

The end of all things is near

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[0 : 0 0] Lord, as we come to share your word now, open our eyes to your presence, our ears to your voice, our ears to your voice, speak into our minds, break into our thoughts, take hold of our hand and fill our hearts with your grace this day we pray in Jesus name.

Amen. I wonder if anyone remember some of the prayers they were taught when they were young? Well, I can remember two simple prayers.

One was a mealtime prayer. The other was a prayer before going to bed. The mealtime prayer went like this. God is great. God is good. Let us thank him for our food.

By his hands we all are fed. Give us, Lord, our daily bread. And before going to sleep, I learned to pray this way.

Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take.

[1 : 1 3] Of those two prayers, the first one seems simpler. Perhaps because the phrases are shorter. The second strikes me as more intense.

Maybe even a bit scary. The first prayer gives thanks to God as the source of all our blessings. The second acknowledges the uncertainty of life.

And although I never thought about it when I was young, it's a serious thing for a five-year-old to pray if I should die before I wake. What if that bedtime prayer finally came true?

What if after years of rising and shining, the sun doesn't come up for us? What if we knew that this would be our final day on earth?

What if we knew we would not live to see another sunrise? What would we do? How would we live on that last day? Well, something like that was in Peter's mind when he said in verse 7 of our reading, the end of all things is near.

[2 : 3 3] Commentators differ on his meaning here. And the phrase certainly includes the day of our death. When that day comes for you and for me, we will leave behind all that it is of this earth.

Our hopes, our dreams, our thoughts, our plans, our earthly friendships, all of it will end when we die. And those who live beyond us will go on without us and we will go out into eternity to meet the Lord.

No doubt Peter means at least that much, but his words go beyond that to include the second coming of the Lord Jesus. When Jesus returns to the earth, the entire earthly order will come to an end.

How soon are we? To the day of his return. Romans 13 verse 12 tells us that the day of his return is not far away.

Philippians 4 and 5, the night is nearly over. The day is almost here. James chapter 5, the Lord's coming is near. And Revelation 22 verse 20, he who testifies to these things says, yes, I am coming soon.

- [3 : 54] How soon is soon? In the book, *Voyage of the Dawn Trader* by C.S. Lewis, there's a conversation between Lucy and Aslan.
- Aslan the lion, who is the Christ-like figure in the story said, do not look so sad, Lucy. We shall meet again soon. Please, Aslan, said Lucy, what do you call soon?
- I call all time soon, said Aslan. And instantly, he vanished. And God does indeed call all time soon because he is the Lord of time.
- A thousand years is but a day in his sight, and a day is as a thousand years. When Peter says, the end of all things is near, he uses a word that means at hand or approaching.
- It's like taking children on holiday, and it's a long drive to get there. How often does the cry come from the back seat? Are we there yet?
- [5 : 08] Will we be there soon? We can say the same thing about the Lord's return. Since God does not reckon time the same way we do, we know that Jesus' coming will be soon.
- Think how close we must be now. The Lord's coming is always close, and always coming closer at the same time. The Lord himself will return, and it's imminent, meaning that he could come at any moment.
- If we believe that, how should we be living our lives? The key word in our text is in verse 7, therefore.
- This word therefore is a conclusion, an inference, a deduction, an application. And Peter's going to suggest in our passage that if we really believe that Jesus is coming, and if we really believe the climax of history is upon us, then it ought to make a tremendous difference in the way we live.
- And Peter singles out four things that are especially important for those living in these last days. Firstly, he says, keep your emotions under control so you can pray.
- [6 : 33] Verse 7, and therefore, be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. We live in days of rapid change in our society because of the internet, email, iPhones, laptop computers, and advancing technology.
- What used to take centuries, decades, years, now takes weeks, days, minutes, seconds. Many people can't take the pressure of life.
- They just can't handle it. In these days, to survive, we need to be clear-minded so that we can see things in their proper perspective. Why?
- Peter says, so that you can pray. When we're always uptight, always running from one thing to another, stressed to the limit, it's easy, so easy to become distracted, bothered, and controlled totally by our circumstances.
- And what happens? We can't pray. Our mind won't stop whizzing and worrying. We just can't pray.
- [7 : 54] I'm sure we've all experienced that before, when we're wound up like a top, we can't slow down or focus long enough to pray. It's not easy to persevere.
- Complaining seems to come naturally to most of us. But the moment we start to pray, suddenly we can hear music a mile away. And we remember a conversation we had last week and before long, we are praying because we have not been distracted.
- The point is, in light of the approaching end of the age, don't panic. Pray. One commentator put it like this, he said, and the only advice I can add is to start praying early in the day.
- As soon as you wake up, before the pressure of the day wraps its arms around you, start the day with prayer, and you're likely to remain cool, calm, and collected all day long.
- Secondly, be quick to forgive the stupid things other people do. Verse 8, above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.

