

"The Tangible Kingdom " 1 Peter 4:7–11

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[0 : 00] The reading is going to be from 1 Peter chapter 4, starting at verse 7. 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. So I recently read a survey during this week.

And I found it quite surprising when I read it. And what it said is that nine, it's an American survey. Nine in every ten Americans who identify as a Christian, only one-third of them actually participate in a faith community.

[1 : 14] Or go to a Bible study. Or take part in any aspect of church life. And I know this is an American survey. But this could lead us to just think about how bleak it probably is in Canada.

Because America has it within their culture, Christianity. But in Canada, it's definitely different. A lot different. So we have to ask ourselves, why are the numbers so bad?

Shouldn't Christians be filling the pews or seats, movie theater seats, every Sunday? Shouldn't they be doing that? Well, one answer I've heard after talking with people through the years is that they just feel church isn't doing it for them anymore.

We now have this great blessing live streams. We can listen to any podcast, any preacher throughout the world we want to listen to. So why do I need to go to church? And I can just do my own walk with the Lord on my own time.

And hear a sermon whenever I want to hear it. Another answer I've heard is that church, all churches just abuse power. And I don't need to deal with that.

[2 : 19] And you have to say to that person, well, that's a terrible thing that you've experienced church abuse. And that should be dealt with. And you should leave that church. But you should not just not go to church.

You should just find a better church, one that does not abuse power. Another answer I've heard is that I've been too busy with my kids. I can't make it to church.

There's sports. There's other things I need to attend to instead of going to church. See, the text we're looking at this morning, 1 Peter, I believe helps to remedy, or to shed light on this issue that is happening within the church.

It's going to help shed light on the lethargy or anything else towards church attendance and church involvement. And Peter gets right at the point of this. So let's turn.

Please turn with me to 1 Peter, chapter 4, verses 7 to 11. If you don't have a Bible, I believe there's some on the table outside of the sanctuary. At any time, if you want a Bible, just go get it.

[3 : 21] Don't worry about getting up while I'm talking. It's very helpful to have a Bible because we have to remember that these are letters that we're looking at. They're not just little sayings that we look at every Sunday.

So the way we're going to look at this text is that we're going to look at it in three ways. The first is controlled and sober prayer. The second is love, hospitality, and serving.

And the third is everything for God's glory. Now the thing that's difficult when we do sermons where you just jump into a text is that you have no understanding or no context of what's going on within the letter through as you look at it.

And what the writer has been talking about. Because there's always a theme that runs through the letter. And Peter's talking about that. We need to remember that. So I'll be referring to different verses through the sermon within the first Peter letter.

Now the author is the apostle Peter. He is one of the twelve disciples. He traveled and learned from Jesus. He's an eyewitness of all that Jesus did. He's an eyewitness of Jesus' death.

[4 : 28] He's an eyewitness of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. So we see that he is writing, when you look at this, at the beginning he says he's writing to dispersed Christians.

In the opening verses he lists where they are. Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia. If you look at a map, they're all side by side. So a letter runner, someone who would have taken this letter and brought it to all the churches through it, the dispersed churches.

In chapter 5, verse 12, Silvanus, or however you say his name, signs off on this letter. He is the one who most likely would have taken the letter.

See, Peter is writing to them because these Christians are facing persecution, they're facing suffering, they're facing discrimination. And the theme of this letter that is helpful for us to remember is that those who persevere in the faith while suffering from persecution should be full of hope.

For they will certainly enjoy eternal salvation. Since they are already enjoying God's saving promises here and now through the death and resurrection of Christ.

[5 : 39] At the time of this letter being written, a decree hadn't been put out by the Roman emperor banning Christianity yet. So the suffering and persecution they would have been feeling would have most likely been verbal and discrimination being shunned by the community or the society that they were a part of.

Because in that time, people worshipped many gods. And to say that you only worshipped the one true living God would have been very controversial.

It would have been almost scandalous in that time. Because there's all these apparently different gods where you'd go to to get certain things at the time you need them. But they, as we, hold to that there is only one true living God.

So this makes it easier for us to relate to this. It's not talking about martyrdom. That does happen later. But it's talking about verbal abuse and discrimination and suffering in that way.

