

Living in Light of the End, part 2

1 Peter 4:7-11

(preached Pine Grove 1/19/20 Sun PM)

Introduction

Next Thursday at 10 am, scientists will gather in Chicago and hold a news conference to reveal the exact time on the doomsday clock.

Currently, the clock sits at 11:58 pm, two minutes short of doomsday, which is a reference to the end of the world.

Here is a picture of that clock when the time was revealed last year.

The clock has been around since 1947, having been created as a reaction to the use of the creation and deployment of the atomic bomb.

And for 60 years, the clock was a reflection of the dangers of nuclear war bringing an end to the world.

In 2007, climate change was added as a factor of the time left on the clock.

So now the time on the clock has been sped up.

In fact, 11:58 is the the closest time to midnight that has ever been displayed on the clock.

Some think that the time this year may be inched to 11:59.

Now the arrogance of such a clock is alarming.

No one knows when the world will end, but furthermore, man will not be the cause of the end of the world.

God will.

He will rapture the church, and begin to undo the world in a 7 year tribulation period.

Will there be nuclear war as part of the tribulation?

Possibly.

Since those 7 years will include wars and rumors of wars.

Will environmental disasters be part of the tribulation?

Absolutely.

The green grass will be burned up.

Vegetation will die.

But neither nuclear war nor climate changes will bring about the end of the world.

God will.

It is his world to bring to an end, and he will do it for his glory in his way and in his time.

But then he will remake it for his people, and it will be a place without war and without environmental change for all eternity.

And the timing of that end is simply a mystery to us.

There is no such thing as a doomsday clock because man has absolutely zero idea of when the end to time will come.

And he will also have zero say in when it will come.

All we know about the end is that it is always near.

In fact, that is exactly what 1 Peter 4:7 says..

7 The end of all things [f]is near;

And if Peter wrote that in 64 AD, it certainly carries far more weight in 2020 AD.

Now why was writing about the end of time only a few decades after the church began?

For starters, the start of the church got the clock ticking toward the end.

You see, the church's rapture will be the event that begins the end.

As the church is snatched away to heaven, the Lord begins to unleash his wrath on an unbelieving world that eventually climaxes in the 2nd coming of Christ to end the current system of evil in the world.

And he will then take a seat as the sole source of government in the world for 1000 years.

Which will give way to a new heavens and earth for all eternity.

So when Peter writes that the end is near, it has to be true since the church is a necessary part of God's plans to bring about the end.

Now when Peter wrote the end is near, he had no idea of when that would be.

But it is fair to say that he expected it in his lifetime as did Paul and all the early church.

But knowing that end was near was not a reason to just sit and wait for Christ.

It was a reason to live a life that would be pleasing to Him should he return at any time.

Which is why Peter follows up the truth that the end is near by saying that believers should be of sound judgment and sober spirit.

Look back at verse 7..

7 The end of all things [f]is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of [g]prayer.

In other words, the fact that Christ could rapture the church at any moment was reason for seriousness in all we do.

It is not that we can't enjoy the blessings of life in this world.

It is not that we can't laugh and eat and fellowship, it is simply a call to live every moment knowing that you could see Jesus in the twinkling of an eye.

Now the question is why would the readers of this letter not be of sound judgment and a sober spirit?

Well for starters, they were felling the heat of persecution.

And the trials of life often cloud our judgment or worse yet cause us to medicate our problems.

But the Lord was calling those reading Peter's letter to clear thinking and sobriety even in the midst of trouble.

And why were they called to that?

So that they could pray properly and we talked about how prayer requires our seriousness last week.

But on top of that, Christians felling the heat of persecution are not exempt from loving others.

Look at verse 8...

8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

Though Peter's original audience was pressed on all sides, they were called to love because love covers a multitude of sins.

And then we finished last week talking about hospitality which is kindness shown to others that are strangers to you.

Verse 9..

9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

1st century culture lacked hotels and restaurants and automobiles.

Travel was likely by foot and travelers had to rely on the hospitality of others for food and shelter.

And Christians should lead the way in offering that welcome to others since God has opened heaven and welcomed us in.

So the sum of verses 7-9 is the live seriously and love seriously in light of Christ's return, but tonight we are also going to be called to serve seriously in verses 10 and 11..

Let me read verses 10-11 to us once again...

10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so [h]as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving [i]by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Let's begin back in verse 10..

Since the Lord could return at any moment, let's make sure we are serving Him when he does.

And the first note to make about service is this..

IV. Service Requires Our Participation (10)

In verse 10, Peter starts out with a simple statement.

10 As each one has received a special gift,

Now, let's stop right there and take a minute to understand this statement.

And before we begin to understand this statement, I want you to understand that there is ton of confusion over spiritual gifts.