- [9 : 17] The word deeply might be better translated fervently, like an athlete straining their muscles or a horse running at full gallop.
- It pictures a runner making the effort to finish the race. It means stretched out love, a love that goes on and on. You must make that sort of effort because true love is difficult.
- It costs something. Once you really get to know another person, real love means going to the wall for them, stretching to the limit, putting yourself in a place where you can be hurt.
- Friends, to love is to open ourselves up to the possibility of being deeply hurt, which is why Peter says in verse 8, above all, love each other deeply.
- And there's a reason for this command, to love each other with a stretched out love, because love covers, as already said, a multitude of sins.
- [10 : 29] And every time someone wrongs us, we have two choices. We can deal with it, forgive it, cover it, and move on.
- Or we can drag that person through the mud and in hatred, stir up all kinds of dissension. The meaning is that love refuses to wash its dirty laundry in public.
- Love handles it privately. It goes out of its way to veil sin, to treat it discreetly. It's exactly the opposite of hatred. Hatred exposes weakness and humiliates someone else.
- Love deals with sin publicly, only as a last resort. There is love first of all, then there's forgiveness, then there's silence.
- Love is a short memory and sealed lips. We need to hear this word because others will indeed fail us a multitude of times. Love isn't surprised when close friends fail, isn't surprised when promises aren't kept, isn't surprised when we're criticized unfairly.
- [11 : 50] Fervent love expects others to fail, expects to be hurt and expects to be used unfairly, but it goes on loving anyway. I'm sure we've all been to a wedding where the bride looked positively radiant and the groom has a slightly confused smile on his face, as most grooms do.
- Then as they take their marriage vows, the couple are so happy, so hopeful, so full of optimism and joy, so ready to embark on their new life together.
- Have you ever thought at moments like that they don't have a clue? But how could they? I didn't have a clue when I got married.
- You learn so much in just the first few weeks, and still you don't know much at all. And even after a few years, you're still learning and growing. June and I have been married for almost 60 years, and we're learning all the time.
- Or maybe I should say I'm learning all the time. No one really has a clue when they get married. But I'm sure you'll agree if a marriage is going to succeed, love for one another, also getting along together, is so, so important.
- [13 : 26] And this applies to every part of life. Love must stretch out to cover sin. Without that stretched out love, we will never be able to live together and get along together.
- I had a speaker say recently that there are too many people these days who get their feelings hurt too easily. And here's the worst of it.
- While we sit at home feeling down because our feelings got hurt, the person who hurt us is probably out having a good time because they didn't even realize they had hurt our feelings.
- At this point we face an important question. How do we cover the sins of those who don't admit they did anything wrong?
- Is it even right to talk about covering sins when there's no confession, no repentance?
- R.T.

[14 : 34] Kendall, the writer, put in his book called Total Forgiveness. He says that if you wait for others to repent, most of the time you'll wait forever.

Very often people who hurt you either don't know it or don't see it or pretend it never happened. And if you try to convince them they did wrong, you'll often start an argument.

end. Kendall says we must forgive anyway and he means it in the precise sense that Peter means in verse 8, we cover the sins of those who have hurt us.

Thirdly, we should stop complaining and start sharing what God has given us. Verse 9, offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

The word hospitality here means kindness shown to strangers. And it was vitally important in the early church because they didn't have buildings.

[15 : 41] They met in homes of various members and in that day, traveling Bible teachers and evangelists would come into a town and stay with a local family.

They had to because they didn't have a travel lodge or a Hilton or a Premier Inn. And the Inns then did have, what they did have then, were filthy and dangerous.

The early Christian church depended on hospitality, on open homes. In those days, to welcome other believers into your home was a matter of honor.

There's a qualification to this verse. Do it without grumbling. grumbling. The Greek word for grumble is go guzzo, which means to mumble under your breath.

But why would anyone grumble about hospitality? Most of us don't look at our homes the way the early Christians looked at theirs. They saw their homes as not only a shelter for their families, but also a tool for ministry.

[16 : 53] ministry. They understood that God had given them a place to live, not just to get away from the world, but also a means of ministering to others.

One commentator put it this way, your home is your single best tool for evangelism and Christian ministry. Hospitality is one way to show love for other believers.

