

The End of All Things

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Preacher: Chris Trousdale

[0 : 0 0] I want you to turn in your copy of the Scriptures to 1 Peter chapter 4. 1 Peter chapter 4. We have been marching through 1 Peter and only have a few more weeks left in this precious! letter that Peter has given to the church.

And so we're going to begin this morning in verse 7 and only read down to verse 11. So 1 Peter chapter 4 verses 7 through 11 and I want to ask you guys to stand with me as we read together.

The apostle writes, Take this we pray and apply it to our hearts in Christ's name. Amen.

You guys be seated. The apostle Peter has been throughout this letter preparing his original readers who lived in that region of Asia Minor, what we call Turkey today, but also preparing us 2,000 years later to live in this fallen world in which we find ourselves as followers of Christ.

He's been preparing us for that. And preparation is really everything when you're in the midst of a journey or when you're in the midst of a task. Everything boils down to how prepared for you for the task at hand or for the journey that lies before you.

[2 : 0 2] Are you ready for it? We went to Moody Gardens down in Galveston yesterday. We were going to go last week. It didn't happen. So we went yesterday to take the kids down there. And you can imagine with three little boys and a little baby, it can be a little bit challenging getting ready to go.

So we got on the road eventually. We were headed down there. And our main objective was to spend time in the water park since the water park is going to close pretty soon for the year. We wanted to spend some time in the water park.

And so I needed certain things. I felt like I wanted certain things. Let's say I wanted certain things at the water park. I wanted my contact lenses so I could see the kids as they were doing things. I wanted to have my flip-flops to wear because when you go in the restroom there, you can slide your flip-flops on.

It's gross in there. And all these sorts of things. I wanted a new bathing suit because I don't like mine. I didn't have any of those things when we got there. I didn't have my contacts. I didn't have my flip-flops. So I was blurry with dirty feet and in an old ugly bathing suit all day because I'm just not very good sometimes at preparing in advance for those kinds of little trips.

The trip was fine. Everything was okay. We had a great time. But there were some things that would have been better. I could have seen the kids coming down the slide had I had my contacts with me. But I just didn't have them. And that idea of being prepared, whether it's for something as small and silly as a trip or something as serious, as important as how you live life as a follower of Christ in a sinful, fallen world, we must be prepared.

[3 : 3 3] And Peter has been preparing us. In fact, he began this whole letter by calling us exiles to remind us that this place is not our home.

If you don't know your home, if you don't know where you belong as a follower of Christ, if you're not clear on the truth that this place, this world is not really our home, then you're going to be all out of sorts as you try to walk through it.

And you're going to be doing all sorts of things and trying all sorts of things and making goals in your life that do not match who you are, who you're called to be, and what God wants you to do. And so Peter begins by saying, listen, you're exiles, which is a way of saying you're pilgrims, you're strangers.

In fact, he calls us strangers and aliens in chapter 2. If he didn't get the point across in the first verse of the letter, midway through the letter, he's going to make sure you understand you are strangers and aliens.

And then, of course, we saw last week how he describes us as those who are in the Spirit, living in the Spirit, and yet we are also in the flesh.

[4 : 38] And I said to you that what that means is that we have been born again, we have a heavenly home, we are in the Spirit in that sense, and yet we are still in the flesh in the sense that we still live in this sinful, fallen world.

So Peter wants us to be aware of that. He wants us to know so that we are prepared. And he talks about preparation throughout this letter. He tells us to gird our minds for action.

He tells us that we need to have our thoughts steadily fixed upon Christ. We saw that last week where we are supposed to have our minds retrained.

We are to have a new kind of attitude, a new thought process that we said was Christ-centered, that was terminated upon the cross, that sees that Christ finished and dealt with sin there at the cross, we are to have a mindset that understands that and knows that and sees the world and our own lives in light of that truth.

And all of that is a part of what it means to be prepared. And Peter is going to continue here through the middle of chapter 4 to try and practically prepare us for life in this world.

[5 : 48] He says it in a different way though. I want you to take a look at what he says in verse 7. He just tells us straightforwardly, Now I think that's another way for Peter to tell us, you're strangers, you're foreigners, you don't belong to this place.

