

The End is Near (but the sky is not falling)
1 Peter 4:7-11

“The end of all things is at hand...”

Introduction: In the children’s fable *Henny Penny*, known in America as *Chicken Little*, tells the tale of a chicken who is hit on the head by an acorn while eating and assumes the sky is falling. She then proceeds to involve her friend’s ducky lucky and turkey lurkey while seeking out answers, and they come to the presence of foxey boxey (or loxey – I’ve heard it both ways), and he invites the over-reactors into his home, offering help....and they all went in but never, never come out again. The point or moral of the story is clear: do not overreact to incomplete information and rush to judgment, for the consequences could be dire.

What would you do if you knew 2018 was your last year on earth? How would you respond, react, or think? Would we answer like Martin Luther when asked if he knew the current day would be his last, responded, ‘I’d plant a tree and pay taxes.’ In other words, he said he lived every day with the end in view, so his normal actions and activities would not change. We are going to look at a few verses in the middle of the epistle of **1 Peter**, a letter written to Jewish believers who were facing active suffering and fiery trials. They were challenged to have hope in the security of their future inheritance, that they would continue to walk in holiness, submission, and fearlessness. By responding well in the midst of persecution, they would not only have their faith refined, but they would proclaim the goodness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world around. In the middle of a discussion on suffering and outward and upward action, Peter reminded the church that **the end of all things is at hand**. Was this the same mentality of chicken little? No, Peter was not looking for believers to overreact, but rather to be motivated by the sure and coming end of all things.

Since Jesus left in the clouds after His resurrection, believers have awaited His return. We believe that His coming again in **IMMINENT**, meaning it can happen at any moment, and since the early church, every generation of believers waits expectantly for it in his or her lifetime. For us, the fact that Jesus is returning for sure is a **motivating factor that brings hope**. For unbelievers, His return is a fearful thing, since they are not prepared. Its like when I was in college and rented a room in an apartment with some other guys. I was given a room of a friend who was going to be gone for the first few weeks of the summer, so I made myself at home (which basically meant my clothes were all over the room). I got home late one night to find all my earthly possession piled in the hallway as my friend came back early, unexpected, and without notice and *took possession back* of his room (we are still friends, though that tested said friendship). The Bible frames Christ’s return much differently. We are called to live in light of His return, knowing that His return signals the dramatic change of our Lord and King taking possession of this earth. For believers, this life is the only taste of **hell** that we will ever face, and for unbelievers, this life is the only taste of **heaven** they will ever experience. Living in light of the fact that the end of all things is at hand has huge implications for us today, since this world is not our home. **How would you respond if you knew that 2018 was your last? The answer speaks volumes to how we will live each day to the glory of the Lord this year.**

The End Is Near, so Sound Thinking Must Guide

1 Peter 4:7 *The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.*

Sobriety and Self Control

The first command after talking about the end is NOT one of overreaction: *sell everything, move overseas, give everything away!* No, the call was for calm and clear thinking, for rational and logical mindsets in light of the end. **Sober-minded** has the idea of being “clear headed”, and is the opposite of being intoxicated and out of control. **Self-controlled** is virtually synonymous, meaning that thinking and actions should be measured. A shortened version of this verse would simply be “**Keep sane and level headed so you can pray.**” The way that our minds function properly is that they are grounded on Scripture, the historical redemptive story of the Bible, and the realities of the gospel. It’s a bit concerning when I see Christians respond like the world when looking forward to the new year: “*Goodbye 2017 and Good Riddance – here’s to a better 2018!*” This is short-sighted, narrow, informed-by-the-world-instead-of-Scripture kind of logic. We know that this world is broken, dying, and will mean suffering for us as well as the effects of sin – including injustice, death, pain, and sorrow. *How do we know if we are thinking Biblically? Do we turn to prayer in light of the end?*

Purpose of Prayer

Prayer signals dependency. Prayer recognizes that we need the Lord, that we desire Him, and we need Him to move and act if anything of significance will come about. When our thinking is wrong, we begin to take life into our own hands and become purely reactionary. We can become too focused on the here and now, or too focused on the future (not typically our problem). We can get too focused on ourselves, either by self-exaltation (I don’t need God) or too debased or introspective (even God cannot help me). Self-controlled, sane thinking leads to properly focused prayer, which keeps us in tension of living in this world while looking forward to the future.

What does this mean for us in 2018? We need to be committed to continual growth in our knowledge of God, His will and character, which comes from a persistent study of His Word. **Theology** simply means a study of God, and we embrace it as a necessity, not a bad word. I find it interesting that we love our kids taking AP classes in Science, English, and History classes, we desire they advance in experience and discipline in athletics and music, and prepare them for future scholastic achievement, but DOWNPLAY their capacity to understand theology and the depths of God. Perhaps we have the wrong expectation for them and us. Peter’s response to the reality of the brevity of life was to **think rightly about the future in order to function properly in the present**. We must continue to train ourselves up in a growing knowledge of our God and Savior through His Word.