So with this in mind, let's look at the text. Verse 7. The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

[6 : 49] Now I probably, I was thinking about this yesterday. I should open this sermon with this thing saying I'm going to talk about the end times. Because I would have all your attentions for the rest of the sermon when I'm talking about the end times.

Because it just takes, just one, go on the internet, go on YouTube and put, if you just type end times in, you're going to get so many rabbit holes about the end times.

So it's always on people's minds, the end times. So we're going to look at it. Because Peter says, he talks about the end times right here. So the end times. The end times. The end of all things is at hand.

What is he talking about? Well, to summarize, we need to summarize what Peter's been talking about up to this point. Because it's very helpful. And what he says, what he's been talking about through his letter, is that, what he's talking about, I got, switch the page.

What he's talking about, he's saying this through the letter. See, on Thursday this coming week, it's Ascension Day.

[8 : 12] This is the day where we remember Christ's ascension into heaven and being seated at the right hand of God. This letter is written only 15 years after this happened.

See, the ascension was crucial for God's plan of redemption. Because through the ascension, the Holy Spirit was sent and God's church was inaugurated, as you read in the early chapters of Acts. But the other thing about the ascension is that it marks the beginning of the end times. See, the end times have been happening since Christ was ascended and the Holy Spirit came.

See, Christ can return at any moment, as Jesus said in the gospel text that we looked at. He'll return to judge the living and the dead. When Peter says the end of all things is at hand, he wants his readers and listeners to have this in mind.

As you face suffering, as you face persecution, Christ can return at any moment. How are you living through these times? That's the question he asks his readers, in a sense.

[9 : 20] And that's the question we need to ask ourselves every day. But as he says this, he turns his attention towards the church and church life. That's what he turns his attention to.

See, look again at verse 7. He says this, To be self-controlled and sober-minded, What he's referring to here is that earlier in chapter 4, he refers to those who aren't followers of Christ.

And he says this, earlier in chapter 4. He says, See, These things lead to confusion.

If a church was full of them, they'd be full of confusion. But to be self-controlled and sober-minded is not just so we can pray nicely. It's so we can pray more effectively, appropriately, prayer steeped in scripture, to the ability to view world events, evaluate and discern them wisely and biblically.

See, prayer that lacks self-control and sober-mindedness versus prayer that has that self-control and sober-mindedness is kind of like this. Think of a river.

[11 : 08] A river that runs, think of the Ottawa River. It is very deep, but it has river banks to keep the water in. Yes, when it rains a lot, it floods, but the majority of the time, it is deep and it runs in one direction.

It has banks holding it in. A river that spills out is shallow. There's no depth to it. So to have self-control and sober-mindedness in our minds as we pray keeps us within the banks of prayer.

And prayer will run deep. It won't just be shallow. When Peter is showing his readers, what Peter is showing his readers is that the church should be full of people who pray for one another.

But prayer that is controlled and sober. Prayer that makes sense. But look with me how Peter describes how a church should act in verse 8.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. See, love here, what he says in the Greek, it's agape in the New Testament.

[12 : 15] And this has a deep meaning. I'm sure we've all heard this word agape before. It's likened to the love of God. But obviously, humans cannot love like God.

God's love is perfect. But this love that he refers to is strong. It's deep. It's pure. It's genuine. It's earnest. This sounds like the love of a married couple.

But Peter is commanding it to all believers, not just those who are in a marriage. See, every day this week, I've asked myself, have I loved Christ's people like this?

And I confess, I have to say no. And we should all ask ourselves this question. Have we loved Christ's people like this? With this deep, pure, clean, strong, genuine, earnest love.

Peter commands it here. But why does he do that? And he says it. See, friends, we need to strive to love one another. What if someone has wronged me, you might be thinking.

[13 : 13] See, love them all the more. Because he says, love covers a multitude of sins. Where love abounds in a fellowship of Christians, many small offenses, even some large ones, are readily overlooked and forgotten.

Now, if someone commits an offense, repercussions should be warranted. This is not a get-out-of-jail-free card. When things happen that need to be dealt with, they should be dealt with. Think of a parent. A parent with a child. That when the child acts out, you have to discipline the child. But the parent does not stop loving that child.

They do it in a sense of discipline. That is the idea here. See, the parent will be crossed with the child, but regardless of the offense, they will love the child.

As one commentator said, but where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is liable to misunderstanding, and conflicts abound to Satan's perverse delight.