But exactly what does he mean, precisely what does he mean when he tells us the end of all things has drawn near or is near quite literally? What does he mean by that?

Because we're living nearly 2,000 years after the day that Peter wrote these words. So how are we supposed to understand this? How are we to take these words? There are of course some who would say, Well, Peter and Paul and even Jesus himself really believe that the end of the world was going to happen within a few years of their own lives and they really believe that the end was there and was upon them and in fact history shows that they were mistaken and they were wrong in which case Jesus is not who he claimed to be because he was a false prophet.

The apostles were not what they claimed to be and did not speak the very words of God to God's people. And so you can take that view and you can say, Well, they thought that the end of the world was about to happen and they were mistaken and they were wrong.

But if you say that, you don't pay close attention to their words and you certainly aren't paying attention to the context in which Peter himself was writing. In fact, Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 24 in the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke as well, Jesus tells us in fact that though the kingdom of God, Jesus says, the kingdom of God has drawn near, something he says over and over, he says in Matthew chapter 24 though, that there are certain things that must take place before the end has come.

[7 : 37] And one of the things that Jesus speaks about specifically there is the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which was not to happen until the year 70 A.D. And Jesus even said it's going to happen within a generation.

That is, within approximately 40 years of when he was saying that. Around 30 A.D. he says that. Around 40 years later in 70 A.D. the temple is destroyed. And so Jesus' prediction was precisely on, which means that when Jesus said during his own lifetime, the kingdom of God is near, it's drawn near, he did not mean the end of the world is about to happen.

And neither do I think that Peter meant that precisely. Peter, in fact, wrote this letter a few years before the temple was destroyed. And Peter was there the day that Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple.

And so you have to read this in light of that. You have to read this and say, okay, Peter says the end of all things is very near or it's at hand, it's drawn near, and yet Peter is aware, he's well aware of the fact that Jesus has said something else must happen before the end comes.

And one of the things that must happen is the destruction of the temple. And that has not happened. Peter knows that has not happened. So Peter cannot mean that the end is any moment right now upon us.

[8 : 57] That's not what Peter means, I don't think. I think that what Peter means is that we are now living in the last major epic of human history.

The end of all things has drawn near means that things are being put in place. There's not another major epic of human history.

We have the era before Christ came and now we have the church age. And there's not another major epic between the church age and when Christ comes for his people.

He does not mean it's going to come today. Peter's not setting dates. He's not one of those guys who says, So it's going to happen on May 5th at 2.20 p.m. in the year so and so. It's not what Peter's doing at all.

What Peter is saying is, you are living in the very last age of human history. Which is another way of him saying to us, you are exiles.

[9 : 56] You are strangers. You are aliens. Don't forget. The world lives as everything is going to continue to go on the way it always has. You ought to live as those who know.

You have received the truth and who know that the end is near. The last days, the last major epic of church history, whether it lasts for two years or now we're going on 2,000 years, regardless, that last epic of history has begun with the death and resurrection of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

That last epic has begun and you are in it. And Peter says, Live your lives like people who know that. The end of all things is near, he says.

And then he's going to focus on two ways in which to prepare us to live during this age, during the last days. He's going to spend some time briefly addressing our relationship with God and he's going to spend most of this passage addressing the ways in which we relate to one another.

And so we're going to do the same thing. We're going to briefly touch upon what he says about our relationship with God and then we're going to camp out and dwell a little bit on how he says we ought to treat one another within the body of Christ. So look first at what he says here about our vertical relationship with God.

[11 : 08] He says, The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Both of these words have to do with the internal life of your mind. How you think. And he's saying that we ought to have minds that are focused. Minds that are not easily distracted, but minds that are focused.

Minds that know what's happening. Minds that are girded for action, as he says earlier in the letter. Minds that have been reshaped by a new pattern of thought, as we saw last week. We're to have these kinds of minds.

And why are we to have these kinds of minds? Why are we to be so focused as followers of Christ? Why, he says, for prayer. Because if you are going to survive in this age, if you're going to live as a pilgrim in a foreign land, then you need to be constantly, continually in prayer.

