

Growing up I had the opportunity to attend a Christian high school. I was in my junior year and we had a substitute teacher for our bible class on Romans. And like most high school students, when we had a sub, we tried our best to steer them from the curriculum of the day and get on a fun tangent. Our mission was a success! We got our sub to talk about the “end times.” Who doesn’t want to know about the end times and more specifically, when will the end times happen? Our sub went on and on and finally told us the end of the world would occur in June of 1986! Much to my and my classmates dismay, we didn’t want Jesus to come back in June of 1986. That meant no graduation ceremony, no class trip to Hawaii, none of us going off to college, or getting married and having kids!

But when we think about the end times, that is where our mind often wanders—to the things we won’t be able to do or experience. Peter gives us a different way to think, which poses the question, With the end of all things near, how should we live our lives?

Let’s refresh our memory since we have been out of 1 Peter for two weeks. Up until now, Peter has talked a lot about suffering—suffering for doing good, suffering while living in a secular society, how to be holy in the world, which will often bring suffering and remind us that we are exiles in a strange land. Because of Jesus, we have hope between these two worlds and hope in our suffering. So let’s pick up where we left off.

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. 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 4:7-11).

Peter introduces a new phrase in his letter, “the end of all things is near.” You might wonder, why would Peter say this? It’s 2000 years later and the “end of all things is near?” As far as I can tell it hasn’t happened! Was Peter wrong? Not at all.

What does “the end of all things is near” actually mean? What happened in Jesus’ death and resurrection was the ushering in

of a whole new era. This is the beginning of the end of life as we know it. God has already started—in Jesus—the process of the last age. The first coming of Jesus inaugurated a new era. So when Peter talks about the end of all things near, we are awaiting the suddenness of Christ’s return. That is, He could come back at any moment.

Think of it this way: when we know time is short, we act in urgency and simplicity. I remember getting the news that my mom had cancer. Nothing else mattered. Our family lived in an urgency that time could be short, and we wanted to make the most of it. When people are faced with a tornado or hurricane, they grab the essentials and head for cover. Being short on time requires both simplicity and urgency.

Christ has come. We are waiting for His return and we are living in the time where the end of all things is near. Peter is encouraging us to live in these last days with simplicity and urgency as we wait with hope the return of Christ.

Clear-Minded Prayer

With the end of all things near, Peter turns our attention to prayer. It is more than prayer. He says, “Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.” I’m reminded of our Palm Sunday sermon Mark Mitchell gave. Peter is in the garden with the other disciples, and Jesus has asked them to pray. Jesus comes back to find them asleep, and he says “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Peter wasn’t alert or sober-minded and wasn’t praying and preparing himself for what was about to happen. He wasn’t drawing strength from the Lord and acted out in a panic when the guards came to arrest Jesus and Peter ends up cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant.

Peter is exhorting this group of early Christians as well as us to be alert, to be sober or clear-minded in our suffering as we are drawn to prayer. We don’t need to panic and move to the mountains and be a prepper or quit your job. When the world is spinning out of control, pray. What is prayer? It’s communication with God. He wants us to realize that we are totally dependent on Him. I love what Chuck Swindoll says about prayer. “Prayer sharpens our awareness so that we are able to be more discerning. It gives us genuine hope and confidence in Christ in the midst of confusion. When you’re panicking, you’re not praying. When you’re reacting, you are not trusting in your sovereign God.”

A Deep Love for Each Other

From prayer, we move to love. When we face suffering or persecution, love shown from a brother or sister in Christ is one of the most encouraging acts we as believers can do and experience. Peter exhorts us, "Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins." With the end of all things near, Peter reminds us to love one another. It's this idea of a "love that persists despite difficulties." (Jobes) It speaks of intensity, determination, much like an athlete determined to win or cross a finish line. Do we love our brothers and sisters in Christ like that? It's easy to love those Christians we like. How about loving those Christians we don't like or who have wronged us. We all know or have fellow believers who are difficult to love, who have hurt us or wronged us. Peter is telling us we are to love them deeply or fervently as well. He uses the phrase "because love covers over a multitude of sins." He is paraphrasing Proverbs 10:12, "**Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.**"

The opposites are reflected in Proverbs 10:12: hate/love, stirs/covers. Our world loves to watch Christians go at each other. The world acts in hate and stirs up conflict and yet when we respond as the world would, when we hold back forgiveness, we discredit one another and Jesus. It is difficult to have true Christian community when we hold on to the offenses that have happened to us and respond the way the world would.

We have a motto on staff at CPC: keep short accounts. We have a staff of some 50+ people and trust me, we don't all get along! When we let things fester, when we act in the flesh as described in 1 Peter 2:1 by responding in "malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind," we create difficult working relationships and quite frankly, hinder our staff community and ministry. We are no different than the world. When one of us has wronged another, we get to the bottom of it. We give forgiveness freely. We don't let it fester because of our love for one another.

Understanding how to love each other deeply—because love covers a multitude of sins—is key to our faith and our Christian community especially during the midst of suffering. Peter is not saying that we ignore sin in our lives or our community. Love also exhorts and disciplines when it comes to sin. Just like a parent would discipline their child in love, our heavenly Father does the same for us.

