

How Should We Answer The Mockers?

Series: Living Godly In A Corrupt World!

by Ron R. Ritchie

Here is part of the text of an advertisement which was carried in the newspapers last week:

The Greatest Halloween Trick Of Them All. Franklin Roosevelt once said we had nothing to fear but fear itself. He neglected to mention Orson Welles. Because on October 30, 1938, a wave of mass hysteria seized millions of Americans when Welles and his popular Mercury Theatre on the Air presented a dramatization of H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds. He said later that it was the Mercury Theatre's own version of dressing up in a sheet, jumping out of a bush and saying "Boo!" But for listeners who tuned in late, it was a little bit more. It seemed nothing less than a full-scale invasion of earth by hostile Martians. As panic spread across the country from Grover's Mill, New Jersey (the first reported landing), hospitals treated people for shock and hysteria. Others gathered in churches in fervent prayer. New York families fled to nearby parks. And Boston families stood on roofs, straining for a glimpse of New York burning. If you've never heard the most famous radio broadcast in history, you owe it to yourself to hear it now. It's the program that terrified a nation and sent thousands fleeing in panic, one you'll enjoy hearing again and again. Now this great Halloween trick is available on cassette tape . . .

The greatest Halloween trick of them all . . . Don't let this "trick" cloud your vision, however, and keep you from realizing that the most incredible invasion of time and space will be the second coming of Jesus Christ. I'm speaking of the full-scale invasion that will occur when Jesus Christ as Lord of lords and King of kings comes to judge the ungodly and bless those who follow him. This will not be some Halloween trick. Jesus will not be appearing in a white sheet and saying "Boo!" to the world. This will be the invasion to end all invasions, one that will make Star Wars look like child's play.

The apostle Peter writes about this invasion in the third chapter of his letter to the young churches in Asia Minor. False teachers and mockers had infiltrated themselves among the believers in these groups, "introducing destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them," according to the apostle. But he counsels God's people that they have nothing to fear from these people. They were "bringing swift destruction upon themselves . . . their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep" (2 Peter 2:1,3). God knows how to rescue the godly and punish the ungodly on the day of judgment.

In chapter 3, therefore, Peter deals with the mockers who denied the second coming of Jesus. These were asking sarcastically, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Earlier in this letter the apostle wrote of an experience when he, James and John were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty," Peter declared. They had a foretaste of how Jesus would appear when he would invade time and space again in his second coming. "We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus," he wrote. Thus in chapter 3 the apostle goes on to show that God is in control; everything is on schedule.

How should the Christians answer the mockers? How should they respond to their taunts and sneers? Have you ever seen a strange look on someone's face when you shared that Jesus Christ will come again in glory? Have you ever had a nagging doubt yourself that he will? Have you ever feared that you would be excluded from certain company because you were marked off as "one of those born again folks who believe all this stuff"? How should we answer the mockers? Peter gives us two responses to those who would deny Christ's second coming. First, he says,

1. Remind them of God's Word

2 Peter 3:1-4:

This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandments of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

Peter says his ministry to these Christians in Asia Minor is one of "stirring up [their] sincere minds by way of reminder." He is reminding them of truth they already know, stirring up their pure minds about the things of God. Imagine the apostle stirring up a pot of thick soup, scraping up the bottom so that the chunks of meat and vegetables are mixed in with the broth. In the same way he is for the second time writing to stir up these believers' minds to remember truth they had already been exposed to. These people were living in a corrupt society. They had just abandoned corrupt mystery religions, and now they had to contend with corrupt teachers who introduced destructive heresies among them, and mockers who held there would be no second coming of Christ. Peter's response to all of this is to remind them of the word spoken by God about such people.

That is why the apostle says, "remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets." He had already written (in 1:16-21) that the prophets had predicted Jesus' second coming in power and glory. "No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation," he wrote, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Word of the second coming did not emanate from some group who sat down and came up with this incredible story. What Isaiah, Joel, Ezekiel and Daniel had to say about the first and second comings of Jesus was not a matter of human wisdom, logical deduction or cleverly devised tales, rather it was revelation from above, when men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

This revelation is above and beyond the minds and the experiences of believers and unbelievers alike. Revelation by the Holy Spirit is that process by which God has made himself known to man, when he personally broke into time and space. Think, for example, of the time God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, the manifestation of the Angel of the Lord, the angels, by his voice speaking through the prophets, etc., God has communicated with his creation by means of revelation. Part of the content of this revelation was his word through his prophets concerning Christ's second coming in power and glory to set up his righteous rule on earth.

