

Living in Light of the End

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Date: 24 April 2022

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Our sermon text is 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 7 through 11. Let me ask you to turn there with me. As usual, the text will be on the screen, but let me encourage you to have the text open in front of you while we consider this passage together. If you want to do that in the Pew Bible, it's page 955. 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 7 through 11.

All right, let me read for us. The Apostle Peter writes this, Let's pray together.

Father, through your Son, Jesus Christ, you commissioned the apostles to teach in your name, and by your Holy Spirit, you inspired them to do the same.

And so we realize, having read Peter's words, we have read your words, Father. Grant us the grace now to receive these words and to live these words. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

So, the end is near. That is how Peter begins this paragraph before us. The end of all things is at hand. Now, maybe, I don't know about you, maybe you don't think a lot about the end of all things.

[2 : 0 6] Maybe for you, that just sounds like something for religious fanatics or sidewalk preachers, you know, the kind who self-publish books with titles like 77 Reasons the World Will End in 1977 or things like that, you know. The end is near.

But maybe for you, maybe for you on the other hand, the idea of the end being at hand is not so easily dismissed. You look around the world and you see ongoing proliferation of atomic weapons. We look around the world, we see ongoing degradation of the environment.

And maybe the end of the world isn't something you can just write off so easily. Or maybe for you, the end is near doesn't bring to mind sort of global crises, but personal crises.

Old age? Or serious illness? The end of all things is at hand. Now, no matter how much you think about such things, I wonder if you've considered that what you really believe, what you really believe about the end of all things has a pretty profound impact on how you live. Every year, it seems like there's another pop song written about how the world's all going to end anyway, so we might as well enjoy whatever life we have left.

You know, whether it's going 2.47 seconds on a bull named Fu Manchu or however that song went. Do you remember that one? You know? We're gonna dance until the world ends.

[3 : 3 9] I don't think people would want to see me dancing until the world ends. That would be kind of embarrassing. But you know, this trope kind of in popular music, it goes all the way back to the first century. Even earlier, let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. If we're all going to be annihilated anyway, if it all comes to nothing, maybe by a nuclear crisis or just the crisis of old age, why not just live to please ourselves and have fun?

But as we find out pretty quickly, such a life doesn't end up being very satisfying. In other words, if we have an utterly empty view of how things end, we will inevitably have an empty view of what it means to live.

And whether we like it or not, we all live with some end in mind. What's yours? And if I can be so bold to ask, how's it working for you?

What Christianity offered to the ancient world and continues to offer to our world is a better ending. And because of that, a better way of living. Because while Christians do care deeply about things like global peace and global warming, our view of the end is not simply annihilation.

[5 : 0 1] Rather, for Christianity, the end is God. Who will bring judgment, justice, and the wonder of a new creation. When Peter says, the end of all things is at hand, he means that in the story of God's redemptive plan, the only chapter left is the return of our creator and king, who will judge evil, defeat death, and make all things new.

Peter's saying, we're living in the last chapter of God's great story. That chapter might be long or short, but it's the last one.

The end is at hand. I like how Karen Jobes puts it in her commentary on 1 Peter. She says, Peter is saying that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, his readers are living in the last stage of God's redemptive plan, and the goal of that plan is being realized.

Earlier in this book, Peter has called this our living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is what the psalmists used to sing about. Like we heard in Psalm 96 earlier in the service, The psalmist says, This past Friday was Earth Day, you know.

So don't be afraid to go plant a tree, Christian, because one day that tree is going to sing for joy at the return of its creator. And when people ask you why you care for the environment, you can just tell them that you're getting the choir ready for the conductor when he comes back.

[7:07] Now, maybe you're not sure about the Christian view of the end of all things. Maybe it seems more than a little implausible. But why don't we take a look at the life, at the sort of life it produces, and then maybe you'll at least see how beautiful it is and consider it for yourself.

And for those of us who are Christians, Peter's showing us here the life that our hope should be producing now. So let's take a look. Peter says, The end of all things is at hand.

Therefore, in other words, here's how you should live in light of this glorious end that we have in Christ. And what Peter says here, we can state very simply, and then we'll spend some time unpacking it.

