

Title: The End is Coming
Date: November 18, 2018
Subject: How to live as we approach the end times
Scripture: 1 Peter 4:7 - 11

Two pastors standing by the side of the road hold up a sign, "The End is Near! Turn yourself around now before it's too late!" The first driver yells as he accelerates, "Leave us alone you religious nuts!" From around the curve they hear screeching tires and a big splash. "Do you think we should just put up a sign that says 'Bridge Out' instead?"

Apparently, "The End" came mean different things. You've probably seen comic strips with a hermit with a long beard dressed in a dusty robe holding up a sign with the words "The end is coming." There are variations of it. One has a second man who holds a sign that reads, "The end." Another where the guy with the sign looks at his watch as he counts, "10...9...8...7..." Another where the guy with a sign, "the end is coming tomorrow." He explains to a passerby, "At least for me. My mother-in-law is coming."

This morning's text begins with "the end."

READ 1 Peter 4:7 - 11

I. The end is near v. 7

These verses are a welcome retreat from the teaching about suffering and abuse from non-believers. They're linked to the thoughts from the previous verses. God will judge the living and the dead. Those who heap abuse on Christ followers will get what they have coming to them. The end, their end, is coming.

Followers of Jesus Christ can look forward to the end. It means the end of suffering. The end of being made fun of at school or work for following Jesus. The end of pain from cancer, from relationships that break apart. The end of persecution. The end of evil. The end of sin. The end of death.

Since the end is coming, there are some matters that should be prioritized.

II. How to live vv. 7 – 11

A. Prayer v. 7

1. The goal is to be able to pray. The struggle always seems to be the what, how and when and even the why of prayer. I read an article titled *Pray Anyway*. The author's premise is there's no valid reason for not praying. He listed ignorance, depression, boredom, lack of visible need, laziness, immaturity, fatigue, shame, sin and unbelief. "There is no time and there are no conditions in which prayer is not necessary, not helpful, and not the right thing to do" (Joe McKeever). This week's topic in youth group is prayer. One of the main ideas is that the best way to learn to pray is to pray. Maybe use the Lord's prayer as guidance.

There are lots of things concerning the movement toward the end of time that can serve as topics for prayer. To follow the Lord whether we face difficulties or life is smooth sailing. To have strength during times

of suffering (1 Peter 4:12-19). To escape the traps of evil and the devil (1 Peter 5:8). To be faithful. To present the Good News as we give an answer for the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15). For dependence on the Lord (James 4:8). Cast all our cares, anxieties, weights on the Lord (1 Peter 5:7). For the Lord to deliver justice for his children (Luke 18:7, 8). Prayer helps us focus on our relationship with God.

The ability to pray is based upon how we live our lives. The first is a mental aspect.

2. Be clear minded. The mind is to be in a state where it can focus on communicating with our heavenly Father. It involves how we think. RSV “sane.” NASV “sound judgment.” Phillips “calm.” Not scatterbrained. Not insane. Wise, mature. In other words we are to think like Jesus. That’s the plea of 4:1, to have the same attitude, mindset, thinking as Jesus.

How did Jesus think? He viewed himself as a servant (Mark 10:45, Philippians 2). We’re to not think too highly of ourselves (Romans 12:3). Jesus knew and looked forward to eternity. He saw beyond his suffering on the cross to the glory that’d be his when reunited with the Father in heaven. He spoke about this in his high priestly prayer in John 17. He also said in some of his last words that he was going to heaven to prepare a place for his followers and would return to earth to get them so they’d be with him in heaven (John 14:1-4). We are to think about our future in heaven.

3. The second aspect is to be self-controlled. It involves our actions, our morality. Many translations put this as “be sober.” Christ followers aren’t to be “drunk” on the world system opposed to God, materialism, evil human desires, sin or alcohol. Steer clear of the things that start to affect the judgment.

People who engage in these things, who constantly are sinning and repenting, are simply focused on repairing the relationship. They’re wasting time and energy they could be utilizing to serve the Lord.

Jesus is again our example. Even on the cross he was in control He didn’t give in to worry, fear, anxiety, hopelessness or worldly solutions.

