

How Shall We Live

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[0:00] Good morning. The scripture reading for today is taken from 1st Peter chapter 4 verses 7 through 11. You'll find it on page 1016 in the church Bible that's under the seat in front of you.

That's 1st Peter chapter 4 verses 7 through 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 very 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.

[1:20] To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Thank you very much for reading 1st June.

The end of all things is at hand. The Apostle Peter wrote those words almost 2,000 years ago under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who cannot lie.

But exactly what does that statement mean? By writing that the end of all things is at hand. Peter was not communicating that he knew exactly when Jesus would return.

Or that Jesus was going to return very soon. Instead, by those words, the end of all things is at hand, and Peter was simply referring to the end of God's redemptive purposes.

The redemptive purposes of God began in the Garden of Eden. When God himself preached the gospel to Adam and Eve, when he said to them that one day the seed of the woman is going to crush the head of the serpent, who is Satan.

[2:49] And the end of God's redemptive purposes began with the fulfillment of that promise that he made.

The coming of the one who would crush the head of the serpent. The one who was proclaimed and he came and was conceived in the womb of Mary.

And he one day is going to return. Jesus Christ marks the end of the redemptive purposes that we see being worked out in Scripture from Genesis chapter 3 up to the New Testament.

Peter was referring not to a point in time, but to a period in time. A period of time that marks the end of God's redemptive purposes.

And so in truth, every generation that is living until Christ returns, that generation is living in this period that is rightly called the end of all things.

[4:08] Again, it began with the coming of Jesus in the womb of Mary. It will end with the return of Jesus coming in the clouds.

And so I think in light of this reality, the natural question is how shall we live? How shall we live, those of us who live in this period of time called the end of all things?

How should we live? Well, the answer to that question is the same answer that it was in Peter's day. It was a natural question in Peter's day. Peter answered it in his day. It's a natural question in our day and it is answered in our day. The answer is not that we stock up on food, quit our jobs and move to a rural area where we can farm and look for Jesus to return.

The answer is not that we fix our eyes on the Middle East and try to trace and track everything that happens with the nation of Israel. No, in this letter the Apostle Peter as he wrote to the scattered saints of God throughout the world, he tells them how they are to live in light of this reality of the end of all things being at hand.

[5:39] And so this morning as we continue our sermon series in the letter of 1 Peter, I want us to consider how the Apostle Peter says we are to live in the light of the fact that the end of all things is

at hand.

But first let me pray for us. Oh, Father, we bow our hearts this morning before you and we ask that you would draw near to us.

Would you give us hearts and minds to hear your word and to respond to it? Lord, your word calls us to live in particular ways in light of the fact that the end of all things is at hand.

Would you help us to hear this word and to heed it for the glory of your name? We pray in Christ's name. Amen. How then should we live in light of the fact that the end of all things is at hand?

If also Peter answers that question for us in verses 7 to 11 of chapter 4, he calls us to four particular activities.

[6:57] Four ways that we should have our lives marked as we live in this period of time called the end of all things.

all things are ready. There is nothing that prohibits or prevents the Lord from returning.

Indeed, when we reflect back on the previous sermon where Peter said that Christ is ready to judge the living and the dead.

he's ready. He's not preparing. He is ready to do that. The only reason that Christ has not come, that Christ delays, is it is within the sovereign domain of the Lord to determine when that moment will be.

So, four activities that the Apostle Peter calls us to. The first is we have to be a praying people. We see this in verse 7.

[8:11] Look again at how Peter says it. The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Notice that although the command is to be self-controlled and sober-minded, that's not a freestanding command.

That's not a command all by itself. It has a goal. It has an aim. The goal of that command, that two-fold command, is for the sake of your prayers.

For the sake of your prayers, you are to be self-controlled and sober-minded. So, Peter is saying, because the end of all things is at hand, be a praying people.

And to be a praying people, you must be self-controlled and sober-minded. The goal is that we are to be a praying people, and the requirement to fulfill that goal is that we must be self-controlled and we must be sober-minded.

[9:18] And what does it mean to be self-controlled and sober-minded? the easier of the two is sober-minded. To be sober-minded is to think clearly.