You need to be in constant communion with your Father. Otherwise, you are not going to make it. You are not going to endure. You are not going to last. One of the means that God uses to cause his people to endure to the end is this vital connection through prayer.

[12 : 27] And we must at all times be a praying people. But you cannot do that if you're just distracted by everything going on around you in the world.

If your attention is riveted on what's happening in the news constantly or what's happening in the gossip sites of the world and if you're more concerned about what's happening in Hollywood and what movies are coming out, if that garners most of your attention, if that's where your mind is, you're not ready for a vital life of prayer.

You won't find yourself praying very often. When you are alone with your thoughts, your thoughts will not drift to conversation with God. Your thoughts will drift to whatever those things are that have captured your attention.

And those things are not even always bad things. It could be that you're consumed with thoughts about work, consumed with concerns and worries about your children or your grandchildren. And if those things are constantly distracting, you constantly have your mind, your mind's eye riveted upon them, your mind will never drift toward prayer.

And when you do set down for a prayer time, for a specific time in which you're going to talk to the Lord, you will find those things drawing your mind away from prayer. You must be sober-minded.

[13 : 45] You must have your mind fixed for the sake of your prayers so that you might pray. That's one thing you must have firmly in place in order to be prepared to live in this age and in this world.

But Peter, having spent a lot of time in this letter dealing with our relationship with God, dealing with our connection to Him, is going to camp out for the next couple of verses on how we are to relate to one another in light of the world in which we live.

Take a look at what he says. Verse 8, Above all. In other words, he's saying, Now, what I've said before is important, but right now, this is the main thing that I want to say to you.

Above all, keep on loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. That's the first thing he tells us. Love one another.

The second thing he's going to tell us, verse 9, show hospitality to one another without grumbling. And then verse 10, And as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace.

[14 : 54] So three things he wants us to do here within the body of Christ. Three things that ought to determine and direct how we relate to one another. Our love for one another, our hospitality toward one another, and our service toward one another.

Let's look at the first, love. Straightforward command, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. This isn't a passing concern for those that you know are followers of Christ.

This isn't just a, you have a kind of acquaintance with other believers. He says, love one another earnestly, deeply and sincerely is what that word conveys.

Deeply and sincerely. Have a real, deeply rooted love for other people within the body of Christ. A church will not endure long, and a church will not stay on mission long, if it is not a church that is characterized by love amongst the members for one another.

It will not. We will not be a church here in Atascacita or in the Humble area in 20 years. We certainly will not be one that accomplishes the mission that God has given to us to glorify God by making disciples of Christ here.

[16 : 15] We will not do those things if we are not characterized by love for one another. And the reason for that is very simple. He says, love covers over a multitude of sins.

He does not mean by that that love makes up for your own sins in God's sight. That's not at all what he means. What he means is that your love for other people will cover over a multitude of sins that they have committed against you.

That's what he means. Because the truth of the matter is the church in this world is a gathering of a fallen, imperfect, on their way, getting better, disciples of Christ.

Not fully formed, perfect people. And because we are still riddled with sin and because the flesh still pulls us back and because we are still tempted and because we still have some of that old man within us and we still get frustrated and angry and we still sometimes hold on to things for longer than we should and we grow angry and bitter and all those things because they can still come back and strike us at times, we need to have a deep abiding love for one another because we are going to offend each other.

We are going to do things or not do things that other people within the body don't approve of or don't like. We are not always going to agree on the ways in which we conduct our home lives.

[17 : 54] You may not like the way that I discipline my kids or you may not like the way that I interact with my wife or you may not like the way that my house is ordered and the things that we do.

We are not always going to agree on all of those things. Yes, there are biblical parameters and we need to be able to come to each other when there is real genuine sin being committed and we need to be able to talk about that in dialogue but there are things that we are just not going to agree on sometimes.

There will be times when you say something to me that I don't like and that I could find offensive or there will be things sometimes when I forget to do something or forget to say something to you that you might be offended by.

There are all sorts of opportunities among sinful people to be offended and get mad. A plethora of opportunities. And Peter says love will cover over all that stuff.

Because if I have an earnest, a deep and genuine love for you, then I won't remain angry when you say something off the cuff to me that's a little bit rude or a little bit dismissive.

[19 : 05] I may at the time kind of go, whoa, what was that? But what I won't do is go home and stew about it and get angry. What I won't do is say to Bill or say to Joe, can you believe what Doug said to me?

You know, can you believe he said that? And I won't do that if I have a deep, abiding love for him, which we should have in the body of Christ.

We will not endure long and we will not present before the world the picture of a loving bride of Christ if we don't love one another.

Accept the fact that others are going to do things and say things even within the church that are sometimes hurtful. Know that and then love them anyway and realize that you're going to do the same thing to other people and thank God that those people are going to love you anyway.

We must, must begin, above all else, Peter says, with a deep, abiding, earnest love for one another. And then that love sort of begins to flesh it out in the other two things that he mentions here.

[20 : 20] He says to us that we are, to verse 9, show hospitality to one another without grumbling. Now this was of paramount importance in the first century.

What he means by hospitality is he means quite literally an opening up of your home to other believers, allowing them to come in, allowing them to spend time there, being willing to host others and have them in your house on a regular basis.

That's exactly what he means and that was very important in their context because if you remember from last week we saw this list of sins that Peter sort of rattles off and says don't participate in those things that the world still participates in.

And what I said to you last week is those sins were all things that were woven into the fabric of society in such a way that to refuse to participate in some of those things could not only result in sort of a social ostracization but could also affect your means of living, your livelihood itself.

Because if you're a bricklayer and you can't participate in the bricklayer's guild because the bricklayer's guild offers up sacrifices to a false god on a regular basis which these guilds all did, then you've all of a sudden put yourself at risk of not having the opportunity to use your skill anymore.

[21 : 36] So it was a time in which they risked a lot. And if you're in the church, if you have certain members of the church who are going to suffer because of that, you're going to have to be willing to take them into your home when they have nowhere else to go.

The other members of the church who are more secure in their possessions and more secure in their livelihood for whatever reason are going to have to be willing to have them come in.

No matter how uncomfortable it might be, no matter how much it might get in the way of your daily routines, Peter is saying to them, you're not going to last as a church.

It's not going to work. You're not going to be able to live if you don't flesh out love for one another by being hospitable. It was even more than that though because they had no place to rent like this, nor could they buy a piece of land as many other churches have done around us and build these wonderful places to come and worship.

They had to meet in homes for worship. That's where they met. There's no church building in the first century. It was just meeting in homes for worship. So without someone in the church, preferably somebody who was a little bit more well-to-do and had a larger home, without them showing extraordinary hospitality and willing to have all these fellow believers come over to their homes on a regular basis throughout the week for worship, when all of their neighbors are wondering what's going on, required some courage.

[23 : 11] It required a commitment and a love for others that would show hospitality even when it brought upon the homeowner distress. Now, I will be really honest with you.

For us as a church, I feel like you guys have done a really good job of this. I really do. I might have some words to say to some of us about how we've demonstrated love in other areas within the body, but I really feel like there are some of you who have regularly opened up your homes to have us in your homes and we could not be functioning now the way that we're functioning because we have this building, this room, for four hours on Sunday morning and we don't get together during the week if someone is not hospitable and inviting us to come into their homes.

And so, I want to commend you for a moment here and say, you guys are doing good. So keep doing it. Keep obeying Peter's command even if you didn't know the command was here. Keep obeying this command.

Keep being hospitable the way that you've been hospitable. And if you're in a position where you can't open up your home for various reasons, there are legitimate reasons why some believers can't open up their homes, then help those who do.

Offset their labor by being willing to come over and help them with things and being willing to say, you're opening your home. I don't want you to have to cook anything. Let me bring all the food over. Let me bring all of the drinks over.

[24 : 37] That's a part of participating in hospitality when you can't technically open up your home to other believers. We're doing a good job at this. We can always do better.

We're doing a good job at this. And I want you to know that I think that you're doing a really good job at this. Number three, let's just move on. Number three, he says that we are to serve one another.

He says in verse 10, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Now pause for a moment right there because there's a play on words here in this verse that you'll miss very easily in your English translation if you don't know that it's there.

As each has received a gift, the word used for gift there comes from the same root as the word for grace. In fact, you could just as well translate, as each has received a grace gift or a gift according to grace.

And that would get at the basic meaning of this word. This is not just a mere talent that you have. This is a gift, an ability that has come to you by the very grace of God.

[25 : 47] And whatever gift you've had, recognize that it has come to you as a gift of God's grace and serve one another, he says, as stewards of God's varied grace.

So if you have a gift from God, and all believers do, if you have a gift from God, you are to first of all recognize that you are a steward of grace.

This is not just like, well, I'm good at this and so I'll use it, I'll do my best to use what I'm good at. This is recognizing that whatever good dwells within you, whatever good gift you have received has come down from the Father of lights, James says.

And now Peter is saying, you must use that as a steward of grace and use it in service to others. Now Peter is not going to give a long list of gifts the way that the Apostle Paul does in a couple of other places.

Peter is simply going to divide up these spiritual gifts into two categories. Spoken, verbal gifts and then gifts in which you use your hands or you're physically serving others.

[26 : 52] So take a look here, I want you to see here. He says, First of all, whoever speaks, whoever uses a spoken gift, whatever it may be, and there are a number of them within the church.

There are a number of them. People love to sit around and debate about speaking in tongues and the gift of prophecy and well, are those still around anymore or have they disappeared from the scene since the New Testament was finished being written and people love to center on those two gifts alone.

But there are a number of speaking gifts though that the New Testament speaks of, regardless of what you may believe about those particular gifts, there are a number of gifts of speaking. There are gifts of encouragement.

There are gifts of evangelism. There are gifts of preaching and teaching. There are all sorts of gifts of speaking that have no aura of controversy around them at all and that we ought to be fully utilizing within the church regardless of how you feel about those others.

And here's what Peter has to say about the exercise of those verbal gifts. whoever speaks as speaking the oracles of God.

[27 : 57] I don't think that Peter means here that if you have a speech gift, let's say you have the gift of teaching, I don't think that Peter means that when you stand and teach God's people, you are giving them new revelation on the same order and level as we have in the Bible.

I don't think that's at all what Peter means when he says speak as the oracles of God. I don't think that's his point because otherwise what is unique about this book? If at any time a preacher such as myself or someone else in the church who has gifts of speaking, if any time we are able to speak and our speech comes with the same kind of authority as this book, there's nothing unique about the testimony of the apostles and the prophets.

And yet all over this book the testimony of the apostles and prophets is held up as unique. All scripture is God-breathed. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

So I do not think that Peter means that those who have gifts of speaking are speaking the word of God in the same sense in which the apostles or the prophets of the Old Testament were speaking the word of God. What I do think that Peter means though is that we ought to come as those who speak the very word of God that we find here that our speech should be shaped and formed and flavored by this word.

So that if I come to you to preach a sermon in which there's very little from this book and a whole lot of my own opinions and my own speculation, I have not spoken to you as speaking the oracles of God.

[29 : 32] In fact, the reason that I preach through the Bible verse by verse and try to focus upon the words and the sentences and the phrases themselves is because I want to be very, very careful that I've never come to you giving my opinions telling you what I think about a particular topic or a particular issue or even telling you what some other theologian thinks about that particular topic or issue.

I want to come to you and bring to you as best I can the word of God. And anybody in the church who exercises verbal gifts of speech ought to do so in that kind of a manner so that we are certain whether it's giving advice to someone because God has given us a gift of wisdom to speak advice into people's lives or whether it's teaching in a Sunday school class or in a small group or whether it's teaching in a children's class or whatever it might be we want to be certain that what we are proclaiming to them is the word of God itself not our own opinions.

Whoever speaks as the oracles of God. And then secondly he says whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.

Whoever serves. Now there are all sorts of gifts of service and probably hospitality would fall under this category as well but there are all sorts of ways in which we serve other people within the body of Christ.

All sorts of ways. And Peter says when you are serving whether you are serving by coming here at 830 on Sunday mornings and helping us to set up sound and chairs that's a way of serving within the church.

[31 : 08] Whether you are serving by cooking food for someone who needs a meal or whether you are serving by helping out those who are in need within the church.

Whatever means of service that God has placed before you. Peter says you are to serve as with the strength that God supplies.