There have been denominational split over a person's view of the spiritual gifts.

There has been false teaching because of erroneous views of the spiritual gifts.

Long story short, not having a correct view of what the Bible says about the spiritual gifts has caused and can cause much harm in the church and the world.

So, let's set a proper view of the spiritual gifts.

This will be brief but important, and the first truth about spiritual gifts is that each believer is blessed with them.

Peter writes in verse 10 that each one has received a special gift.

Now, next thing to understand is that no 2 believers are alike in the gifting they have.

Here is a passage in the book of Romans on spiritual gifts..

Look at verse 4..

4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly:

According to this passage, each believer is gifts in a special way according to the grace given to them.

Now what does that mean?

Well, for starters we are all recipients of God's grace as believers.

In that sense we all received the same amount of grace.

But there are also various amounts of grace given to us as we use our spiritual gifts.

And the simple truth of spiritual gifts is this.

No two Christians are gifted the same way with the exact mixture of gifts in their life.

I have seen this spiritual gift tests that people take.

I have taken them myself, but the notion of finding your one spiritual gift is impossible.

It would be like trying to find that one snowflake in a pile of snow.

The idea is that God has given you a mixture of gifts unique to you and unique to what the church needs from you.

Now Paul goes on to list some spiritual gifts in the remaining verses..

if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

And there is an additional list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 that repeats some of these but adds more.

But understand that these lists contain the broad categories of spiritual gifts but each combination and quantity of the gifts is unique to the believer.

If you asked me what my special gift is, I couldn't identify the exact gift I have.

It would certainly teaching and exhortation but I hope there is some mercy and encouragement slipped in there as well..

Ultimately, my gifting is what the Lord deemed best for me and my service to the body of Christ.

Which leads to another important truth about spiritual gifts.

They are just that.

They are gifts given to you by God.

You can seek them out.

You can't give your back and ask for others.

God has given you what you need to accomplish the purpose he has for you in the church.

So first of all, every believer is gifted uniquely at salvation with abilities and attitudes that the Lord uses to bless and build his church.

Second of all, the gifting that believers possess is accompanied with a grace that enables them to use their gifts.

Third, the gifting is a result of God's sovereign choice to accomplish His will and purposes in the church and in the world.

Now, let's go back in 1 Peter 4..

10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Peter's point is simple, since you have been gifted by God, use that gift to serve others.

And this is where you need to understand that there are no levels in spiritual gifts.

In other words, every gift and combination of gifts serves a purpose in the church.

There is no hierarchy of gifts where some believers are more important because of their gifting and others are less important.

Every grain of sand is necessary for the beach and every unique snowflake makes the pile of snow.

The same is true in the church.

The church is what the church is because people use their gifts in service to the church.

The greek word for steward is oikonomos, and it means who who care for his house.

As God has given you unique capacities to serve the church, you have a responsibility to care for how those gifts are used.

Can you imagine the uproar in our country if the government collected our taxes each week but never used them to serve the nation?

There would be riots and protests and war from the citizens.

Yet, there are many believers who have collected the gifts that God has given them at salvation and never used them for the benefit of the church and the glory of God.

As the outline point says, service requires participation.

So church, each of you are gifted uniquely by God if you saved.

And you are uniquely commanded to use those gifts to serve his church as a reflection of God's grace in our lives.

Let me make a note here.

Natural talents and abilities aren't necessarily related to spiritual giftedness.

And the reason that your spiritual gifts may be different from your talents is reflect the grace of God.

How can God takes someone who prefers to be quiet and make him onto someone who speaks God's truth?

How can God take the introvert who struggles with personal interaction and make her into someone who serves and encourages others?

The simple answer is that God is gracious and powerful to change the leopard's spots and melt the heart of stone.

And when we employ our gifts that he has given us, we often reflect the manifold grace that we have received in the gospel.

So employ your gifts to bless the church and reflect the incredible grace of God.

Your gifts are meant to be used, so be responsible to use them.

But as you exercise and use these gifts, remember your dependence..

V. Service Requires Our Dependence (11a)

Look at the first part of verse 11...

11 Whoever speaks, is to do so [h]as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving [i]by the strength which God supplies;

If you examine the broad categories of the spiritual gifts, they can neatly divided into two categories that you see right here in verse 11.

There are speaking gifts, like preaching, teaching, giving a word of wisdom and knowledge.

And then there are serving gifts like administration, prayer, offering help..

So what Peter does is connect each of those big categories to the Lord here.

In terms of the speaking gifts, the point is simple.

When you employ a gift of speaking, do not depend upon your own words.

Instead depend upon the utterances of God, and what is that?

It is simply the words of God.

The Greek word for utterance is *logion*, which is related to *logos*, meaning word.

