

## Week 20 - Living With the End in Mind - 1Peter 4:7-11

### Scripture Reading: Matthew 24:36-44

#### Introduction

I'm sure you've seen versions of the little hermit-type guy with a long beard carrying a sign saying "The end is near"

There have long been apocalyptic predictions, some given with remarkable precision, that haven't happened

In 1499, the German mathematician and astronomer, Johannes Stöffler, predicted that a vast flood was going to engulf the world on February 20, 1524

In Europe, more than 100 different pamphlets were published endorsing his prophecy and business boomed for boat builders only to have 1524 turn out to be a year of drought for Europe

Perhaps the strangest of all the predictions of apocalypse I found was the doomsday hen of Leeds, England

It seems the hen began laying eggs with the words, "Christ is coming" inscribed on the shells

People came from mile around to see the eggs and many were convinced the end of the world was at hand

Eventually, someone discovered that the hen's owner was writing on the eggs with corrosive ink and reinserting them into the hen to be laid again later

One of the most prolific modern predictors of end times is Harold Camping

Mr. Camping has publicly predicted the end of the world no less than 12 times based on his interpretation of biblical numerology

Perhaps his most widely known prediction was for May 21, 2011, a date that he calculated to be exactly 7,000 years after the worldwide flood of Noah's day

When the date passed without the world ending, he declared that his math was off and pushed the date back to October 21, 2011

The reason these predictions and many, many more like them have failed is that no one knows when the end is coming and according to God's Word there are no signs to be read that will tell us when it will be

Jesus said he will come as a thief in the night when we least expect him as we heard in our Scripture reading from Matthew 24

And in **Mark 13:32** Jesus said that no one knows the day or hour when the end will come except for God the Father

Still, we aren't immune from speculating and I hear many well-meaning believers pointing to the events going on in the world today and predicting the end of the world

I have to admit, I sometimes wonder myself at how long God will be patient with the world and the debauchery we see all around us

But we aren't the first generation to look around ourselves and be certain that God surely won't bear with us much longer

Still, we are closer to the end today than we were yesterday and there is nothing preventing Christ from returning today except God's patience in working out his purposes

As we turn to today's passage, we see Peter begin this section of his letter with the statement that "the end of all things is at hand" as he then turns to the subject of how Christ-followers should live in light of that reality

Our passage closes out the long middle portion of Peter's letter that he began back in 2:11 describing the social conduct of the disciple as a sojourn and exile here on the earth

This world can be a harsh place for one who follows Christ, but it won't last forever

This age will end when Jesus returns to overthrow sin and establish his new and perfect order and creation will finally attain its proper status

And when Peter says that the end is at hand, he isn't speaking chronologically - that is according to time - but theologically - according to God's plan

After all, Peter made his assertion some 2,000 years ago but Peter wasn't a false prophet and we have been in the final phase of God's plan of redemption since the church was founded at Pentecost

The church age had been in effect for about 30 years when Peter wrote this letter and he knew the curtain could fall at any time and the 'goal' toward which all events had been leading up to was at hand

One day, at the right time, the time established by God himself, the Father will send his Son again to bring this age to a close and it could happen at literally any moment

Therefore, Peter says, followers of Christ must continually live in light of Jesus' return until such time as he returns

There is an account of Colonel Abraham Davenport, the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives that serves to illustrate this truth perfectly

One day in 1789, the sky of Hartford darkened ominously and some of the representatives, peering out the windows, feared the end was at hand

Quieting a clamor for immediate adjournment, Davenport rose and said, "The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought."

That should be the attitude of every follower of Christ

Let me encourage you to open your Bible to 1Peter 4 and to follow along as I read verses 7-11 [1Peter 4:7-11]

*The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

The first thing we see that Peter says we must do is:

## **I. Mind your mind**

In verse 7 Peter gives two descriptions of the kind of mind we should have

He says we should be self-controlled and sober-minded - let's take them in the order given

The Greek word behind "self-controlled" means to have a sound mind or to have a right mind

That's the way the word is used in **Luke 8:35** after Jesus healed the demon-possessed man in Gerasenes

When one is self-controlled he sees things as they are and acts appropriately

To be sober-minded originally meant to be free from drunkenness but, over time, it came to mean being mentally disciplined and alert - to be free from fuzzy thinking

In many ways, these attitudes of mind are the opposite of the sins we saw last week mentioned in verses 3-5

And they are the result of having been transformed by the renewing of your mind as you begin to "think with sober judgment" as Paul puts it in **Romans 12:3**

Having a sound mind, thinking and evaluating situations and conditions maturely and correctly is a valuable practice “*for the sake of your prayers*” as Peter puts it in the last part of verse 7

