

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse – June 21<sup>st</sup> 2009**  
**2 Peter 3:8-9**

Time, although we have our watches and clocks which measure time in hours seconds which make it seem so predictable, actually has an elastic quality to it. Some days seem to last an eternity and others seem to fly by. So when Peter says quoting Psalm 90v4 that 'with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day' we kind of know what he means. The scoffers reckoned that Christians had got it all wrong as quite plainly Christ had not returned. Peter gives this reply to them and also to us in 2009 who are still waiting for Christ's return. And if you think that's merely clutching at straws, trying to get round the problem of Jesus' non-return then we need to understand that from God's perspective this is not such a big deal – it is an incredibly short time. It depends what perspective you have, through whose lenses you are looking. In the light of the glory that awaits us, this suffering will be like 'a week and a half', a blip! This world is just a preparation, the warm-up for the life to come. Calvin exhorted his congregation to raise their eyes upwards for 'by so doing they will not be subject the time appointed by God to their own ridiculous wishes'.

Jesus' delay has to do with the mercy of God; it is a sign of His patience *makrothumea*(Gk). When he returns He will come to exercise His justice and because He does not want anyone to perish but all to come to repentance He delays. He is not slow, not off the case, not indifferent. Nor does He say that everyone will be saved, He will not abandon His concepts of justice. But God will respect the freedom of those who reject this offer, and hand us over to our choices.

God is long-suffering, and shows mercy to anyone who has a contrite heart, anyone who makes one step in His direction. This idea of some Christian groups that God elects some to salvation and some to damnation in a kind of double-predestination is not valid – the whole reason that Jesus came is precisely because God does not want anyone to perish. He delays because of His mercy. This is a consistent revelation in the Old Testament and the New. Look at Moses in Exodus 34 where Moses intercedes for the people and addresses God as 'slow to anger'. It's the same in Numbers, Nehemiah, Joel and the Psalms. Why did Jonah flee from Nineveh at first? Because He knew that God was one who relents from sending calamity, and that God is gracious. At His heart He is patient. People get judged not because God gloats but because they refuse to avail themselves of God's mercy in Jesus.

Some people think that God's anger is on a hair-trigger (the slightest mistake and God exercises His judgement) and His mercy is on a safety-lock, and is so slow to come. But it's the reverse – 'God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love'. It's the kindness of God that brings us to repentance.

There is a debate as to whether the return of Jesus is conditional on the obedience of His Church. But whether or not it is conditional, God is patient. His delay is not indefinite, Jesus will come and judge but God has made a way through for all.

This long-suffering *macro-thumea* is a subject that Gordon Fee studied for a long time. Then one morning God spoke to him 'What if it were not so, Gordon?' What if God were slow to mercy and abounding in steadfast anger? Then not one of us would have a chance. We have done enough in five minutes of thought before breakfast, of anger, lust, jealousy, and unforgiveness, to earn an eternity cast out for the presence of the Lord.