The End Is Near, so Love Must Rule

1 Peter 4:8-9 *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

Love Covers

The knowledge of Christ’s return should provoke us to **love**. Peter placed a high level of importance by saying this was what needed to happen “above all”, which does not diminish the other encouragements, but says to focus *especially* on loving each other. It’s interesting that the focus for Peter in light of the end was **NOT TO LOOK OUTSIDE BUT INSIDE**, to re-double efforts to love those who are fellow believers. He used the word “**earnestly**”, using the same idea as in 1 Peter 1:22, meaning relentlessly. We are to fervently maintain love because we know our love is apt to grow cold (Matt. 24:12). How many people have said they have “*fallen out of love*” with someone? Earnestly maintaining love means loves needs to be **stoked** in order to be displayed to others, to be **stretched or put into tension** in order

to maintain its health. Love is supernatural and hard, requiring death to self, selflessness and ultimate humility, none of which come easily for any of us.

Last week I was able to celebrate John and Pat Bakker's 50th wedding anniversary. This was a celebration of God's grace and the perseverance and determination to love. 50 years of marriage between two sinful people brings about hardship, hurt, and all kinds of potential resentment, not to mention the revealing of loads sin. The antidote to these realities is love. Love that is relentless to decide to love, recognizing that love is a volitional choice greater than an emotional feeling.

But just staying together does not express love the way Peter describes it. There are unhealthy marriages that have lasted, but are miserable and joyless. Peter described love in action this way, "**love covers a multitude of sins.**" This is similar to Proverbs 10:12, which says "*Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses*" Admittedly, this is a tough phrase which has created disputes over its interpretation, but the meaning seems clear. When we lavish love on others, the sins and offenses of others are overlooked, particularly when they are against us. In other words, **love is the foundation of forgiveness and reconciliation**, not only the love of Christ on the cross which paid for sin, but the outpouring of love on others to move forward in trust, acceptance, and restoration. Love of God expressed toward others embraces the truth that love is greater than someone who is deserving, or who has earned, or has measured up. Love humbly overlooks the sin of others which is necessary in any family, marriage, or church. It's the part of love that keeps no record of wrongs and bears and endures all things. Love keeps us away from self-righteous responses to other sinners, knowing that we ourselves are loved by God and its by His grace alone that keeps us away from the same sin.

Love Welcomes

But love does not end with our ability to forgive and treat our family humbly, it extends to those we may NOT know. Peter says in light of the end, they must show **hospitality**, or literally **to love strangers**. This is an essential quality for elders (1 Tim. 3:2) and widows who would be helped out by the church (1 Tim. 5:10), as well as the mark of all true believers (Rom. 12:13). In the culture of Peter's writing, this would have been an extension of love to the larger Christian community, those who would visit the church from outside and were in need. This would mean opening up homes and lives, not just to those close to you but to those you don't know, or make you uncomfortable, or who are socially awkward. It is by nature **hard to be hospitable**, which is why the caveat was placed there to do it **without grumbling**. There is a cost to sharing your life, space, time, and possessions with other, particularly those who are strangers. We tend to be fiercely loyal to close family and friends but do the Heisman (keep an arm extended) towards those we do not know. **Love welcomes the stranger, and even the strange. Hospitality opens our lives, hearts, and minds towards others, pushing past the normal discomfort and doing it without complaining!**

What does this mean for 2018? We are committed to our mission of making disciples and training up leaders, and we are going to keep the peddle to the metal in this pursuit. We are going to pray hard that God will stir the hearts of people to move out to Rancho Cucamonga and that the gospel would take root in many hearts in that area. We are going to bring in new staff and train up those who God has already brought here with an eye to send out more workers for the harvest, which will keep us all uncomfortable, dependant, and needing to work hard.

BUT, we are NOT going to do any of this at the sacrifice of the work of love here! We are going to commit to loving the Lord with all our heart so that we can properly love each other. This love means that we are willing to **forgive, to overlook, and be longsuffering** with those who sin, especially those who have sinned against us. We are going to **open our hearts to strangers**, especially those who visit us on Sunday mornings. Love demands that each of us look to welcome the stranger in conversation,

encouragement, friendship, in our homes, and in our lives. This transcends whether you are an introvert or extrovert, shy or make friends with a pole. Love is what shows we are true disciples, and by love the world will know who we are (John 13:35).