The plural word “prayers” suggests specific, individual prayers lifted throughout each day and the operative idea is that when the Christ-follower is properly informed and is properly evaluating what is happening around them, they will be able to pray more intelligently, appropriately, and effectively

No longer will their prayers be based on pipedreams or fantasy, nor will their prayers be based on desperation or fear. The prayers of the self-controlled and sober-minded will be guided and powerful because they see things as they really are from God’s perspective

Proper prayer is not a mantra to make us feel better or an escape from reality, it’s not a way to get God to act as we would like; proper prayer is a function of clear vision and a seeking of even clearer vision from God

Thinking clearly and rationally is something of a rarity these days

And being self-controlled and sober-minded is a discipline that requires intention and effort or it wouldn’t be necessary to command it

To pray effectively a Christ-follower must first be aware of what is going on around them and then evaluate it rightly by considering it through the lens of God’s Word

[**Romans 12:2**] That is the renewal of your mind that allows you to test and discern the will of God that is good, acceptable, and perfect and pray accordingly

What this verse teaches can and should be put into practice as a matter of routine in our daily lives and especially as we encounter the news and events of the day

Peter’s exhortation to proper thinking and prayer that leads to proper fellowship with God leads Peter to talk about proper personal relationships and especially the relationships between believers

## **II. Love one another**

When Peter begins verse 8 [**1Peter 4:8**] with the words “*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly*” he doesn’t mean to put love above prayer or thinking clearly

What the phrase “above all” is meant to do is alert us to the fact that he is introducing a new facet of the topic and to underscore the fact that love is the most important part of what follows

All of what Peter says in this section of his letter falls under the heading of the end of all things being at hand but there are different dimensions involved and love among the brethren is the most important part of the following four verses

There is a primacy surrounding love among God’s people and love is a prerequisite to the proper exercise of the duty of a Christ-follower

Jesus taught that love for the brethren would be the hallmark of his followers in **John 13:34-35**

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Of course, the reminder to love is never more needed than when facing difficulty because it’s in times of trial that we are prone to turning on one another

But where love abounds in a fellowship of Christ-followers, many small offenses, and even some large offenses, are readily overlooked and forgotten

But where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion and every action is liable to be misunderstood and conflicts about because without love everything is suspect

Solomon wrote about this in **Proverbs 10:12** - *Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses*

But we need to understand that what Peter and Solomon mean when they say love covers sin

They don't mean that love covers over or buries sin so as to deny that the existence of offense

They don't mean that love somehow atones for sin because Christ did that on the cross

What they mean is that love causes us to forgive sins or offenses against us as Christ did

After all, the church is at its core a society of sinners who have been redeemed by grace

We will offend one another and we will take offense even when no offense is intended

And because both of those things are true, we cannot hope for a strong community if we fail to extend to one another the grace and forgiveness that the Lord first extends to us

People often say, "But I don't feel love for the person who has offended me"

But feelings aren't what Peter is talking about here

To be sure, love includes feelings - Paul speaks of loving one another with "brotherly affection" in **Romans 12:10**

But love is much more than a feeling - love is a determination and resolve to do good to others and that includes the good of refusing to give attention to their sins against us

Sometimes, I think the best gift we can give each other is to simply be impossible to offend

Satan perversely delights in a church that is embroiled in conflict and divided so we need to always assume best intentions from our fellow Christ-followers and be willing to forgive their trespasses against us as God has forgiven our trespasses against him

After all, I think God has the stronger claim when it comes to being offended

Next, in verses 9-11, Peter turns his attention to practical ways to show love

### **III. Use your gifts properly**

And the first practical way to show love is through **hospitality**

It's likely that the original focus of Peter's command here concerns travelling Christians - an idea that is a bit out of date in an age when we have plenty of motels and hotels where we can readily find suitable lodging

But in Peter's day that wasn't the case and, especially when we think of the persecutions that some of the Christians were enduring, we can see how finding a friendly home where one could receive not only lodging but encouragement would be quite valuable

However, we can still find application in this command for ourselves today

We live in a time when the electric garage door opener serves much the same function as the drawbridge of a medieval castle

We can hit the button on the remote as we reach our driveway, pull into the garage, and lower the door before exiting our vehicle thus ensuring that we aren't even seen, much less approached, by our neighbors

We like our privacy therefore showing hospitality - which in the literal sense of the term Peter uses here is being friendly to strangers - is a real test of our godliness

And to make matters worse for many of us, Peter goes on to say not only that we have to show hospitality but that we have to do so without grumbling

Not only do we have to get out of our comfort zone and have others intrude into our private lives but we have to do so without resenting the time and expense that may be involved

The grumbling Peter refers to here indicates repeated words of complaint - the Greek word is *goggusmos* (go'-goose-moss) and it even sounds like murmuring or muttering under one's breath

And we need to remember that all complaining is ultimately complaining against God and his ordering of our circumstances

Think about it

If we truly believe that God is in control isn't all our dissatisfaction against God?