[14 : 23] Proverbs 10.12 says, hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. But how do we find this love? That's the question.

Where is this love at? Can we just muster it up on our own? No. We need to look at the cross of Christ, because that is where we see the true love of God, that he saw us so far gone, so going in the opposite direction that he wants us to go, that he sent his son into the world to die upon the cross, to rise again and ascend, to take our place.

See, when we look at the cross, we see Jesus being pinned there for our transgressions, not his own. And that is the deep love of God that he would give his son for you and for me.

That is the love that we need to be earnest, to share to our fellow believers. This is deep love of Christ. See, after Peter gives this command to love each other in light of the end times, because Christ can return at any moment, he gives two ways of expressing it.

And he does this in verse 9 and the following verses. So verse 9. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. See, Peter gives this command.

[15 : 44] And it's interesting that he uses hospitality as a way to show this kind of love. Why? We have to ask ourselves that. Why would he use hospitality as a way? See, I think there's three ways that we can look at it that shows us when it's done without grumbling.

Because as soon as grumbling is behind the hospitality, it loses its benefit. So the three ways I think we can look at it is number one, when we do hospitality, which most of the time ends up being a meal, if we're honest, it costs the host time and money.

They have to clean their house. They have to do all these things. See, this is a direct blessing towards the other person who's coming, who's taking part in being served by the host.

This is a direct way of blessing people with what God has provided for us. When it's done with grumbling, it's directly against God's provision for our lives and his willingness to bless.

Secondly, sharing a meal with people is a very intimate thing. Have you noticed when you sit around a table with people, there's a sense of fellowship that just happens?

[16 : 54] You don't experience that anywhere else except over sharing food with people. It deepens the bond of affection. As I come up here to preach every so often, you'll hear me quoting a lot of Token, the guy who wrote Lord of the Rings.

See, Token was aware of this in his writings when you read his books because he had a deep love for the Anglo-Saxon writings, which speak a lot about feasts happening and being merry.

See, in The Hobbit, when you read The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, he really drills this down, this idea of sharing meals together. In the books, there's lots of meals shared between the good characters, but the enemy shares none, but they fight and kill over the food.

The movies take this away, but if you've seen The Hobbit, they've kept it in the first scene, which they call it The Unexpected Party, which has lots of food, drink, and singing, and merriment, and then they set off on their quest to the Lonely Mountain.

See, meals shared together deepen the bonds of affection and shows the kind of love that God has for us. But thirdly, and I think this is the most important thing when we think about hospitality, meals shared together are an image of the great marriage feast that we will all take part in, that those who call Jesus their Lord and Savior and follow him.

[18 : 17] Jesus talked about this in his ministry, always about the feast, the feast, the great marriage feast, that he will be the host of this great banquet. See, when we do hospitality with one another within the church, when we have each other over to our houses, we are showing an image of this great feast that we will all take part in when we meet Jesus face to face.

The Apostle John in his letter, Revelation chapter 19, verse 9, says this. He records this. And the angel said to me, write this, blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. See, this idea of sharing meals together is all throughout the Bible. Friends, let us challenge ourselves with this. Host people for meals. Host people you don't know.

It's easy to host people you know and you're rewarded immediately. Let us be a church that shows hospitality to each other. Don't worry about what actually the meal will be.

Everyone likes hot dogs and veggie dogs. And if you don't, there's something else that's easy to make that people like. It's about the people who sit across from you, love each other through hospitality.

[19 : 30] And I point my finger at myself for that as well. See, look with me now because there's other ways Peter lists the ways of showing expression of this deep love.

Look with me at verse 10 to 11, the beginning of verse 11. 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. See, every believer within the church has a gift given directly by God and it varies drastically through one another.

And these gifts are for the use within the life of the church. Peter earlier in his letter likened believers to living stones that when they're put together build the church.

The church needs your gifting. Some may have one, some may have many gifts, but everyone has a gift to use. You may be thinking you don't have a gift. Well, here's a short list.

[20 : 32] Singleness, marriedness, age, whether you're young or whether you're older, age plays a huge factor in gifting. Different kinds of evangelism.

It could be just conversations with people. It could be running groups. It could be living a godly life. Music ministry. Teaching in various ways. Bible studies. Sunday school.