Think of last week's passage in John 21. Could you imagine if Jesus did not let love prevail when Peter betrayed him? None of us would be sitting here! Because of the father's great love for us, let us demonstrate the great love we have for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

How do we love each other deeply? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. "**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not**

self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." When I look at this description of love, I'm convicted every time. I know I can't love people this way unless I'm relying on Jesus Christ to give me the power.

Hospitality

Peter calls us to be hospitable. "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." Ever been to another believer's home and they make you feel like a part of the family? Isn't that an amazing experience? In our love for one another, we are called to open our home to fellow believers, whether it's a meal, lodging, hosting a bible study, or as in Peter's day, hosting church. In Peter's day, missionaries and preachers didn't stay at the inns. Often inns were considered a place of ill-repute. So the need for Christians to open their homes to these fellow believers became crucial.

Showing hospitality comes with a cost. At times it can be inconvenient, more expensive, a loss of privacy, yet Peter reminds us that we are to do this without grumbling.

We live in one of the most expensive places to live on the planet! I've experienced hospitality from many of you. You have had interns live in your home for a year or more rent-free, which has freed them up to do ministry and not worry about where they will live. For me, I'm grateful and thankful for the generosity and hospitality of some believers in the body who have given up their townhouse for me to live in at a discounted rate. They could get triple of what they are charging, yet their attitude is that the townhouse is the Lord's; let's use it for Him and let ministry happen in what He has given them. Because of their hospitality, I've been able to live and serve here for a long time. I haven't had to say good-bye to CPC due to the cost of living. Because of their hospitality, countless students have heard the Gospel, and their lives have been changed. Because of their hospitality, that townhouse has been a safe haven for adults and students alike.

This campus is going to move to the Fox Theater soon, which makes midweek events interesting. How can we as a campus be hospitable to not only the ministries within CPC but to our fellow believers?

Max Lucado says this about hospitality:

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?

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 God and me." 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

Our Peninsula culture isn't very hospitable. We live in our little cubicles, we open our garage doors, drive in, close the garage and enter our houses without ever knowing our neighbors. We can come to a church and hide in the crowd and never be known! Community is at the core of our very being. We can be a part of a community group for 20 years and refuse to invite people into the community. We were created for community. In just a few short months God may bring all kinds of people to CPC South because of our location at The Fox. Are you ready to invite people to lunch after service? Are you ready to invite people into your home and your community group so they too can be known, so they too know "they are worth the effort"?

Serve One Another

Peter commands us "...use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in various forms." As believers, we have all been given a spiritual gift, and God wants us to use them. What is a spiritual gift? Spiritual gifts are supernatural abilities invested in believers by the indwelling Holy Spirit by which the living Christ inside expresses His love through us to others. You can find all of the different spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4:11.

I remember the first time I heard about spiritual gifts. My high school small group leader had us do a year long study on spiritual gifts. Taking the time to learn about them proved to be a catalyst in my own life as we were encouraged to discover ours as well as use them to build up the body of Christ.

CPC has always been a place where we encourage people to use their gifts. Over 17 years ago I was sitting in my elder interview.

They were asking me all kinds of questions and the topic of spiritual gifts came up. Their exhortation was that we train people up at CPC to use their gifts and serve. I remember it like yesterday. John Brandon said, "we will never be the church who hires for everything. Fan the flame of people's gifts, teach them to serve; they are the true ministers in this church. Your job is to work your way out of a job!" Each of you here have a calling and a ministry. The church is all about every person in the body of Christ using their gift.

I'll never forget how the church body took care of my family after my mom passed. In our suffering, we saw the spiritual gifts of hospitality, mercy, serving, giving, exhortation, and pastoring; all used in love to build us up.

Peter summarizes the gifts in two categories: speaking and serving. "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..." He insists we use our gifts relying on God's strength, proclaiming His word, all the while not serving ourselves but serving one another.

If you don't know what your spiritual gifts are, we would like to help you discover them. We have a tool for you that gets you started in discovering your spiritual gifts. We sent the link to the Spiritual Gifts Test in our weekly e-newsletter called Take 5. You can also find the test on our app. You will find a tile labeled Spiritual Gifts. Once you have finished taking the test, contact one of us; we would love to walk through the test and find a place for you to use your gifts and build up the body of Christ.

Finally, Peter ends this section with a doxology of sort. "...so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen." Peter is reminding us of our purpose and how we should live because the end is near. With urgency and simplicity we are called to pray, to love, to show hospitality, and to serve one another. Why? It's so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. When we live in such a way, we are leaving the results up to Christ, relying on Him to use us and give us His hope to help one another persevere as exiles in a troubled land knowing that the end of all things is near. In the last days, the community of believers who glorify God will pray, love and serve.

Last week my niece turned 18 and it feels like yesterday I was holding her in the NICU. She is getting ready to graduate and go off to college in the fall. I feel this urgency to impart more wisdom to her as she is ushered into adulthood. Is she prepared and ready for what awaits her? I feel this same urgency in Peter's words. The older I get, time gets shorter, the end is near. This urgency for our church community and the lost has been in the forefront of our mind, especially as we get ready relaunch in August. Will you join me in living this way? Being alert and

clear-minded in your prayer life, love one another deeply, practice hospitality, and use your spiritual gifts, all to glorify God as the end of all things is near. When the world sees that kind of community, it's irresistible.

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

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