In essence, Peter says, You're living in the last chapter. So first, verse 7, pray. And second, verses 8 through 11, love. Let's look first at verse 7.

The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. In other words, living in the last chapter of God's great story moves us from distraction and dissipation to divine communion.

[8:18] It moves us from preoccupation and perplexity to prayer. How often do we find ourselves riddled with a hundred distractions these days? Whether it's the kind of constant news feed on our phones or the ping of another text or the mindless scrolling through social media.

And you know, we're constantly distracting and preoccupying ourselves. Why? Why are we so prone to distraction and preoccupation? I think because so often we're looking for something, anything, to just sort of dull the gaping boredom or even nihilism that just yawns under the surface of our lives.

If you think that life ends in nothing, that this beautiful world ends in nothing, then really everything is just a distraction, isn't it?

A number of years ago, Alan de Botton wrote an excellent book called *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*. But at the end, he simply says, okay, so what's the real purpose of work? If the universe just ends in a tidal wave of oblivion, then isn't the most meaningful work just a distraction from the inevitable?

He concludes his book by saying, let death find us as we are building up our matchstick protests against its waves. Of course, that sounds a little heroic at first, doesn't it?

[9:54] But actually, it's deeply and profoundly unsatisfying. Because, friend, life isn't simply a series of distractions until death washes everything away.

Life is a series of pregnant moments ordained by your loving and just creator to be lived in fellowship with him and his purpose of redemption.

Therefore, Peter says, be self-controlled and sober-minded. Don't live a life of endless distraction. Rather, live a life of prayer that is of communion with the God whose story is about to come to its thrilling close.

Because Jesus has risen from the dead and the last chapter is upon us. Now, what does this life of prayer, of communion with God, look like? Well, as we read the pages of Scripture, we see that there are many well-marked paths that God himself has marked for us and which saints for generations have walked.

There's the path of adoration, delighting in the godness of God, praising him and enjoying him. There's the path of confession, unburdening our souls to God, naming and releasing our failures and sins into his merciful love.

[11:20] There's a path of thanksgiving, gratitude for all God's gifts, supremely the gift of God's own son and the gift of the cross. There's a path of lament, expressing our negative emotions to God, sadness, anger, fear, letting him be God in the midst of our loss and trials.

There's the path of petition, asking God for our needs, for ourselves, for others, entrusting our desires and needs to him to provide.

Imagine a life walked in these paths and not the endless distractions of our digital age. Isn't deep down that the kind of life that you want?

With a deep center in the holy God who made you in all things? The God who's coming to judge and to heal? How can you begin to walk these paths of prayer, of communion with God?

Let me suggest maybe a simple practice if you're getting started. Simple practice. For 15 or 20 minutes, find a quiet place and turn off your phone.

[12:34] You know it has an off button, right? Your iPhone. It's that little thing on the side. You can push it, but you got to hold it in because Apple's smart and they don't want you to turn off your phone. You got to hold it in and then your phone turns off.

That's possible actually to turn it off. Then, take a physical Bible because remember, you've turned off your phone. So you take a physical Bible and just read one psalm or one paragraph in the Gospels slowly.

Read the same passage once or twice slowly. This isn't the time to do your annual Bible reading plan. If you do one, you can do that another time in the day. This is time to commune with God. And as you read slowly, listen, ask with an open heart to the Lord.

Where is God in this text inviting you to walk the path of adoration or confession or thanksgiving or petition or perhaps even lament?

What path is the Lord opening up before you and beckoning you to come walk? Maybe you read the story of the disciples struggling at the oars, trying to cross the Sea of Galilee in a storm, and how Jesus comes to them on the water and says, it's I, don't be afraid.

[13:52] And then you realize that you are afraid. You've been pulling at the oars of your life and the water's still choppy and you're afraid.

You don't think you'll make it to the other side. So you pray a prayer that's something like a lament. I don't know where all this anxiety and fear is coming from, but I'm giving it to you, God.

And then you read the passage again and you listen to the sovereign Lord as he says, it's I. Don't be afraid. So you pray a pair of petition. Jesus, fill me with your peace and presence.

And suddenly, it becomes a path of adoration. Lord, you are sovereign. I see you standing on the waves. You are in control. Nothing surprises you.

