

## Living in the Last Days

- 1 Peter 4:7-11
- “The end of all things is at hand.” That’s how Peter starts this section of his letter. It was believed by everyone then, including Peter, that Jesus was coming back in that generation. James, the brother of Jesus wrote in his letter, “The judge is standing at the door.” Paul wrote, “For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night...But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.” (1 Thess. 1:2, 4) Peter and James and Paul believed Jesus would return soon, and it has been believed by everyone since then. Every generation of followers of Jesus believe he is coming in their lifetime. Every generation of believers, at least in my lifetime, cannot imagine that the world could get any worse. Jesus said himself, “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Luke 12:40) How are we then to live? Peter writes in his second letter, speaking about the destruction of the earth by fire, “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...?” (2 Peter 3:11-12). And that’s the question he begins to answer in his first letter. How would you and I live if we knew it was our last year? Would we stop everything and go preach on the streets? Would we double-down on work and pile up as much money as we could? Would we just lock our doors and binge on food, drink, and Netflix? I think our answer is found in Jesus’ question to his disciples when he said, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith (faithfulness) on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). That’s what we are to do. Be faithful. What does that look like? Peter gives us four things to do and to consider since the end of all things is at hand. Let’s look at these four in turn.
- **Be self-controlled and sober-minded. (verse 7)**
- Self-control and sober-mindedness affect our prayers, and prayer affects our readiness to go through what is coming. Whether Jesus comes back in our lifetime or not, we have gone through, are going through, and will go through trials. Some trials are life changing, some are just minor irritants, but man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward, as Job said. Two things are certain in this life. Trials and Jesus’ presence with us in those trials. **And**, he is coming back! Jesus said to his disciples, “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:34-36) That doesn’t mean we don’t sleep but that we live self-controlled and sober-minded lives, by his grace!
- **Keep loving one another. (verse 8)**
- Above all, Peter says, love one another. The greatest thing we can do as we await Jesus’ return is love one another the way Christ loves us. The adverb he uses is “earnestly” and it means “stretched out, continual, intense, and enduring.” When Peter was in prison and James had already been beheaded, the church prayed “earnestly” for Peter. They were stretched out in prayer for their beloved apostle and friend. I believe it is God’s love that stretches our love to its limits for one another. John wrote, “We love because he first loved us.”
- What does love do? It covers. It covers a multitude of sins. A tree that is wounded produces new wood to grow around the wound. This isolates and protects the wound from further exposure and damage. That’s what God does for us, and even more, with his love through grace. David wrote in Psalm 32, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” And it is what we do for one another. We love them to health. We don’t love well if we delight in finding and exposing sins and faults. We love, instead.
- DL Moody used to share this story years ago: “Show me a church where there is love, he said, and I will show you a church that is a power in the community. In Chicago a few years ago a little boy

attended a church I know of. When his parents moved to another part of the city the little fellow still attended the same church, although it meant a long, tiresome walk each way. A friend asked him why he went so far? There are plenty of others just as good nearer his home. 'They may be as good for others, but not for me,' he said. 'Why not?' his friend asked. 'Because they love a fellow over there,' he replied." Moody continued, "If only we could make the world believe that we loved them there would be fewer empty churches, and a smaller proportion of our population who never darken a church door. Let love replace duty in our church relationships, and the world will soon be evangelized." Second, we love one another! Third, we...

- **Show hospitality without grumbling (verse 9)**
- Hospitality flows from love that is stretched, but we are called to it without the added grumbling. Do this, Peter says, without that. We can show hospitality in our homes, and that's what naturally comes to mind. And our homes can be great embassies where we as ambassadors for Christ can break bread with those who are strangers to the Christian faith. Walls come down and hearts open up as we share a meal either with friends or strangers. But Peter is mainly addressing the believers, here. Hospitality in the church is a mindset described in Romans 15:7, a verse we spent some time on this summer: "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." Show hospitality on Sundays when we gather for worship, and on Wednesdays as we gather for discussion and prayer, and throughout the week as we are able, in our homes, at a restaurant, at a walking track, wherever you can gather to build relationships. I had a student in this semester, first day of class, who when I asked the class what people's greatest fear was, said, "to be forgotten." I want to get to know him and find out why he said that. We are to go out of your way to make people feel seen and heard and cared for. Fourth, we...
- **Serve one another (verses 10-11)**
- The last thing Peter says we can do in the last days is serve one another. Seems that would flow out of loving one another earnestly, but Peter has a specific way in mind with which we love and serve the body. With our spiritual gifts. This is so important that Peter spends two verses on it. We have talked about these verses before but it bears repeating. Paul said it like this in 1 Corinthians 12: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed." Paul had a lot to say about spiritual gifts, and Peter considered them important as well, and especially as we see the darkness growing and the day approaching.
- First, remember that Peter was writing to believers, to elect exiles. How many of them, according to Peter, had a spiritual gift, a "charisma," a gift of grace, undeserved but powerful in its use for the church? How many believers get such a gift? Every single one. "As each has received a gift." Are they talents you can learn? No. They are gifts you are called to use and develop. Paul says, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit." (These gifts are spiritual, not natural). "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." The Spirit of Christ, who dwells in you, came bringing gifts, with his great power!
- Second, notice how we get these gifts. "As each has *received* a gift." We didn't go shopping at the Holy Spirit Store in heaven and pick out *just* the one we wanted! We *received* one, and Paul adds, "(The Spirit) apportions to each one individually, as he wills." As the Spirit wills. He picked out just the right one for each of us!
- Third, notice that spiritual gifts are given to each of us to *use*. For what purpose? We use our spiritual gifts to "serve one another." Not to establish our identity. Not to build a name for ourselves. Not to promote our 'brand.' But to serve. The word there is the verb form of the word that means deacon. In its narrowest form, it means to serve tables, as the first deacons were asked to do in Acts 6, so the Greek widows would not be overlooked. But in a broader sense it means to do anyone a service, to care for others' needs.

- Fourth, notice that this is a stewardship issue. Peter calls us to be “good stewards of God’s varied grace.” The word for steward means “house manager,” someone who manages another’s house for the good of the owner. We steward a spiritual gift that belongs to God but was given to us for the common good of the body, for the people who dwell in his house. How do we know what our gift is? I believe gifts are discovered as we serve others. You will find great joy when you use your spiritual gift and those you serve will be greatly blessed as well when you use it!
- Fifth, notice that Peter divides the spiritual gifts into two groups: speaking and serving. Those who proclaim God’s truth in preaching or teaching or discipling or exhorting are reminded that we need God’s grace. We do not preach ourselves but Christ crucified. We do not speak in our own strength but only by the ability that God supplies. Paul said, “Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.” (2 Cor. 2:16-17) I like what Alistair Begg says, here: “When God’s Word is truly preached, God’s voice is clearly heard.”
- What about those who serve? They are just as important and necessary to the health and flourishing of the church. These are not “second tier” gifts, but essential to the life of the body. And Clowney writes, “Peter’s exhortation is no less needed for service than for teaching. Christians may be more tempted to undertake acts of service in their own strength.” If God is to be glorified, then service is to be done in his name and “by the strength that God supplies.”
- What is the end result of all of these “last days labors,” sober-minded prayer, love, hospitality, serving and speaking as God’s people? Peter tells us at the end of verse 11: We walk in these “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.” That is why we are here. That is the purpose of the church and the end of all things. Amen!
- Prayer
- Greet One Another