A further part of that revelation concerned the final judgment of the ungodly of every generation. Isaiah 51:4-6 says,

**Pay attention to Me, O My people;
And give ear to Me, O My nation;
For a law will go forth from Me,
And I will set my justice for a light of the peoples.
My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth,
And My arms will judge the peoples;
The coastland will wait for Me,
And for My arm they will wait expectantly.
Lift up your eyes to the sky,
Then look to the earth beneath;
For the sky will vanish like smoke,
And the earth will wear out like a garment,
And its inhabitants will die in like manner,
But My salvation shall be forever,
And My righteousness shall not wane.**

**Listen to Me, you who know righteousness,
A people in whose heart is My law;
Do not fear the reproach of man,
Neither be dismayed at their revilings.
For the moth will eat them like wool.
But My righteousness shall be forever,
And My salvation to all generations."**

These words came from the very heart of God through his prophet as a warning to the ungodly mockers and a note of hope to those who walk in righteousness.

Isaiah 66:15 has another word on this judgment:

For behold, the Lord will come in fire And His chariots like a whirlwind, To render His anger with fury, And His rebuke with flames of fire. For the Lord will execute judgment by fire And by His sword on all flesh, . . .

Time does not permit comment on all the prophecies spoken by God through his holy prophets concerning the glorious second coming of Jesus. All I will say is, if God said it, so be it!

Next, Peter stirs up the minds of his readers by asking them to remember the word of God spoken through his Son Jesus Christ. The false teachers had denied "the Master who bought them," but that did not make Jesus any less Lord and Savior, any less the God of creation, any less the Ruler over all of history, past, present and future--including his second coming.

In Matthew 24 and 25 we have what is known as the Olivet Discourse, when Jesus taught his disciples about what would happen at the end of the age. Many false Christs would appear, he said. There would be wars and rumors of wars. Famines and earthquakes would occur. Lawlessness would increase; love would grow cold; there would be great tribulation. Here are his words from Matthew 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come."

Then, replying to the disciples' question about the sign of his coming, he said (24:29-31):

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days 'tine sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaker,' end then the signs of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the 'Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky' with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angers 'wish a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.'"

Things are not getting better. Jesus will come at a time when the world is at its worst. "Therefore be on the alert," he said to the disciples, "for you do not know which day your Lord is coming . . . the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will." He will return; that is the issue. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne, and all the nations will be gathered before Him . . . and the judgment will begin . . ."

This is not an idea that sprang from the mind of man. No human wisdom was instrumental in bringing this revelation to light. This word came by direct revelation from God through his Son Jesus Christ. God has already told us through his word what will happen at the end. He has not, however, told us when these things will occur. Instead he leaves us with many warnings: be alert, don't be misled, remain faithful. If every word of prophecy concerning Jesus' first coming was fulfilled, be assured that every word of prophecy about his second coming in power and glory will likewise be fulfilled--despite what the mockers say.

Then Peter stirs up the sincere minds of his readers to remember the words of God spoken through his apostles. One commentator has written, "The prophets foreshadowed the truth of the power and the glory of our Lord's second coming; Christ illustrated it by example (the transfiguration and the ascension); and the

apostles gave an authoritative interpretation of the scriptures by the Spirit."

As we have seen, the gospel of Matthew records much about the second coming of Jesus. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren . . . you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly . . ." (5:1-3). To Timothy he wrote, "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come" (2 Tim. 3:1). James says, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (5:7). John has many things to say about the second coming, especially in 1 John and Revelation. In his letter he writes, ". . . we know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And every one who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). In Revelation, John quotes the very words of Jesus: "'Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" . . . He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev . 22:12,13,20).

I want to say that I felt deeply affected last week following my study of these verses. On Thursday afternoon I felt a longing in my heart to say, "Come now." I'm weary of the brokenness I see on all sides—the broken homes, the broken marriages. Last week a woman wrote and told me that when she and her husband reached out to the hurting community around them the result was that a woman fell in love with her husband. She asked me to pray about this bad situation. Don't be under any illusions: you put yourself at risk when you reach out to the hurting and the needy.

So we see that Peter has faithfully stirred up tired believers, reminding them of his own experience at the transfiguration of Jesus, when he, James and John had a preview of the power and glory of our Lord's second coming. Further, he has encouraged them to remember the words of the prophets, the words of Jesus and those of his apostles.

The apostle now turns his attention to the problem at hand. "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers; will come with their mocking . . ." "The last days" began with the birth of Jesus and they will end at his second coming. The opening verses of Hebrews refer to this time: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophet; in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son." ". . . Mockers will come. . . ' Peter is talking about people who sneer and scoff at the gospel message. Jesus faced them daily during his ministry. They were there to taunt him at his trial and execution. They followed the apostles during their ministry, and even today you can still hear the taunts of their successors. While many of them pose as servants of righteousness, according to Peter they "deny the Master who bought them."

The apostle says that these mockers "follow after their own lusts." Jude also identifies them in his letter. He says, "'In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.' These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit." Aldous Huxley, the philosopher and atheist, at least was honest about his reasons for attacking Christianity and the scriptures. He wrote, "The philosopher who finds no meaning for this world is not concerned exclusively with the problem of pure metaphysics: he is concerned to prove there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to. . . For myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political." This man was an example of one who rejected Christianity so that he might be free to sin. The mockers would have found many areas of agreement with him.

