



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Better Together

1 Peter 4:7–11

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series: Exiles: Hope Between Two Worlds

Good morning everyone. I'm Dan Reid, one of the pastors at CPC. I hope all of you had a wonderful Easter celebrating our risen Christ. As I reflected this week on Easter, what hit me was that the power that raised Jesus from the dead also lives in us. So we have the power of God in us as we face the challenges of life, the hard things that happen in a fallen world. I was encouraged to hear many good things about the Easter weekend here at North Campus.

I'd like to begin this morning by asking you to pretend for a moment that you don't know me. I haven't been to North Campus very much lately, so for some of you, you don't have to pretend you don't know me, you actually don't know me! Or let's say you've come to this church for the very first time. What comes to your mind as I start this message today with this bold statement: "The end of all things is near."

You might be thinking, oh no, he is one of those crazy preachers who likes to make specific predictions about the end of the world. Perhaps you are waiting for me to give a date for when I believe the Lord will show up in the sky. Or maybe this guy will tell me to quit my job, sell my house, buy guns and ammo and head for the hills. And maybe you are now thinking, I came to the wrong church, and the first chance I have I am going to bolt for the door.

Or maybe you have a different more reflective response. You see that we are quoting from our text in 1st Peter. What did Peter really mean when he said, "The end of all things is near"? Maybe he just means that all things we know will one day become as obsolete as phone books and carbon paper. Or maybe Peter just means that one day we all will die.

But is there a greater meaning to these words than one day we will all die? If this is about the end of the world, I can see the confusion. Peter wrote these seven words over 2000 years ago and no major prophecy has happened since. Was Peter just flat out wrong? All through the history of the church people have been predicting the end of the world but it doesn't end. In fact, I have an old study Bible that has lots of notes on the end is near and one note says, "Christ will return around 1988."

But prophecy does tell us that real and worsening problems like wars and rumors of wars, poverty, environmental disasters and the human race seems to roll on. On the other hand, we can even see some progress. Things have gotten better for some in the human race because of advances in medicine, technology, communication and nutrition.

Why does Peter bring up end times in chapter four? If you remember back before Easter, Peter had just finished talking about the reality of a coming judgment. In chapter four verses 4-5 he told us not to join in the wild and reckless living of those who ridicule us. He says, "*But they will have to give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*"

When Peter says, "the end" he is really referring to a period of time, a period of time that will consummate with Christ's second coming and the judgment of the living and the dead. The wording "is near" can best be translated "approaching." In other words, the end is imminent, it could occur at any moment. We are in the same time period as Peter's audience was 2000 years ago. This period of time began with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and will consummate with his second coming and the present world order will dissolve and the Lord will set up his own rule in the new heavens and the new earth. The end of all things in this world will mean the beginning of something far more wonderful for the people of God.

The second coming of Christ and the judgment will be both a wonderful and a terrible thing depending on your perspective. Peter wants us to take comfort in the fact that "the end of all things" is a good thing, not a bad thing for Christians. But he also wants us to know that even though the end of all things is not a bad thing, it's likely going to be a hard thing for God's people.

Peter knew that the end would be preceded by a time of increasing persecution of God's people. He learned this from Jesus Himself. Jesus in Matthew 24 spoke of wars, famines and earthquakes that are the beginnings of birth pains and they will become more intense as time marches on and we get closer to the final event. And Peter and his readers were starting to experience those hard things.

Someone has said, "the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice." That's the belief that somehow the world is getting better, that the world is bending toward justice and eventually the human race will get this thing figured out. From a Biblical standpoint, that is a myth. When I moved to the Peninsula I was talking to someone about living near the San Andreas fault line. This person corrected me, "Hey Dan, you don't live **near** the San Andreas fault, you live right **on** the San Andreas fault. You should prepare now. Take action. Get your water bottles and flashlight batteries and all the resources you might need to ride out the big one."

