of God are emphasized to the detriment of the other. An understanding of both God's desire and God's will must be present to understand the full picture of God's salvific work in the Scriptures. Does God cause some to be born again, and not others? Yes. Does God also desire that all should be born again? Yes. They are not contradicting ideas. They are simply the outworking of two connected and yet distinct aspects of God, equally binding on the narrative of Scripture. The more important aspect of this passage lies in the last verse. God will one day bring a judgment of fire upon the earth to once and for all do away with sin, and punish sinners. With that reality in mind, God's people should be constantly seeking to do His will at any cost, "looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read 2 Peter 3:8. What is one day with the Lord equivalent to in human time?

2. Read 2 Peter 3:9. Is the Lord slow to His promise? Rather, why does He wait to return according to Peter? Does God desire that any should perish?

_____

_____

Day Two

1. According to the notes, what is the difference between the will of God and the desire of God? Do you agree or disagree, and why?

_____

_____

2. Read 2 Peter 3:10. How will the day of the Lord come? What will happen when it comes?

_____

_____

Day Three

1. Read Joel 2:10-14. How is the day of the Lord described in this passage? What does God call His people to do in light of this coming day?

_____

_____

2. Read 2 Peter 3:11. How are we to behave as God's people in light of this coming day of destruction?

_____

_____

Day Four

1. Read 2 Peter 3:12. How will the heavens and the elements be destroyed on the day of the Lord?

_____

_____

2. Read 2 Peter 3:13. What are we to be looking forward to, and according to what?

_____

_____

Week 8 Discussion: When Bad Things Happen

In 2 Peter 3:8-13, we are given two realities that somehow are connected together: God desires no one to perish, and yet God will destroy a great many people who have lived rebelliously in this life. This phenomenon could be explained by better understanding God's will and God's desire, and how they are different. Knowing this helps us understand how God can allow bad things to happen, and still sovereignly move to accomplish His purpose in spite of those things. Talk as a group about how you protect your mind and heart when tragedy strikes.

1. Icebreaker: What is the most recent crisis you have faced? It can be big or small. How did it make you feel when it initially happened?
2. When bad things happen in your life, how does it affect your fellowship with God?
3. When bad things happen in your life, how does it affect your fellowship with God's people?
4. Read Romans 8:31-33. How does this Scriptural truth answer your heartache when tragedy strikes?
5. How important is it to release your feelings when you enter into difficult circumstances? Read Matthew 5:4. Why are those who mourn blessed, according to Jesus?
6. How can the church better rally around those individuals who are experiencing difficulty? How important is it for the people of God to support one another in the face of trouble?

Takeaways:

1. Time is different in the presence of God than it is in the human experience.
2. There is a difference between the will of God and the desire of God.

PRAYER REQUESTS: