

KEEP AN EYE OUT

1 Peter 4:1-11

INTRODUCTION

“I can’t wait to get out and move on.”

No, those are not words that I have recently said about my retirement. I love being a pastor and I love this church. Rather, those were words that I said in my final semester of college. I crammed four years into five, so by the fifth year, I was ready to get out of the college setting and move on into real life and a real job. During that last semester, I kept my eyes focused on my classes, but, at the same time, I kept my graduation in sight. That helped me keep disciplined and studying hard until I actually graduated.

In our series, Peter has been trying to help the Christians face persecution and hostilities by the people around them and being willing to live as Christians even if it meant to suffer. One of the primary ways to do that is to help them realize that Jesus is coming back, and with his coming, God’s final chapter of human history will end.

That should help us put the present into perspective. You were probably like me in that last year of college. You were ready to get out, but first you still had to study.

The main idea of this section is that because Jesus is coming back, it should make a difference in the way you live your life. When was the last time you consciously thought about Jesus coming back? When you do that, it helps you face things right now.

Peter says:

The end of all things is near. 1 Peter 4:7^{NIV}

Peter was not saying that the return of Jesus is near. Jesus himself said that no one knows when that will be. Christians in the first century mistakenly thought Jesus was coming back within their lifetime. Two thousand years have passed, and Jesus still hasn’t returned.

The phrase, *the end of all things* means the culmination of God’s plan. There have been stages of God’s plan since the beginning when God created everything. God’s plan initially was seen in creating a perfect world. Then after sin came into the world, the next stage of God’s plan was to develop a people, Israel, through whom God could work to be a light for the world. The next stage of his plan included sending Jesus to the earth to live and die for our sins. Now, after Jesus has resurrected and ascended back to heaven, the final stage of his plan is to send Jesus back to the earth to establish God’s kingdom on earth in the fullest way, with Jesus as the King. What Peter is saying is that we are in this final stage of God’s plan. The end or culmination of all things has come.

Now that we are in the final stage of God’s plan, he wants us to look ahead to this final culmination when Jesus comes back, but we are to still keep engaged in life on earth. And as we face life, which may include suffering and persecution, what will help us is to keep Jesus’ return in sight?

How are we to live today in light of Jesus coming back? Peter is telling us how we

should act as Christians, especially how we should act toward fellow Christians.

1. Be willing and intentional to follow Jesus even if it leads to suffering

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. ² As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 1 Peter 4:1-3 ^{NIV}

Peter has been telling us that if we are going to live as true Christians in following Jesus, it is probably going to end up causing us to suffer hostilities, insults and even persecution.

He first tells us how we should live: If we are going to follow Jesus and be willing to even suffer, we need to have the same attitude that Jesus had when he came to the earth. Jesus stated that attitude in:

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. John 6:38 ^{NIV}

What God wanted Jesus to do, is what Jesus wanted to do. What mattered was God's will, not his will.

This attitude comes out of a clear mindset. It is a choice that becomes an intention.

E.g. At some point in your Christian life, if you are truly serious in living your Christian life, you probably made a conscious choice to follow Jesus. And with that conscious choice, you became intent on doing what Jesus wanted you to do.

For me, it was in college. I faced the fact that I had not been serious in living the way God wanted me to live, and I made a choice to start doing so. And that choice led to a purposeful intention to do God's will.

Are you prepared to face suffering? You will first need to have the attitude that to be willing to do God's will first.

The incentive for living this way is that when a person suffers in the body, he is done with sin.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.

Does that mean that if you suffer for obeying Jesus, you will never sin again? I wish. I think what Peter means is that if you are willing to suffer because you have chosen to obey God, then you have developed an attitude that is not going to give in to sin. Following Jesus is more important than sinning, even if it means you are going to face persecution. To sin is easy. But to purposefully obey God, especially when you know that you might be ridiculed or insulted, takes a determined, intentional attitude. And when you do that, you realize that you would rather continue to obey God than sin. So in that way, you are done with sin.

The second way to live with a view to Jesus' return is to:

2. Pray purposefully and consistently

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 1 Peter 4:7^{NIV}

It's interesting that Peter says in light of the reality of Jesus' return, the most important action to take is to pray. You might think that if you knew that Jesus would return next month or even next year, that you should first go around and start telling everyone about Jesus, that you should feed the poor, and sell your house and give all your money away to further the spread of the gospel. But, instead, since we don't know when Jesus is going to return, Peter tells us that the #1 priority is to pray.