Discipling. Greetings. Wealth. Poor. Educated. No education. Arts. Helping. Baking. Time. Gifted in trades. Gifted in administration.

See, we all have these different giftings that make the church a beautiful thing that we can use within the church and then it spills out and people notice. See, this list goes on.

Everyone has something or have experienced life in a way that can bless the church. We are called to be stewards of God's gifts and we must use them. We're called to use them. Within the church, earnest love will find its expression in the use of spiritual gifts.

[21 : 32] Not just self, not for self-advancement or to draw attention to ourselves but for the benefit of others. But you might be thinking, and I can relate to this, but Matt, I'm so gassed.

I'm so tired at the end of the day. I don't have much left to give. A commentator said this very interesting thing. God's rule for our gifts is that we use them with confidence.

That resource, and these resources will be used in faithful stewardship. But our faith needs to be that he'll replenish it because he's a faithful master who cares deeply for us and knows what we're experiencing.

We are called to be a church that prays. We are called to be a church that earnestly loves. We are called to be a church that earnestly shows hospitality, excels in it, and serves unconditionally.

But why? That's the main question. But why? Look with me again at verse 10 and 11. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace.

[22 : 35] Whoever speaks is one who speaks oracles of God. Whoever serves is 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. See, we all know people who do things for their own glory, but we are called to do it for God's glory.

Using our gifts will lead to giving God glory. And this is something we're supposed to do. But if we use our gifts for God's glory, we bring him glory.

Think about that for a minute. Like, really think about it. When we serve each other, when we do these things, in light of living in this time that Christ can return at any moment, when we pray for each other, when we show love for each other, when we show hospitality and use our gifts for his church, we bring him glory.

Earlier in the letter of 1 Peter, he calls believers a part of the royal priesthood and that we are called to do spiritual sacrifices to God.

[23 : 42] These are the spiritual sacrifices that he's referring to. It's things like this, serving one another, serving the community, serving the church. This is such a profound thing because it brings them glory.

When we really think about it, it's profound that we bring glory to God in that way. See, as Daniel continues in the book of Romans, it's already become pretty clear that we cannot do any of this by our own doing.

You get that pretty quick when you read Romans. It's only through the saving work of Christ. No matter how hard we try, without Christ at the center of our lives, we'll never be able to do it.

We'll always do it for different reasons. So this brings us back to the question, why are numbers so bad? Shouldn't Christians be filling the pews everywhere? Why does there seem to be this lethargy over the church?

Why do some think they don't need church? Why do others run from the church? Why do others put other things over attending church? See, it comes down to identity.

[24 : 46] And what do I mean by that? What do I mean by identity? See, identity has many layers. We may say, Jesus is my all. I'm committed to follow Jesus. But I'm also this.

I'm a mom plus Jesus. I'm a father plus Jesus. Professional plus Jesus. A pastor plus Jesus.

Athletic plus Jesus. Again, the list can go on. See, Jesus must be first.

Anything that takes you away from Jesus, it must go. I led a funeral last week. I was asked to speak at a funeral and do the service for it.

And this person didn't know Christ, which is a sad thing. They were cremated and they were put in a niche. And what was interesting is that this man, he picked where he wanted to be, his ashes to be laid.

And it was literally at the feet of a big cross with Jesus on it. Literally, like three meters away. And it was a sad thing because he did not know Jesus.

[25 : 47] He was pretty clear about that. But he wanted to be laid at Jesus' feet. It was very, this very weird dichotomy or it was very ironic. This scene moved me deeply because it was a very sad thing.

See, our hearts are similar though. What is at the center of your heart? Is it Christ crucified? Or is it yourself, your identity? Are you striving to bring God glory or not?

Friends, brothers, sisters in Christ, I include myself in this. How are you living in light of it being in the end times? Is your life dedicated to Christ?

Is it what Peter lists here? Are we doing these things? Because it's so important. And he's writing to a church that is facing persecution. He's writing to a church that's facing suffering.

But he calls them to do this. To live as a church that brings glory to God. And through this, through living like this, through coming together, those who don't know Christ will be drawn to it.

[26 : 53] Because they will see God's glory. They will see God's love through those who show Christ through the ways they live. Friends, let's live like that.

Let's live the way Christ has called us to live. Let's live the way whochtsch