To be sober-minded is to be clear-minded. It means that our thinking is not influenced by anything that weakens our judgment, our ability to think things like alcohol or drugs.

Now, on the other hand, self-control is not as easy to identify or to define, and the reason is that we tend automatically to think of self-control as more behavior.

But self-control at its core is not about behavior. It certainly eventually will manifest in behavior, but self-control at its core is a mental quality.

Self-control is the ability to think rightly. Self-control is the ability to do not what we want to do, but what we ought to do. That is that mental state, that mental quality that enables us to think rightly so that we can act rightly.

[10:46] To be self-controlled is to be self-disciplined. And again, first and foremost, it is about right thinking, and right thinking will lead to right living or disciplined living.

And so being self-controlled or right thinking, being sober-minded or clear thinking, they are connected. They are connected.

but again, we must remember the aim. The aim is not just to say, I am a self-controlled person, I could think as I should, I could, I am rightly thinking, I am clearly thinking, sober-mindedness, that that is not the aim, to be able to say that we are that kind of person.

The aim is for the sake of your prayers. Peter is saying to us, that if we are not sober-minded, if we are not self-controlled, we are not going to be a praying people.

We have to be at the forefront of the gates of our minds, guarding them, controlling them, monitoring them, if we are going to be giving ourselves to prayer.

[12:16] And here is what is true, whenever we are neglecting prayer, we are not thinking rightly, we are not thinking clearly. The mere fact that we neglect prayer is evidence that we are not thinking rightly, we are not thinking clearly.

When we see prayer as optional rather than essential, brothers and sisters, we are thinking in a fuzzy way. We are thinking in a way that just is not true to spiritual reality. we are not thinking with the awareness that we are living at a time when the end of all things is at hand.

beyond times of prayer, and we should certainly have times of prayer, we need to have a mind that is mindful of the Lord, seeking to commune with the Lord, and that only happens as we are in a better place of just controlling our minds, thinking rightly, thinking soberly.

But when we think of prayer, we think of it on two levels. One, there's certainly personal prayer. and then there's also corporate prayer.

[14 : 07] We should all be seeking to cultivate our lives personally and corporately, our prayer lives, both personally and corporately.

Thinking about praying personally in private, thinking about praying corporately in public, and here's reality. We all lead busy lives, all of us. Lives that are full, lives that could just become frazzled with many other things.

If we don't prioritize prayer, prayer will be crowded out. It will be crowded out. And so I want to offer us two questions this morning to help us assess whether we are a praying people, both personally and corporately.

Here's the first question. On a personal level, do you have at least one set time of the day when you seek to come before the Lord in prayer?

Life being what it is, the only thing I think that is absolutely consistent every single day is the sun. time, and it's rising and setting as we call it.

[15 : 29] But there is no habit or activity that we give ourselves to that life is so consistent and unchanging that that happens every single time.

And so the point, the question is not so much, do you pray every single day? That's not the question. It's the question. The question is, do you have at least one set time per day when you aim to, when you seek to come before the Lord in prayer?

And that's a yes or no answer. And then the second question, on a corporate level, have you incorporated our church's corporate prayer times into your schedule and aim to participate as much as you possibly can?

Have you, are you mindful of the times when we as a church gather? And do you seek to fit that into your schedule to participate as much as you are able?

brothers and sisters, those are the foundations for us to cultivate being a praying people personally and corporately in a time when the end of all things is at hand?

[17 : 08] If your answer to one or both of these questions is no, I encourage you to reflect on that and think about what changes you need to make to be able to commit yourself to prayer personally, to commit yourself to prayer corporately.

Brothers and sisters, if we don't pursue this with intentionality, it will not happen. It won't happen. And even when we do this, when we think of our personal endeavors to be a praying people, if we're not seeking to give the best part of our day, whenever that is, that will make it more likely that prayer is going to happen, we're not approaching it in a way that's going to prove to be effective at the end of the day.

the important things are easy to be crowded out by the urgent things.

What is urgent, oftentimes not important, will crowd out what is important. And so, brothers and sisters, we need to give ourselves to this, be thoughtful about it, and by the grace of God, let us seek to cultivate being a praying people, personally and also corporately.

In addition to being a praying people, the Apostle Peter calls us, who lived during this time of the end of all things is at hand, to be a loving people.