Wise people prepare, don't they? This is what Peter tells his audience. In light of the fact that the end of all things is near and things are likely to get harder, prepare. Peter gives us four exhortations to rally around because the end of all things is near. He saying to us, "If you prepare by focusing on these four things now, you will discover that your Christian community becomes your source of strength, your place of refuge, and your means of support when things get hard."

Peter's first exhortation for the Christian community is when things get hard:

Pray with Clear Heads

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray (v. 7).

As we unpack verse 7 let's start with the last word. The noun Peter uses for pray is plural. It's repeated acts of prayer, likely "prayers" in community gatherings where the church gets together to offer prayers. Two imperatives in the original language are to shape our prayers: "be alert" and "sober mind." It's kind of funny that this comes from Peter because he was the one that kept falling asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus told him to watch and pray. Maybe this is a weak area for you too.

The idea of "be alert" is to be clear-minded. He is saying keep your head despite the dangers and fears of the times. Peter is saying, I understand what you are going through. Persecution can lead to fear and worry. But you need to know what is actually going on around you and pray intelligently. Pray for wisdom to understand what is going on around you. And pray to not fear what is going on around you. Pray for wisdom to know how to engage the times, not to escape the times in which you live and run for the hills. In other words, Peter is saying to us, "Don't be so heavenly minded you are of no earthly good."

The other phrase—"sober mind"—means the opposite of drunkenness. The idea is don't get intoxicated or numbed by the world around you so that you stop seeing life correctly. We can become desensitized to the world around us. Face it, the things of this world can become intoxicating if we let them rule our hearts and minds.

A couple of months ago Julie and I bought ourselves an anniversary present. We have been late adapters to Netflix. So finally we broke down and bought the deal to stream and are now streaming Netflix. I started looking at the shows considered popular and I started watching a couple of series. At first, the level of violence was shocking to me. I remember trying to eat a sandwich one night while I watched and I had to change the channel to keep my food down. But gradually you can get hooked on this stuff. I watched a few more episodes, and a few episodes became the entire first season and soon I found I could eat just fine while watching these shows!

Julie reminded me that I may be watching too much and I need to balance it with a few Hallmark movies. She was right. I was becoming intoxicated by the world and desensitized to the weird stuff on that program. I was becoming so earthly minded that I was of no heavenly good. So yesterday, to counter some of the dark stuff, we watched a Hallmark movie about the adventures of a family who owned a tulip farm. Seriously.

Remember, there is a devil. There is evil. There is a spiritual battle. He is a liar, a tempter, a deceiver. He is also seductive and intoxicating. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing and he prowls around like a lion seeking to devour. He is thrilled if we are so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good and we head for the hills. And he is also thrilled if we are so enmeshed in earthly things that we are of no ministry good.

But when we are alert and of sober mind our prayers keep us in proper fellowship with God and that leads to proper fellowship with one another. So in addition to prayer he says above all else, love fervently when the end of days is near.

Love Fervently

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (v. 8).

When persecution and trouble come, it is supremely important that we stick together in love. Love must define our relationships within the church family. He adds that we must love each other "deeply." Literally, the Greek word for deeply means "at full stretch." The idea is that these demands to love won't be easy; they can stretch us to the limit.

This usually means that God will place someone in your life, even someone in your church who is very hard to love. Do you have people in your life who stretch you to the limits of your ability to love? Maybe someone who talks too much, who ignores you, with strong opinions who doesn't listen, who is a Debbie Downer. It's hard to love these people. Some of you might be saying, "Yeah, you are describing everyone in my community group!"

But then Peter gives us the key. He says, "Love covers a multitude of sins." He pulls this from the book of Proverbs 10 verse 12 where it says, "*Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers a multitude of sins.*" When someone sins, or just manifests behavior that offends or irritates you, you can either make much of it or overlook it. When love abounds in Christian community, small offenses, and even larger ones can be overlooked, even forgotten. This is so important because community is already fragile due to increasing persecution. Peter is saying, "Don't respond with behavior that can destroy Christian community."