The reason for this exhortation to pray is because most all of what we want to see God do in our world, in our families, and in our lives will only happen with God's help. We cannot accomplish God's purposes in our strength. We are facing spiritual battles; we are trying to witness to people whose minds are darkened and enslaved by Satan; we are trying to live godly lives while still having sinful natures. We need God's grace and God's power. That's why wise and discerning Christians will spend more time praying and see that the first and most important priority is prayer.

Here's a question for us: are we praying more than we were a year ago, or 5 years ago? We should be.

A third way to live is to:

3. Love each other earnestly

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8^{NIV}

We have heard Peter say to love one another, which reflects Jesus saying we should love one another. But here he adds a reason for doing so: love covers a multitude of sins. Does that mean that we should ignore it when a fellow Christian sins and just cover the sin by forgetting it?

Sometimes to love another person is to forbear or put up with someone we may not like. That is to cover their sin by loving them. But other times, no. The loving thing is not to simply ignore someone's sin. Prov. 10:12 gives us a clue as to what this means:

Hatred stirs up conflict,

but love covers over all wrongs. Proverbs 10:12^{NIV}

The parallelism of this proverb contrasts hatred and love as being opposites, which means the words, "stirs up" and "covers over" are opposites. Hatred stirs up conflict. If someone insults us or does something to hurts us, to respond in a hateful way is to insult them back or to spread gossip or to carry a grudge. This stirs up conflict and destroys Christian community. Instead, love covers the sin in the sense that love addresses the wrong in the way that Jesus wants us to respond. We deal with sin to defuse conflict. If we are sinned against, Jesus says to go to the person and talk to him first. It says that we are to

be forgiving and not carry a grudge or be bitter. This will promote unity in the church.

Remember that in Peter's day, most cities only had one church. If dissensions and quarrels blew apart a church, there would not be another church to go to, and the Christian witness of that church to the community would cease. It was essential that Christians get along with each other, not just for the sake of their relationships, but also for the sake of their presence and witness in the community.

A fourth way to live in light of Jesus' return is to:

4. Be hospitable

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:9^{NIV}

Hospitality was important in the first century for several reasons. One was that there were no Motel 6's in towns. When a fellow Christian, like Peter or Paul, traveled to visit a church, they needed food and lodging. Christians were expected to offer hospitality. Also, for several centuries, churches met in homes. Many Christians just had little homes what could not host 20-40 people that might be in a church. The church needed more wealthy Christians to offer their homes as a meeting place.

Although we may have hotels and church buildings today, one of the lost practices of hospitality today is that we don't invite people over for dinner much. I am as guilty as anyone. It may not be that there is a need to share a meal out of necessity or lack of food, but hospitality is one great way to bring fellowship among Christians to a much more intimate level than just seeing people at church on Sundays.

Before I first came to Trinity when Nancy and I were here to candidate, Trinity had what they called, START dinners. START stood for Sharing Together Around a Table. Every month or so, a different group of people would meet in a home for a potluck dinner. They would share food, but more importantly, they would share fellowship together. I would like to see something like that happen again.

Wouldn't our love and fellowship grow more deeply if we have regular times of getting together for meals in our homes and engaged in other hospitable ways?

One final way Peter mentions is that we are to:

5. Use your gift to serve others

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:10-11^{NIV}

If the church is going to make it in hard times, it is going to do so with people playing a part that builds up the church family. God has given every one of us at least one spiritual gift.

Peter broadly categorizes them into two groups: speaking gifts, like teaching and

encouragement, and serving gifts, like the gifts of leadership, administration, service, and helps.

Paul tells us that God has given us our spiritual gifts to build up the body, to strengthen people. That not only pertains to helping people grow in their faith, but also to help people keep their faith.

E.g. Let's say someone loses their job because they have refused to lie at work and cover up their boss' cheating on his expense report. How can the church family help that person?

The person with the gift of mercy, can empathize with the person and pray for them in such a way that the person is comforted. The person with the gift of giving, can give money to the person to make sure they have the money they need. The person with the gift of administration can help the person get organized to start a new job search. The person with the gift of service can help the family by watching their kids so they can go to a job interview. The person with the gift of encouragement can help the person keep motivated to look forward and not get stuck in the past.

Do you see how important it is that all of us know what our gifts are and that we use our gifts? Let me put in a pitch for Class 301. In this class, we talk about spiritual gifts, among other ways that God has shaped and equipped us. God wants you to know what your spiritual gift is, and then he wants you to be using it.

Until Jesus comes back, these are some ways in which we can be the church to one another. These are ways that can help anyone face suffering when they live out their Christian life and choose to follow Jesus even if there are repercussions from society.

So what can you take away from this message?

Next Steps:

1. Make a determined choice to be willing to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost.
2. Review your prayer life. Are there any changes you need to make in terms of praying?
3. Take Class 301.