[18 : 54] This is my second point. Look again at how he says this in verse eight. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sin.

The Apostle Peter begins this command with the words, above all. And these two words signal to us that we are to give special attention to this command.

And I think Peter is also signaling to us that this is not always easy to do. And Peter is not telling us to love every single person in the world, although we are to love all people.

Peter is addressing this to God's people in the household of faith, and he's saying that we are to love one another. We're to love one another.

We're to love brothers and sisters. That's what he has in view here. And he says we must keep on loving one another, and we must be earnest with it, meaning that we are to make genuine, sincere, determined effort to love one another.

[20 : 14] another. Why? Because sometimes we will find it hard to love one another. Sometimes it's others finding it hard to love us.

And sometimes it's for legitimate reasons, sometimes it's for illegitimate reasons. But that is the reality of living in community, and this is not an empty command and a necessary command. This is a necessary command, because in community, we sin against one another. we disappoint one another.

And so Peter says, above all, you keep loving one another earnestly. We're told that love covers a multitude of sins.

How does it do that? It does it in different ways. The most obvious way is through forgiveness.

When we forgive the sins of others, we cover those sins.

[21 : 27] We cover them. We don't hold them against our brother and our sister. And this is not just ignoring sin.

Instead, there is a place for overlooking sin. And there's a difference. we can ignore sins that bother us, but we can also overlook some sins.

And this is what love covering a multitude of sins will do at times. It will cover those sins because we overlook them, and we don't need to engage the person who may be the one who sinned against us.

We are able to overlook it because love covers a multitude of sin. Now, if it is a sin that gnaws at your heart, a sin that troubles you in your mind, but then that's an indication that's a sin you can't overlook.

It's an indication that you need to go to your brother or to go to your sister and bring to their attention the action or the word or the deed, whatever it is that they have committed against you, and we should seek to resolve it.

[22 : 54] This call for us to forgive one another, this is an ongoing call to be a loving people, and it is a reminder to us that we are to do it not once, not twice, not two times, not three times or four times, but we are to do it a multitude of times.

Recently, I sat with a believer who recounted to me the very hurtful ways that they had been sinned against.

When the person was finished, the person said, how can I forgive someone who has done that to me? And I said, the way we forgive those kinds of penetrating sins, those grievous sins, is we remind ourselves of the multitude of sins that Christ has forgiven us.

sins. See, we don't forgive in a vacuum. The repeated command that we find in Scripture is you are to forgive.

How? As Christ has forgiven you. And I remind this, I reminded this individual of the parable of the unforgiving servant who was forgiven a massive amount of debt.

[24 : 32] servant and then went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a small amount and threw him in prison because he wasn't able to pay it.

Brothers, all of us have been forgiven a massive amount of debt of sin. And the amount of sins that can be committed against us pales in comparison to our sins against the Lord.

And so, the way that we are to forgive as Peter is calling us to forgive is we to be reminded of the debt of sin that we have been forgiven.

And then we likewise forgive. To be able to forgive, we must be willing to be self-sacrificing. we are to give ourselves. And we got to do this in front of a watching world.

[25 : 40] We got to forgive brothers and sisters in front of a watching world where the only love they know is self-love. But we know a love that is informed by Christ's love.

love that is rooted in mercy and in grace, not in deservedness, not in merit. again, this is not easy. And I pray that I'm not for a moment making it sound easy because it is not. True forgiveness, true forgiveness, not forgiveness that comes from our lips and say, I forgive you.

But true forgiveness that comes from the heart is a divine work of God. God has to grace us to truly forgive from the heart.

Otherwise, we'll just be going through the motions, we'll just be saying, I forgive you, and we haven't truly forgiven. And I believe all of us have experienced hearing those words, I forgive you, and time

will soon tell that those were just mere words.

[26 : 59] They weren't from the heart. Love and true forgiveness will cover sins. It doesn't uncover them, it covers sins.

As we live during this time of the end of all things being at hand, the third activity that we are called to be committed to is hospitality.

We're called to be a hospitable people. In verse 9, we are called to show hospitality to one another without welcoming.

To be hospitable is to be welcoming. It begins with open-heartedness. Before we open our homes to people, we open our hearts to them.