And when we complain against God we make it impossible to properly express thanksgiving and we lose our joy

The door of a Christ-follower must be open to guests who know they will receive a cordial reception and practical help when they are in need

Next, in verses 10 and 11, Peter turns his attention to the exercise of spiritual gifts

Let's look at those two verses together again [**1Peter 4:10-11**]:

*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.*

First we want to notice that little word "each" that reveals the fact that every believer has received at least one spiritual gift

Let's consider for a moment the characteristics of a gift

A gift is something that is given freely by one person to another

A gift hasn't been earned or according to merit for that would turn it from a gift to wages

And a gift is typically selected by the giver and not under the control of the receiver

Peter goes on to say that each believer has received at least one gift from God for their use in serving one another

Paul makes the same point in **1Corinthians 12:7** where he writes:

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good***

What Paul and Peter are both saying is that spiritual gifts are given by God to individual believers to use for the good of the church and Peter says each believer needs to be a good steward of the gift God has given him or her

We know that a steward is not the same as an owner so, we see in some sense that God gives us gifts but still remains the owner of them

The late radio host, Rush Limbaugh, used to regularly say that he had "talent on loan from God" and it drove his critics crazy because they misunderstood what he was saying and thought he was equating himself somehow with God

I'll leave it up to each of you to determine for yourselves how well he accomplished using God's gift for God's purposes

However, Rush was being quite biblical when he recognized that his gift was merely a loan from God for him to use

But what is a spiritual gift?

Peter lists two here in our passage: speaking and serving

And there are four other lists given in the New Testament - found in Romans 12:6-8; 1Corinthians 12:7-11, 28-30; and Ephesians 4:11

But here's the thing - the lists are all different - no gift is found on every list and no list includes all the gifts

Then, in 1Corinthians 7:7, Paul calls both marriage and celibacy a "gift from God"

And, when you consider all the variations found in the expression of any of the listed gifts, it seems legitimate to conclude that the lists we find in Scripture are not exhaustive but representative of the kinds of gifts God gives

Peter actually refers to God's "varied grace" which means "multi-faceted" and speaks to the different gifts possible

We can therefore describe a spiritual gift as a supernaturally empowered ability sovereignly given to strengthen God's saints who are to use them to serve one another being good stewards of the grace of God

The point Peter is making is that every believer has at least one gift and if they are a "good steward" of God's gift they won't hide it like the unrighteous servant who buried his talent but will use it for the benefit of others in the church

God's only rule regarding our gifts is that we use them being confident that the resources we expend in faithful stewardship will be abundantly replenished by our faithful Master

Peter then mentions the two specific gifts that are more like categories of gifts - speaking and serving in verse 11

*"Whoever speaks"* doesn't just include those who preach or teach

It includes many kinds of gifts involving the activity of speech whether that be evangelism, teaching, preaching, prophesying, and perhaps we could even include singing or sharing words of praise and testimony

And to speak *"as one who speaks oracles of God"* doesn't mean merely to speak Scripture but actually pertains to the manner of speaking which should be speaking with the seriousness and purpose one would use when speaking God's words

*"Whoever serves"* likewise is a very broad category that includes any kind of helping or encouraging ministry

The key to both categories of gifts is that they are spiritually empowered and used for God's glory

Service that is carried out in one's own strength and for one's own status can lead to a person becoming proud or burning out

Whereas speaking or serving that is carried out in God's strength and directed toward helping fellow believers (and others) and is dedicated to building up the church draws on unlimited resources and will result in God's glory in both actions and attitudes

Peter then closes this section of his letter with a doxology to Christ where he calls for the powers of believers to be given more fully into Christ's service for his honor and glory

## Conclusion

We can sum up Peter's commands in this section of his letter this way:

Because the end is near and Christ could return at any moment -

- Be of sound judgment and serious spirit - be aware of the real importance of things and ever mindful of their consequences so that you can pray rightly
- Love each other completely and unflinchingly so that you don't hold things against one another
- Be hospitable by opening up your home and resources to one another without complaining
- Use the gifts that God has graciously given you to serve one another

We are sojourners in exile during our time here and we cannot count on those outside the church to understand us let alone help us so we have to count on one another

Christ didn't commission his followers to sit on a hillside and watch for his coming but to understand that he *is* coming again and to be busy doing his work until that time

Like Colonel Davenport, we should want to be found doing our duty when Christ returns to take his bride, the church, home

To do so, we must fully understand and appropriate what Peter is saying and allow it to instill in us a sense of urgency regarding his coming - after all it's later now than it's ever been

Let's pray

**Matthew 24:36-44 (page 830)**

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>3</sup>or as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”