Here's what he means by that. He means that you shouldn't serve merely by your own abilities and you shouldn't serve just sort of gritting it out on your own.

Sometimes we serve but we do it in our own strength and so we come to the end of our rope and we say I'm done. I'm not doing this anymore.

anymore. I'm just not doing this anymore. I can't do this. And what we really mean by that is I've been doing this in my own strength and to be real honest that's a tiring thing.

[32 : 11] And then on the other hand sometimes we serve in our own strength and we serve in our own strength because it feels good to us. We like to feel as though we ourselves are accomplishing a task that feels good to us and we serve in our own strength.

That's probably what I'm most tempted by because I'm hesitant always to ask someone to help me with something whether it's a little task or a big task and sometimes it'll take me two to three times longer to finish with a particular project simply because I was focused on it and I can do this.

I can get this done. I can build this or I can write this or I can make these. I can get this done. I don't need anybody to help me. They're going to slow me down anyway. I know what I want to do. Let me just get this done.

And the reason why that attitude crops up within me is because I'm doing whatever I'm doing whether it's a good act of service to the church or not. I'm doing whatever I'm doing out of my own strength.

And Peter comes here to rebuke that kind of approach to service within the body. Peter says you don't serve in your own strength. You serve with the strength which God supplies recognizing every moment it comes from him and asking every moment for him to give you more and to supply what you are lacking.

[33 : 30] And there's a really important reason for this that Peter tells us. He says because or in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Christ. Which tells us ultimately that what this is about is it's not about how much we accomplish. It's not about how much we get done ultimately.

It's not about how we appear as a church or how polished your home or the project that you've been working on appears to be. It's never about all of those external things that we sometimes begin to fool ourselves that our service is about.

What it is ultimately about is the glory of God manifested in whatever it is that he's called you to do. Whether he has called you to make coffee in a coffee maker, whether he's called you to preach to God's people, whether he has called you to set up a sound system, or whether he has called you to serve your neighborhood, or whatever he has called you to do, he says that you must do it with the strength that I supply.

You must do it with love, enduring, deep, abiding love towards others, you must do it with your mind fixed upon Christ, you must do all that you do with the strength that he supplies, so that in the end, he receives all the honor and the glory and the praise.

[35 : 00] That's how God works. That's how he has set up his universe to run, in such a way that all praise and honor and glory goes to the only one who is worthy of all praise and honor and glory.

Have you ever asked yourself, why precisely does God save people the way that he saves people? Why is it that God saves us never on the basis of what we do?

The apostle Paul says that no one is justified or no one is declared right by God by the works of the law? Why is that? Why has God set up salvation in such a way that we contribute nothing to it?

We simply come in trust. Why has he done that? Because if you contribute one little iota to your salvation, one bit, then you get a sliver of the glory for your salvation.

And God says that's not how I operate. All the honor, all the praise, all the glory belongs to me. And so all you need do is trust in the work of my son that he did for you and in your place on the cross.

[36 : 32] You trust in that. don't come to me with anything. Don't bring me a gift as though I needed anything from you. Don't try to serve me in order to earn your place amongst my people.

Don't do that. He saves in such a way that he gets all the honor and the glory. So do you think that for one moment he would operate his church in such a way that anyone other than him would get the glory and the praise?

So why would we do that? Let's pray. Maybe Father the issue for some of us here is not our relationship with other people in the body.

Maybe our issue is our relationship with you. Maybe there are some here today who would say I've never really believed all this stuff before even though I've heard it.

But there's something within me crying out to believe right now. It's small. It's minuscule. But I find myself drawn strangely to Jesus.

[38 : 09] I pray Father that we wouldn't move on or we wouldn't do anything else until that is dealt with. So that if you might be at work in the hearts of those who do not yet know you to create new life and draw them to yourself now.

Do the work Father. Open blind eyes. And then for those within the body make us more loving toward one another.

Take away whatever grains of bitterness or frustration may be there beneath the soil. Cover them over with love. I give you thanks for this body for these people.

We may be few but they love you and they serve you and they love one another and they're hospitable toward one another and I give you great thanks for that. It's in Jesus name that I pray all these things.

Amen.