Clear mindedness and self-control counter two main problems believers have in their view of the end. Some think that since it hasn’t happened yet, it ain’t gonna happen any time soon. They get into worldly stuff. They become lazy and uncaring. The second issue, at the opposite end of the spectrum, is hyper sensitive focus on the end. Everything is signs of the end. They listen to all the voices pronouncing the end. Some try to determine the exact timing of Christ’s return. Others may be frightened about what the end will bring.

In the early days of our nation a state legislature was attempting to frame its constitution. For some reason, the people of the city thought the Lord was returning that day. They left work and school to wait in the streets. Someone in the legislature suggested that in lieu of what was about to happen the legislature should adjourn. Another delegate rose to speak. “I do not know if the Lord is coming now or not, but I do know that when he comes that I would like to be found busy with the matters that he has charged me.”

James Moffatt renders the attitudes of clear mindedness and self-control this way: “Steady then. Keep cool.” I think he was British. Sounds British. “Keep calm and carry on and all that rot.”

We come to the most important issue – love. It’s the virtue above all other virtues as it summarizes them. It rises above all commands and priorities as it again summarizes them. Jesus stressed its importance when he said people will know that we’re his followers if we love one another the way he loved us (John 13:34, 35). The apostle John wrote extensively about love in his letters including this thought, “Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him” (1 John 4:16). Paul wrote that love is the greatest of all surpassing faith, hope, sacrifice (1 Corinthians 13). Peter in his second book treats love as the pinnacle virtue to be added to our lives (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Love isn’t only an emotion. Feelings are part, a small part, of the equation. Love is an action. It’s a choice. Previously, Peter wrote that believers are to love each other deeply, from the heart (1:22). Now he repeats the command to love deeply. The wording pictures an athlete who is stretching and straining to achieve his goal. In his day it would be a runner who lunges for the finishes line. We may think of a football player who lays out, stretching to get into the end zone. He contorts his body, pushing with all he has to get to the pylon. He’s intense in his pursuit. Love is to be intense as it stretches toward the goal.

Love accomplishes a lot. It’s the glue that holds people groups together – families, sports teams and followers of Christ. Part of this is accomplished by since it covers a multitude of sins. In the original language: love provides the covering for our numerous sins, errors, wrongdoings because each of us has so many that others are aware of and if they only knew the totality of our sins, the ones that aren’t so visible, they would be astonished and horror-struck but whatever the case, love covers a multitude of sins. Not really, but that’s what it means. Covering is seen through forgiveness.

One day Peter asked the Lord how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him (Matthew 18). The fisherman thought he was quite clever as he suggested a number symbolizing perfection. “Shall I forgive seven times?” Jesus shook the future apostle when he told him the required number was seventy times seven, in other words, to infinity and beyond. Then the Lord told a story of a servant who owed a king millions of dollars. He couldn’t pay and the king threatened to put him in jail till he could. The man begged for mercy. The king extended it and canceled the debt. The forgiven man was met by someone who owed him a few dollars. He demanded his money. The debtor couldn’t pay and asked for patience to get the money. No dice. The forgiven servant had the man thrown in prison till he could pay the debt. The other servants told the king what happened. The king angrily threw the wicked man in prison. He should have had mercy as he was shown mercy. Jesus concluded by saying that his followers need to forgive from the heart.

The love chapter of 1 Corinthians elaborates on what true love is. One of the qualities is it “keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Corinthians 13:5). This doesn’t mean we cover up or condone sin and wrongdoing. It does mean we’re to forgive and not keep an Excel spreadsheet with names, times and dates of the wrongs. To rip off Elizabeth Barret Browning a little, “How have you sinned against me? Let me count the ways. That’s the 7th time you besmirched my character. Add that to the 12 times you spread a rumor and the 23 times you lied to me and the 71 that you...” You get the idea. We are to forgive the genuinely repentant. That doesn’t

mean up to that time we get to hang on to the wrong. We're to have the attitude of pre-forgiveness. We've forgiven in our heart but still waiting for the person to be repentant so that the relationship might be restored. In the mean time we don't repeat the matter to someone else, as in "I have a prayer request...."

One version says that love "hides" sins. It overlooks other people's faults. It may even refuse to see them. We choose not to expose other's wrongs.

The phrase "cover a multitude of sins" is used in the last verse of the book of James. There it refers to a Christ follower who turns a sinning fellow believer from his sin. The person has wandered from the truth and needs to be brought back to a close relationship with the Lord.