Now we will look at the content of their mocking. Notice that there is both a question and a philosophical statement in verse 4. First, the question, "Where is the promise of His coming?" This query is put in a way that implies that the thing asked for does not exist. This was nothing new to 2 Peter 3:-7: Peter. He knew from his Old Testament that the prophets

faced similar questions in their day. "Where is the God of justice?" asked the evil men of Malachi's day (2:17). "Where is your God?" asked the pagans of David's day (Ps. 42:3). "Where is the Word of the Lord?" asked the enemies of Jeremiah (17:15). "Where is the promise of His coming?"

The mockers of Peter's day were asking, Didn't he say he would rise again? Didn't he say, before he went

away, that he would return? It's been 30 years. Where is he?" Almost two thousand years later we still hear the same mocking questions. Christianity, we are told, was designed to take the fun out of life. How many times do we read of people selling all their possessions, donning white robes and heading for the hills to wait for Jesus, only to return again and admit their calculations were off? I have many accounts in my files of these people who only succeed in making themselves and other Christians appear foolish. No matter. Beginning with the prophets, continuing with the himself and later the apostles--all maintain that Jesus is coming again in judgment.

Now the philosophy of the mockers, illustrated in the statement in verse 4, "For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." "Listen, Christians," they were saying, "there are natural laws which God does not violate. He is not going to invade time and space. Get a grip on yourselves. Jesus was not the Son of God. He has not risen from the dead and he is not coming back. There will be no second coming and no judgment." This attitude has intensified in our scientific age, spurred on by TV series such as Cosmos, which preaches that we are all alone on this earth, that nothing exists except the cosmos, that everything will remain the same. They maintain, "The sun rises, the sun sets. The tide comes in, the tide goes out. Nothing ever changes."

Here is an excerpt from a National Geographic article on the Mt. St. Helens' volcano that illustrates the futility of this kind of thinking "Old man Harry Truman (83) built a cabin by Spirit Lake on the slopes of Mt. St. Helens some 53 years ago. All those years nature remained consistent. But then the mountain started to awaken. Residents were asked to leave. Warnings were given. Park guards came to the cabin to tell him it wasn't safe. TV and newspaper folks interviewed him. He said he could not live anywhere else. He was part of the mountain and the mountain was part of him. He laughed at and cursed all his visitors. Then on May 18, 1980 the mountain exploded and Harry Truman perished under hundreds of feet of volcanic ash." This man did not heed the warnings of those who tried to save his life. The mockers do not heed the warnings of Scripture which seek to bring men to repentance.

Make no mistake about it, Jesus Christ is coming again. How should we answer the mockers who deny this truth that is taught all through Scripture? First, we should remind them of God's word, and second,

2. Remind Them of God's Judgments

2 Peter 3:-7:

For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Here Peter challenges the argument of the naturalist by saying "it escapes their notice." The naturalist willfully set aside historical facts which the whole world knew about. Everything has not remained as it was from the beginning. By God's word, the apostle says (and he makes no apology for saying so), heaven and earth were created (verse 5). God spoke and it was so. By his word the heavens and the earth came into being. And God did all of this so as to bless man. In Genesis 6, however, we read that the whole world was already filled with corruption, violence and distorted humanity. Mankind was bent on evil continually. Through the prophet Noah who preached righteousness for 120 years, God warned mankind to repent and change his ways or the judgment would come. Noah failed to make even one convert in all those years. (What a man of faith!) But no one turned from evil.

What happened then? Again, "by God's word" the blessings he had bestowed on man became the means of man", judgment. In the great Flood, God used the very water which sustained life on earth to destroy all of life. God changed the natural laws and used the blessing of water as a judgment rod upon man. This, too, as Peter says, "escaped their notice." That's amazing. How can you possibly over look the Flood?

Here is another warning from Scripture, this time concerning the second coming of Jesus, in his own words:

"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark. And they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:37-39).

Again, we read in verse 7, "by God's word" the final judgment will come: "But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." This is referring to the great white throne judgment, spoken of in Revelation 20. Knowing what God has done in history we should have no problem believing everything that God says about the future.

How should we answer the mockers? We should remind them of God's word as revealed by his prophets, by His own Son, and by the apostles; and we should remind them of God's judgments--that he brought judgment in the past and he will do so again at the second coming of Jesus.

Mankind is divided into two groups of people, those who are in the process of perishing (the ungodly), and those who are in the process of being saved (the godly). Swift, certain judgment is coming. There will be no second chance. Our relationship to Jesus Christ is what will determine our eternal destiny. If we are found among the mockers, then we will inherit hell, torment and isolation. If we receive him as Lord and Savior we inherit life, blessings, wholeness, peace and fellowship, now and forever. "Be reconciled to God through Christ." Do not be deceived by advertisements about the "greatest Halloween trick of them all." There is coming an invasion to end all invasions--the second coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory. "Come, Lord Jesus." Amen.

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