And so this is where it starts. It starts with an open heart. It doesn't end there, but it starts with an open heart. And immediately Peter helps us to see that showing hospitality to one another generally requires sacrifice.

[28 : 12] And that's why he says you to do it without grumbling because there's a temptation to grumble when an opportunity for hospitality may arise, maybe not by invitation, but by request, and we are reluctant to do it.

One degree or another, the hospitality will cost us, cost us our time, cost us our resources, we have to give of ourselves, but this is what scripture calls us to do.

And yet, I think it's fair to say that hospitality is one of those virtues that is not held as highly in Christian community as it ought to be held.

And I think there are two reasons for it. the first reason is that some people understand this call to show hospitality as being to those who have a gift of hospitality.

There is a gift of hospitality, but that's not what Peter is addressing here in verse 9. Peter is saying you are to show hospitality to one another.

[29 : 36] This is a command to all of God's people. And so none of us gets to exempt ourselves from this command to show hospitality.

It is a command. That's first and foremost. It is a command. And it is not just directed.

This is the second reason. It's not just directed to those who may have a gift of hospitality.

Now hospitality varies. Hospitality doesn't look the same for every single believer. It varies by person.

It varies by season. It varies by circumstances. For example, we have those in our congregation who open their homes for discipleship groups to meet in them.

[30 : 42] It's a wonderful expression of hospitality. But that's not available to everyone. It's not available to everyone for a variety of reasons. For example, some of us share a home with others and space may be limited and that's just not possible.

In the day when Peter would have written this command, they would have met in homes. They were meeting in homes. They didn't have church buildings. And so those who were able to accommodate God's people in their homes, they were to be able to welcome them in.

But not everybody was able to do it. Yet this command to show hospitality is still binding upon all of us. again, it starts with being open-hearted.

It starts with being open-hearted. And then we extend hospitality as our circumstances allow, as the season we're in allow.

We show it as best as we are able. But hospitality should not be like a blank spot in your Christian life.

[31 : 56] We want to be thinking, Lord, how can I, in whatever season I find myself in, how can I be showing hospitality? How can I be opening my heart and my life to brothers and sisters?

And hospitality is more than just eating a meal together. Hospitality is more than just food. And I think that's one of the mistakes we make with hospitality, that we make hospitality all about the food, and so we have to do something grand in order to be able to show hospitality.

But that's not the case at all. Hospitality can be very, very simple and doesn't have to be extravagant. So here's the question I want to have us consider as it relates to hospitality.

And the question is very simple. Am I showing hospitality to others as much as I'm able? Am I showing hospitality to others as much as I'm able?

And brothers and sisters, let me just say that if we decide that we're going to wait until our home is ideally suited with every dream we have and what we want for this and want for that, and especially I have in mind the ladies, because women tend to identify more with the space of their homes and

men.

[33:24] But if we do that, if we need to have ideal circumstances to extend hospitality to brothers and sisters, it's not going to happen.

A sovereign God so ordains it that we never have perfect circumstances. we never do.

And sometimes when we extend hospitality in less than ideal circumstances, in circumstances where we would rather this be that way and that be the other way.

But when we do that, we grow in two ways. We grow in hospitality because we're extending it, but we also grow in humility because we're welcoming people into our homes and lives, sometimes in circumstances that in our minds are less than ideal.

I remember when Alexa and I first got married and we didn't have furniture and we had carpet and we invited friends over and we sat on the floor like Chinese and we ate.

[34:41] That's what we did. But we opened our home to others. Brothers and sisters, if we're going to grow in hospitality, we're going to have to trust the providence of God and we're going to have to show hospitality to the extent that we are able.

And it doesn't always have to entail in a home setting. There are many other ways that we can show hospitality to one another and we need to seek to do that.

Well, fourth and finally, we who live when the end of all things is at hand are called to be a serving people. In verse 10, the apostle Peter helps us to see an important truth that we easily overlook and that truth is that all of God's people have received from him one gift, at least one gift, to serve one another.

Every single one of us. None of us came to the body of Christ empty-handed without any gifts.