Here's a summary statement of love's impact: "Where love abounds in a fellowship of Christians, many small offences, and even some large ones, are readily overlooked and forgotten. 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" (Wayne Grudem, *Vol. 17: 1 Peter: An introduction and commentary. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*).

C. Be hospitable v. 9

Hospitality is one of the outworkings of love. There was a dire need for it in the first century. It took time for pastors and leaders of local congregations to be identified and trained. New believers knew they needed Jesus to save them from their sins but didn't have tons of discipleship material. They didn't even have the books of the New Testament in written form. Congregations depended on traveling evangelists, missionaries and teachers to tell the stories and teachings of Jesus and bring the letters from the apostles. These men traveled light. There weren't Holiday Inns or McDonalds. Some of you are thinking that's a good thing in the case of Mickey D's. So substitute Taco Bell. Maybe that's worse. The point is they needed a place to stay and something to eat. Christians were to supply those things to the people who taught them.

Hospitality was also extended to fellow believers who traveled through their area and to other believers in their congregations. In many places they were in the minority and were despised by Jews and Gentiles alike. They depended on each other for survival.

Today traveling Christians can find comfortable accommodations in hotels and satisfy their cravings from a vast variety of eating establishments. The need isn't so much about being hospitable to traveling teachers and believers though it still happens. Some of you open your home to the international workers who are with us for our Missions Festivals. I always hear that it's a blessing to be able to do so. Jean and I feel the same way about the times we've done it and have tried not to hog the missionary so others can be blessed.

There are other ways to be hospitable. We can open our homes to each other. I know offers were extended during the summer when we had the outbreak of mini-tornadoes and strong winds that knocked out power. Some have done it for hosting Bible Studies and other events. It happens by having people over to share food. It's seen through opening our hearts to one another. Actually, it begins there. It means that we don't close ourselves off. It's shown to those we know and those who are new.

There's a stipulation as to how hospitably is to be shown – without grumbling. We aren't to be like one of Bugs Bunny's archenemies, Yosemite Sam. When something happens he doesn't like, he mutters, "Racka-fracka-bracken." Not a good thing if that's our underlying thought and attitude. "Why do I have to ...?" Picture someone helping out at one of the many food kitchens this time of year. They plop on mashed potatoes and under their breath they're muttering, "Here's some food you filthy animal."

We're to be hospitable without grumbling, complaining, grudging, murmuring, "without secretly wishing you hadn't got to be!" (Phillips). The Living Bible states it positively, "Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay."

D. Serve others vv. 10, 11

The underlying thrust is service to others. We aren't to be self-focused or self-indulgent. A student complained to his professor about the lack of progress he was making in his studies. He hoped the professor would help him find a tutor. The teacher responded, "Get a tutor? What you need is a pupil!" The professor hit the nail on the head. It's the idea that we grow more when we're involved in giving out.

We serve others through the use of our spiritual gifts. Definition: Spiritual gifts are Spirit given abilities which empower Christ followers to perform spiritual ministry. Spiritual gifts are not our own creation. They're not a natural talent though God may choose to use our natural abilities.

Since they've graciously been given by the Lord, this should engender a thankful humility. We're grateful to God for what he gives. We direct attention to God as the one who is to get the glory, credit, honor and praise. Glorifying God means to show off him to others, to make him look as good as he is. The goal of photographers is to get people to focus on the subject of the photo and not the one who took the photo. They want people to see the majestic mountains, the beauty of the flowers, the family portrait.

Like the photographer, Christ followers are to direct the focus beyond themselves to someone else. It's not about how we can have our ego stroked or any other motive.

Practically that means when people compliment us we don't fish for more compliments through false modesty. Just say, "Thank you, isn't God good, what did he teach you?"

We're to be faithful as stewards of the gifts. We administer the gifts the Lord has given us. We re-gift God's gifts to us by sharing them with others. They're to be used. If they aren't used we aren't being faithful. Those with speaking gifts are charged with a weighty responsibility. Utilize them with the understanding that are dealing with God's Word. Those with serving gifts are to do it with the strength the Lord provides. Not try to do by self. Ask the Lord to help.

Jesus prayed in private and public. He served others through his gifts. He showed the depths of his love in that while we were still sinners, he died for us (Romans 5:8). He extended hospitality by inviting us into his family (John 1:12). Be like Jesus. Don't submit.