I know you'll see me safely to the other side. And as you read and as you pray, if you find that you've prayed all the things that God in this 15, 20 minutes is inviting you to pray, then simply be still before him and enjoy his presence.

[15:00] Be self-controlled. And sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. You're living in the last chapter, friends. Don't let distractions rule your life.

Begin communing now with the God who's coming soon. But Peter doesn't stop there. He speaks not just of prayer, but of love.

Look at verse 8. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. You're living in the last chapter, so love one another earnestly.

Why? Because love covers a multitude of sins. Peter's quoting from the book of Proverbs there. In Proverbs chapter 10, verse 12, we read, Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers all wrongs.

So this idea of love covering wrongs, or in Peter's paraphrase, a multitude of sins, is the opposite of stirring up dissension. In other words, love doesn't repay evil for evil.

[16:05] It breaks these cycles of petty retaliation. It breaks the cycle of assuming the worst in someone else. And Peter knew that we would need that.

Peter knew that living life as the church would be hard. Why? Because Christians are sinners. Christian marriage would be hard.

Christian parenting would be hard. It would be delightful, and it would be joyful. And being in the church would be delightful, it would be joyful, but it would at the same time be hard. Why? Because we're all still battling our sinful desires.

What's the antidote? Peter says it's the love that covers a multitude of sins. But where does that come from? It doesn't come from our old nature.

It comes from the new nature that we've received in the gospel. Do you remember earlier in this letter, Peter wrote in chapter 1, verses 22 and 23, he says, Love one another earnestly.

[17 : 08] The same command. Why? Because you've been born again through the living and abiding word of God. And what is this word? Friends, it's a message that the God who made all things took on human nature in the person of Jesus to live the life that we should have lived and to die the death that we deserve to die so that in love he might cover over all our sins.

God did not repay us the wrath and judgment that our sins deserved. Instead, he absorbed that cost into himself on the cross.

Amazing love. How can it be that thou, my God, shalt die for me? And three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead so that all who receive the risen Christ by faith might be given a new heart and a new nature.

We're born again, Peter says, and in this new nature, we're able to turn to others and forgive because we've been forgiven. It covers a multitude of sins.

So this is what love doesn't do. It doesn't pay back in kind. It covers a multitude of sins. But what about what love does do? And in the rest of our text, Peter gives us kind of two pictures of love in action.

[18 : 34] We're living in the last chapter of God's story. Above all, we must love. And here, Peter says, is what love looks like. First, it looks like hospitality. Verse 9, show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Once we were filled with sort of hostility and animosity towards one another, but in light of the hope that we have that's broken in upon us, our hostility is traded for hospitality.

Don't you see, if this life is all that you have, if this life is all that we have, then of course, we're all just scrambling for a scarcity of resources and the scarcity of time being the most poignant of all.

And if that's true, why would I even open my home to another? Why exercise hospitality when it's so costly and time-consuming? But if this chapter of God's story is about to give way to justice, healing, and the new creation, if that's what we're looking forward to, then our homes opened in hospitality become a signpost of the coming kingdom.

Hospitality would have been critical to the life of the church in the first century since most churches in the first century met in believers' homes. Hospitality made church gatherings possible.

[20 : 04] So remember that, small group hosts, the next time your small group gathers in your home. You are practicing one of the most ancient and vital of Christian practices.

As you open your home to fellow believers for the purpose of prayer and Bible study, you stand in a long line of saints who have blessed and supported the people of God all the way back to the time of the apostles.

Be encouraged. But of course, hospitality isn't just for hosting formal gatherings. A local church is meant to be a fabric of relationships where there is welcome and support and care, where we welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us.

You know, in the first century, many Christians were losing their friends and being ostracized by their families because of their allegiance to Christ. So the practice of hospitality didn't just sort of meet those needs of belonging and relationship, but it was a sign that in Christ there's now a new family, a new belonging, a new place to be welcomed and loved.

Of course, you don't need to own a home or own a big apartment to practice hospitality. Hospitality literally just means love of the stranger.

[21 : 26] So the next time you're headed out for lunch or dinner, you can just invite someone from church that you don't know well. Welcome them to come along. That's showing hospitality.