I don't think he is telling us to live in denial about sins in the body of Christ. There are times when sin needs to be confronted and dealt with, and forgiveness needs to be asked for and received, and reconciliation needs to be pursued. Jesus made this clear in

his teachings recorded in Matthew chapter 5 and chapter 18. But 1st Corinthians 13 verses 4-7 puts it best, *“Love is patient.... It is not provoked... It doesn't take into account a wrong suffered... it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.”*

Do you know what helps us to love like this? It's remembering how love has covered a multitude of our own sins. More than anyone, Peter understood this. Love had covered the reality that Peter had denied Jesus three times. We all need the kind of grace that Jesus showed Peter. We all need the assurance that the love of God covers our sins!

When I live every day knowing my need for grace, I extend grace to others. And my extending grace to others has a way of covering their sins. A very practical expression of fervent love is our third exhortation for how to live in community when the end of days is near. Peter tells us to:

Practice Hospitality

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling (v. 9).

This was important in the early church for several reasons. It was important because the early church had no buildings and the community met in homes. Someone had to open their home to the church. It was also important because there were traveling preachers and missionaries who went from place to place and they needed somewhere to stay. Back then it wasn't good to stay in the equivalent of our motels. In Peter's day those places had the reputation of being places of ill repute. So believers were to open their homes to one another.

I think many of us today confuse hospitality with entertainment. It's easy to do. We think hospitality means having a few close friends over for dinner. Hospitality is so much more than that. The Greek word for hospitality literally means, “lover of strangers.” And no doubt that includes having people in our homes who are difficult to love and to doing it without grumbling about the sacrifices we are making.

With the high costs on the Peninsula, this need for hospitality is becoming more and more urgent. I want to read for you a long quote from a book titled *Outlive Your Life* by writer and pastor Max Lucado.

Long before the church had pulpits and baptisteries, she had kitchens and dinner tables. Even a casual reading of the New Testament unveils the house as the primary tool of the church. The primary gathering place of the church was the home. Consider the genius of God's plan. The first generation of Christians was a tinderbox of contrasting cultures and backgrounds. At least fifteen different nationalities heard Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Jews stood next to Gentiles. Men worshiped with women. Slaves and masters alike sought after

Christ. Can people of such varied backgrounds and cultures get along with each other?

We wonder the same thing today. Can Hispanics live in peace with Anglos? Can Democrats find common ground with Republicans? Can a Christian family carry on a civil friendship with the Muslim couple down the street? Can divergent people get along?

The early church did—without the aid of sanctuaries, church buildings, clergy, or seminaries. They did so through the clearest of messages (the Cross) and the simplest of tools (the home).

Not everyone can serve in a foreign land, lead a relief effort, or volunteer at the downtown soup kitchen. But who can't be hospitable? Do you have a front door? A table? Chairs? Bread and meat for sandwiches? Congratulations! You just qualified to serve in the most ancient of ministries: hospitality.

Something holy happens around a dinner table that will never happen in a sanctuary. In a church auditorium you see the backs of heads. Around the table you see the expressions on faces. In the auditorium one person speaks; around the table everyone has a voice. Church services are on the clock. Around the table there is time to talk.

Hospitality opens the door to uncommon community. It's no accident that hospitality and hospital come from the same Latin word, for they both lead to the same result: healing. When you open your door to someone, you are sending this message: “You matter to me and to God.” You may think you are saying, “Come over for a visit.” But what your guest hears is, “I'm worth the effort.”

Max Lucado, “Outlive Your Life” (Nelson, 2010), p. 55

The most amazing hospitality I ever experienced was while on a mission trip in Ensenada, Mexico. These believers had so little but they shared so generously. I will never forget that blessing of New Testament hospitality. What if you came to church and one of your goals was to either bring someone home or take someone out for lunch? Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says might happen, *“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it”* (Heb. 13:2).