No, God gave us at least one gift and the purpose of that gift is to serve one another. Look again at how he says it in verse 10, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

[36:16] And the first things we should notice is that the gift that God gives us is very different from ordinary gifts that we receive. When someone gives us a gift, they cease to be the owner and we become the owner and we can use that gift however we choose to use that gift.

It becomes our exclusive property. But notice that the Apostle Peter tells us that the gifts that God gives us are different. They're different in nature and they're different in purpose.

The gift that God gives us is not a gift for us to do as we choose. It's not exclusively ours. It's a stewardship.

And Peter says that we are to use the gift to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

A stewardship, 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 2 says it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. So every gift that we have is a stewardship.

[37:25] We steward it on behalf of the true owner who is God himself. And then the gift that we have also has a different purpose.

It is not like the other gifts that we have. The purpose that all of us have been given the gifts that we have is to serve one another.

It's to serve one another. And so we don't get to do what we want to do with our gifts. We get to store them and we get to use them on God's behalf.

Brothers and sisters, we should think about this. We should think about this. We should reflect on this. And we should consider, am I using the gift or gifts that God has given to me as a steward and using it to serve one another?

Or do I think of it really as my gift or don't even think of it as a gift at all and are indifferent towards serving? Peter also tells us in verse 10 that God gives us these gifts determined by his varied grace.

[38:49] varied grace. Not the same measure of grace. Not the same weight of grace. It's not a cookie-cutter grace.

It's by varied grace. And the gifts vary and the measure also varies. And so we should never preoccupy ourselves with another person's gift or with the measure of gift.

Sometimes God would give the same gifts to different people, but he gives different measures of that gift. That's in his sovereign right to do that.

He can choose to cause one person to be more gifted in a gift that they have than others, and that is his right to do that.

So instead of being preoccupied with the gift that we may have or the measure of gift that we may have, our preoccupation should be to use whatever gift that God has given to us to serve one another.

[39:58] And Peter tells us how we are to serve. He says we are to serve in God's strength and for God's glory. So it's God's gift.

We are to serve. God gives us the strength to serve, and he says this is the reason you do it, you do it for my glory. And so there's no room to boast. There's no room to seek to compare.

Look again at how Peter says that in verse 11. He says 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 be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Notice that in verse 11, Peter talks about whoever speaks and whoever serves. And yes, we use our speaking gifts to serve as well, but Peter distinguishes the gifts in these two categories, and this is consistent with what we see elsewhere in Scripture.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 12, we see that all of these gifts can be put into these two categories. They're speaking gifts or they are serving gifts.

[41:21] Peter says when we use a speaking gift, we are to do so as oracles of God. And what it means is that we are to be mindful that if we are exercising what we understand to be a speaking gift, that we're representing God, and we want to endeavor to bring God's words on God's behalf to God's people.

When we serve with our serving gifts, again, remember, not only is God the giver of the gift, he is the giver of the strength to use the gift. He gives us breath and strength in our bodies so that we may serve.

And again, this means there is absolutely no room for anyone to boast. The gift is of the Lord, the strength is of the Lord, and the purpose is to bring him glory and not ourselves.

So, brothers and sisters, may this be our aim. As we live in this period of time called the end of all things is at hand. May we be a praying people.

May we be a loving people. May we be a hospitable people. And may we be a serving people. And if we live this way, whenever Christ returns, if he returns in our lifetime, we will be living well.

[43:00] We'll be living well. We'll be living ready. If we're praying, if we're loving, if we are being hospitable, if we are serving, we are to be doing ordinary life, waiting for our Lord to return.

And should he come, he will find us doing well. And we do all this, because to him, to him alone belong glory and dominion forever.

Peter reminds us of a reality that we could easily forget. You see, Christ is not coming to reign.

Christ is reigning even now. He is seated at the right hand of the Father.

His enemies are being made his footstool. And all glory and all dominion belong to him right now.

No matter what's going on in our lives, no matter what's going on in this world, Christ reigns.

He's Lord over all. And this must be our reality, brothers and sisters. No matter what we see going on around us, Christ is ruling over all.

[44:21] Let's pray. Lord, would you help us to see the wisdom in living as a people who are prayerful and loving and hospitable and serving because we live in the time when the end of all things is at hand.

May we live wisely each day for the glory of the one who is soon to come, the glory of the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Would you help us, Lord, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.