That's the first way to love that Peter mentions, hospitality. The second way we see in verses 10 and 11. Look at that with me. He says, 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, to Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. So if love moves us from hostility to hospitality, Peter's saying it also moves us from selfishness to service. Everyone in the family of God has received a gift, Peter says.

When the Holy Spirit causes us to be born again into this new family, into this new body, the church, He makes sure that we have a vital role to play. In other words, no one is an appendix in the body of Christ, right?

[22 : 35] There are no useless organs in the church. The appendix is that little thing that's supposedly we don't have any use for, right? That's supposed to be funny. You're supposed to laugh at that. Never mind. I'll go back to the drawing board with that illustration.

Okay. What do we do with these gifts that we've been given? Do we hoard them or do we share them? Peter uses this great metaphor of a steward.

You know, a steward in the ancient world was put in charge of a household to make sure that all the resources were distributed properly and everyone got what they needed. But the steward wasn't the owner of the household. They were responsible for what belonged to another.

They were put in this position to care for what belonged for another. Friends, if you are in Christ, you have gifts to share. But these gifts ultimately belong to another, to your generous Lord who gave them to you and you are called to steward them for his sake.

Some of you maybe have particular gifts, as Peter says, in speaking. You can teach, you can instruct, you can counsel, you can offer wisdom or discernment.

[23 : 44] Don't hoard these gifts. The church needs them. Speak as one who speaks the oracles of God, Peter says. That is, do it with the boldness and the humility that comes from realizing whose word it is we're teaching.

because we teach and instruct from God's word, we can do so with boldness because it's God's word, not ours.

But at the same time, we do so with humility because, again, it's not our own. Some of you have particular gifts in serving.

You can organize and administrate love and care, identify needs, design solutions. Do so, Peter says, with the strength that God supplies. Just as our speaking ultimately derives from God's word, so our serving ultimately derives from God's strength.

That's why we're stewards, right? Because it's God's word and God's strength at work through us by God's spirit. Now, of course, the best way to figure out what your gifts are is to actually start serving.

[24 : 59] give something a try. Ask to help lead a Bible study group in small group. Join a ministry team and give it a try. If you don't know where to start, ask an elder or ask a deacon.

We'd love to help you find your particular gifts. We're stewards, Peter says, of God's varied grace. There's a beautiful diversity of gifts in God's body, a varied grace that when each part finds its place as a body, we sort of shine like the splendor of a stained glass window where every piece sort of contributes to the beauty of the whole.

We're not meant to hoard our gifts but to share them. That's why we sort of crafted our membership vows to say simply but profoundly that we're committing to give and receive gifts of love and service.

We're living in God's last chapter. Life's about more than just stockpiling comforts for ourselves. It's about giving and receiving these gifts that God has poured out on us in these last days.

That is, these days between Christ's resurrection and His return. So this is how we're meant to live then. Because the end of all things is at hand.

[26 : 20] We're to move from distraction to communion and from hostility to hospitality and from selfishness to generous service. And when we live like that, who gets the credit?

Who gets the glory? Not us, Peter says, but Jesus. He ends by saying we do all this in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. If it is God's future that changes our lives so dramatically, then surely it is God's name that gets all the credit and all the attention.

And when you think about it, isn't that the last great gift to us of this living hope that we have? Being liberated from having to live for ourselves so that we can live for something greater, something greater and more lasting than we had ever dreamed.

Our own little story is a part of a much grander drama, a much more magnificent tale. Isn't that ultimately what your heart longs for?

[27 : 37] A place in a greater plot line. And here it is. Peter says, the end of all things is at hand. Come step into this story.

Christ is risen, the kingdom is on the move, and the last chapter is speeding to the conclusion. Christ will return in glory to judge and to save and to make all things new.

You can keep living for your... Flooding into history and covers the earth like the waters cover the sea. Join your story to His. Live for someone greater.

live for His glory. And then watch as your distraction becomes communion and as your hostility gives way to hospitality and as your selfishness becomes generous service.

To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, as we sung before considering Your Word, we pray again that You would take our life, take our lives, and let them be consecrated to You.

[28 : 52] Take our moments and our days, take our speaking and our giving, take our hands and our feet, and use them for Your praise. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.