In the beginning was the Word, the *logos*.

And so to exercise a speaking gift is to rely upon the word of God.

So many pastors stand in pulpits and rely upon their own ingenuity, their own cleverness, their own ideas and charisma.

When preaching is nothing more than planting your feet, opening your mouth, and depending upon the Word of God to do its work in the lives of the people who are hearing it.

The same could be said of so many churches that direct people to psychologists and therapists who rely upon the wisdom of the world and not the word of God.

If you have been gifted as a counselor, you don't need to depend upon science and secular wisdom, you speak counsel and encouragement that is dependent upon the word of God.

He who speaks in the pulpit or in the Sunday School class or behind the counselor's desk, let him depend upon and speak the utterances of God in the Scriptures.

Listen to what Charles Spurgeon said about this passage..

“Reckon that every sermon is a wasted sermon which is not Christ's Word. Believe that all theology is rotten rubbish which is not the Word of the Lord. Do not be satisfied with going to a place of worship and hearing an eloquent discourse, unless the sum and substance of it is the Word of the Lord. My brothers and sisters, whether you teach children or their parents, do not think you have done any good unless you have taught the Word of the Lord.”

If you are gifted in way that you speak for the Lord, make sure you speak with His words.

The same is true for the one who serves..

Peter writes...

***whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving
[i]by the strength which God supplies;***

There are many people who do many things to serve the church.

But there are also many people who stop serving the church after a short while.

You see these people.

They show up and are all excited to do something for the Lord, but eventually their service gets less and less frequent before they stop serving all together.

Now, what is the cause of that?

Most of the time, it is service that comes from their own strength.

So when they are tired, they don't come.

When they had a long day, they don't show.

Look if I only served when I felt like serving, I would probably be here 50% of the time.

That is why the strength to serve must come from outside of you.

Your strength must come from the source of all strength and energy.

It must come from the limitless supply that God alone possesses.

So if you have been gifted to serve, make sure to look to the Lord for the strength to do it.

And how do you do that?

You do it not for the applause of man.

You do it not for the pats on the back or the compliments from others.

You do it because you recognize that God has gifted you to do it, and you do it as an act of thanksgiving and worship of Him.

Would you teach if only one person showed up for your lesson?

Would you cook and clean if only one person showed up to eat?

You should because your teaching and serving is not based upon the who receives it, it is based upon the One who has given you the gift to use.

So speak and serve knowing with a dependence upon the Lord.

And then a final note..

VI. Worship Requires Our Humility (11b)

Listen to the second half of verse 11...

so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

What you have in verses 7-11 are a series of commands.

Be serious so that you can pray.

Be stretch in your love for others.

Be hospitable to one another.

Use your gifts in the church.

Rely upon the Word as you speak.

Rely upon the Lord for your strength.

And the end result of all that is simple..

So that God is glorified.

IF you remember, the struggle of the church in Peter's day is government persecution.

Nero has it out for believers.

So God inspired Peter to write them a letter on how to suffer well.

And the problem with suffering and trials is that they turn our eyes and minds inward.

We ask questions like..

Why me Lord?

We ask questions like..

When will it end Lord?

We ask questions like..

What have I done Lord?

But what the Lord wants to teach sufferings believers both then and now is that suffering is eased when we get our eyes up and off ourselves.

Suffering is eased when we think of eternal things like salvation and not temporary things like our troubles.

And here in verses 7-11, the point is simple.

Stop sulking and pouting over problems and sober up.

There are bigger issues in life than your temporary circumstances.

For one, the Lord's return is near.

So be clear thinking.

Be filled with love.

Be ready to serve.

And be doing these things not for your own pride.

Do them from a heart of humility and worship, realizing that this world is not about your comfort, it about how well you bring glory to the Lord with your life, whether you are suffering or not.

Conclusion

Let me wrap up this section by saying this..

Because Christ's return is near and imminent, we don't have time to waste.

So get busy being serious about your faith and prayer life.

Get busy loving others as you should with forgiveness and hospitality.

And get busy using your God-given gifts to serve the Lord and his church.

I will end by taking us to Matthew 25:14.

14 "For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. 15 To one he gave five [a]talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. 16 Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. 17 In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. 18 But he who received the one

talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his [b]master's money.

*19 "Now after a long time the master of those slaves *came and *settled accounts with them.*

20 The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your [c]master.'

22 "Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.'

23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

24 "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'

26 "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed.

27 Then you ought to have put my money [d]in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. 28 Therefore take away

the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.'

29 "For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 30 Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Let me just say this.

The return of the master is near.

Make sure you haven't taken his gifting and buried it in a hole.

If so, dig it up and get to work while there is still time.

Let us pray.