As the end of all things draws near, it becomes increasingly important for Christians to open their homes to each other. And the fourth point Peter makes here has to do with how we fit together in the local church.

Verses 10 and 11. Each one should use whatever gift they have received to serve others. In that little phrase, we learn that three things.

One, every believer has a spiritual gift. Two, our gift may not be the same as anyone else's.

[18 : 04] And three, we are to use our gift to serve others. Moving on to verse 11, it categorizes spiritual gifts into two groups.

The speaking gifts and the helping gifts. Speaking includes anyone who teaches the word of God, whether publicly or privately, whether to a group or one on one, whether from a pulpit or a small group or to a Sunday school class.

Peter says, if you speak, make sure you speak the very words of God. God, the primary temptation of any preacher or teacher is to render his or her opinion instead of God's word.

And in these days of long and deep debates within the church on issues which may divide us, surely those who preach God's word should live by God's word.

Helping gifts. Helping gifts include everything else in the church. Preparing a soup lunch, serving tea, cleaning up after church event, moving chairs in the hall, visiting the sick, writing a note of encouragement, giving what money we can, working the sound system, arranging the flowers, knitting blankets for needy children, making visitors welcome in the church, handing out Bibles to the crews from the cruise liners, and so on.

[19 : 56] Cleaning the church, helping with children's church. These include 1,001 other things that keep the church going.

of course, there are many people who for health or various other reasons, are not able or fit to get involved in some of the church activities.

But friends, there's one thing we can all do. One thing we can all do, whatever our circumstances.

practices, there's one activity we can all become involved in. We can all pray. Friends, we can revive our church through prayer.

I know how our church needs prayer at this time. We can revive our faith through prayer. We can revive our world through prayer. We can revive ourselves through prayer.

[21 : 00] prayer. We've all been given prayer as a gift from God. A gift. A gift we can all use.

So whatever our gift is, we should use it in the mighty strength which God supplies. The church needs every gift we have. No gift is too small to be used by the Lord.

Here's the progression from God to us, to others. When we stand before the Lord someday, and we all will, he's going to ask us, what did you do with the gifts I gave you?

We won't be quizzed about anyone else's, but we'll have to give an account of our own stewardship. God gives the gift, and then God gives the strength.

All we do is take the gift God has given us, and then his strength, we use it to serve others. That's the whole secret of the Christian life.

[22 : 06] And what is the result? Look at the end of verse 11. So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves, what have we done with the gift God has given us?

Who have we helped along the way? Is the church we attend better and stronger because we are there? Or are we wasting God's gift, or are we using it for his glory?

In World War II, a little French town had a statue of Jesus in their town square. When the bombing came, the statue was damaged, and pieces were broken off.

They stored the pieces, and after the war, they began to rebuild the statue. It had cracks now, but they appreciated it even more.

But to their dismay, the only pieces they couldn't find were the hands of Jesus. others. And that troubled them, because the hands had the nail prints, and that was significant to them.

[23 : 29] So they thought they would have to take the statue down, until one person placed a gold plaque at the bottom of the statue that read, He has no hands, but our hands.

friends, we are the body of Christ in this world. We're living for God. God has no hands, but our hands, to do His work today.

God has no feet, but our feet, to lead others in His way. God has no voice, but our voice, to tell others how He died. And God has no help, but our help, to lead them to His side.

Peter says here, the end of all things is near. We know the end times will be turbulent days. The world will seem to be turned upside down.

Long-held standards will fall. People will be afraid. Morals will be thrown away. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

[24 : 37] Do these things sound familiar? Friends, we are living in the end times. In these earth-shaking days, we need to clear our mind for prayer.

In these turbulent times, we need to love each other deeply and be quick to forgive. And as we see the end approaching, we should offer hospitality without grumbling, and we should tell others about Jesus.

as the days draw near for the return of Jesus, may we use our spiritual gifts, our speaking gifts, our helping gifts to serve others, and the gift of prayer to pray for others.

And if this day be the day before the end of the world, let it be a day in which we can say, we will serve the Lord with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word in the Bible and the passage we have shared together this day.

[25 : 57] And forgive us when we hear you calling us, but we don't want to listen. When you challenge us to trust you, but we would rather put our faith in ourselves.

When we know we should pray, but we have left no time. When your word is before us, but we are afraid to speak. Lord, help us to use the gifts you have given us, that we may follow your way in quietness, filled with thankfulness for your faithfulness and love.

In Jesus' name. Amen.