Finally Peter gives us our fourth exhortation for how to live in community when the end of days is near.

Use Your Gifts to Serve the Community of Believers

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 (verses 10-11a).

The Bible tells us that each of us has at least one spiritual gift from God. It's quite likely that Peter is referring to these God-given gifts as big helps to the community especially in days of persecution. The language tells us that these gifts are diverse. The purpose of these gifts is to glorify God by strengthening the

health of the church by serving. In other places the Apostle Paul mentions at least 15 different gifts, but here Peter simply breaks the gifts down into two categories: speaking gifts like teaching, exhortation and evangelism on the one hand, and serving gifts like helps and mercy on the other.

For those who speak, Peter says, don't teach your own ideas, remember to teach the sacred scripture, and remember you are teaching the words of God. Be serious, accurate and reverent as you exercise these speaking gifts.

For those who serve, Peter says, remember that our serving will be sustained not by our own strength, but by the strength that God supplies. It's only when we speak the words of God and serve with the strength of God that God will be praised through Jesus Christ.

It's a consistent message throughout Scripture that ministry belongs to the people in the church. Each of you is gifted. Each of you has a calling. Each of you has a ministry. For our church to be a compelling expression of community, each of us needs to discover and use the gift God has given you. It's not enough to come and sit here on Sunday morning and enjoy the worship music and the teaching; that's not the church. Church is every member of the body of Christ using their gifts.

How do you discover your gift? You start by just getting involved. Get plugged in and start serving and then ask, How does God seem to use me the most? What do I care about? What excites me? What do others who know me say my gifts might be?

We even have a tool that gets you started in discovering your gifts. We sent the link to a Spiritual Gifts Test in our weekly e-newsletter called Take 5. You can also find the test on our CPC app. When you have finished it, contact one of our pastors and we'll walk you through it and help you find a place for you to use your gifts.

And finally all of this is for one goal. Peter ends this section with what we call a doxology.

.... To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen (v. 11b).

Here is the purpose of it all: Worship the glory and the power to Jesus Christ. Peter knew Jesus in the flesh as a man, but here he worships him as God. Jesus Christ has all the glory and power.

We can certainly understand how Peter's readers might have felt powerless as the end of all things was near. But they can be encouraged because all glory and power belongs to him forever

and ever. Being a follower of Christ might threaten their standing in society in the moment. It might affect their livelihood and in some cases their lives in the moment. But that's okay because all glory and power belong to him forever and ever!

I remember years ago in the spring the first time I ever trained for a long distance race. I was going to run a half marathon with my daughter Katie. We selected a beautiful place in Duluth, Minnesota. We ran along Lake Superior and we were to finish the race in downtown Duluth. I trained hard for three months. I went through shin splints and pulled muscles to train. When race day arrived and Katie and I started the race, I wasn't confident I would be able to finish. I just didn't think even with my training I would be able to run 13.1 miles. I had only run 10 miles at my peak of training. My training guide said not to worry about the last three miles because adrenalin would take over and I would actually run faster as the finish line became visible.

I remember miles 8, 9 and 10 were very difficult. I think old ladies carrying purses were passing me! But as we turned off the lake and I saw the skyline of Duluth and began our descent into downtown, I saw that the end was near. And the training guide was right. I didn't slow down. I actually sped up. Katie and I felt like we were sprinting to the end.

That is what the word of God is saying to us today. As the end draws near, with the finish line in sight, don't slow down. Run faster and run with hope because the end of all things is drawing near. The finish line is within sight. Peter tells us with that finish line in sight, pray with clear heads, love fervently, practice hospitality and use the gifts God has given you to encourage your Christian community.

The writer of Hebrews has a wonderful summary of what Peter has taught us in 1st Peter chapter 4 verses 7-11. *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Heb. 10:24-25.)

Because you and I will need the encouragement of the community God has assembled for us all the more as we see The Day approaching.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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