The End Is Near, so Ministry Must be Active

1 Peter 4:10 As *each* has *received* a *gift*, *use it to serve one another*, as *good stewards* of God's *varied* grace: ¹¹ *whoever speaks*, as one who speaks oracles of God; *whoever serves*, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies-

Purpose of Gifts

The third round of commands that Peter gave in light of the end drawing near was using the gifts God has given to **serve one another**. The word "serve" here is the word "diakonountes", which has as its root idea "diakonos", which means to wait on someone or wait on a table (like a waiter or waitress). This word is where we get the word "ministry" or "to minister", which simply means to serve each other. We are all called to this level of serving. We are called to serve the needs of **each other**, those inside the family. Inherently in this call means that ministry is for every believer, it is hard, and it requires sacrifice. So God has gifted us with the ability to do it. Notice what this says about the ability to serve:

Each one – Every believer has received a gift from the Holy Spirit, meaning every born again believer has been specially equipped by God to serve. No one is cut out of this, meaning no one is absolved from the responsibility to serve

Received – Gifts are exactly that, a receiving of God's grace that is unearned. The word for gift is "charisma", with "charis" being the word for grace. This means God gave us exactly what He intended. Gifts are different from personality or other strengths, although God gave us everything that we are and intended us to use it all for His glory

Stewards – A steward is a manager, one who takes care of something for someone else. The manager does not own the company but runs it for the owner. We do not own our gifts nor are they ours to keep. We must view our gifts as something God has given to us for a time to be used, grown, and cultivated for His glory, not our own. We are called to be faithful with what we've been given, as gifts have been entrusted to us.

Varied – The gifts that He gives fall under TWO BROAD CATEGORIES (as we'll see), but they are **varied and multi-colored**. In other words, God gives out gifts to each one of us, but they are used in concert with our talents, personalities, and situations in life so that no two people look the same or use them the same. Gifts are the same the way people are the same. We have the same makeup but are intensely unique as we play out how God has created us. This means that two people can have the gift of teaching, but the scope of that teaching will be vastly different, and that is intentional. God does not rank success of the gifts the way we do. There is not "unimportant" part of the body. We are all gifted to play the role He intends for us.

Intended to be used – The purpose of our gifts is to be used to serve one another. Sometimes we get paralyzed in our thinking because we may not identify what exactly our gift is. We think we have to figure that part out **before** we start serving. I would propose the exact opposite. We begin to lovingly engage the service of each other, and our gifting will absolutely become visible, clear, and known.

Practice of Gifts

The idea of serving is all through the NT and is used in a variety of ways. Serving is seen as **Providing meals and food for others** (Matt. 8:15; Mark 1:31; Luke 4:39, 10:40); **Visiting those in prison** (Matt. 25:44; 2 Tim. 1:18); **Providing financial support** (Luke 8:3; Rom. 15:25; 2 Cor. 8:19-20), as well as **general ways** (Matt. 20:28 – Jesus came to serve; 1 Tim. 3:10, 13 – Deacons serve; those that helped Paul – Acts 19:22). Serving means we identify the real needs of fellow believers and we seek to meet those needs, whether they are physical or spiritual. This service breaks down into two broad categories:

SPEAKING – This would include the categories of preaching, teaching, wisdom, knowledge, and discernment. The qualification given here about speaking is uttering “**the oracles of God**”. This means that we do not speak from opinion or preference but speak out of what God has already spoken in His Word. It is more than study and exegesis, but not less than this. The goal of speaking is to serve, to speak the truth, to declare the glories of God’s grace, and to display His fame. Anyone with gifting this way knows that it necessitates hard work in study and preparation, learning the art and science of communicating to others. Anytime there is a compliment to one who is a gifted communicator, it should be understood by all that the gift is from God and thusly we are simply stewards of it, taking no credit for themselves but deflecting praise to the giver of all good gifts.

SERVING – This would include the categories of administration, prayer, mercy, or helps. The qualification for serving is to do so “**by the strength that God supplies.**” This means that serving is difficult and cannot be done in our own strength. Serving is the backbone of any church, and though the teaching gifts get the face time, it’s the gifts of service that make things happen. It’s the willingness to serve with a meal, a visit to the hospital, helping with kids ministry, cleaning up around here when no one sees. Its being available to help someone move, to help someone financially, to leave margin in life to help others here. Service comes at a cost and thusly we are supplied with supernatural strength from God.

What this means for 2018: We are all called to **ministry**, which means by nature we are **servants**. You are here to serve, not just be served. There is certainly a mutuality in service, but our mindset in coming here is not what the church can do for me, but how can I engage with loving service. We are intentionally stretching ourselves as a church, not only sending one of our faithful young families in the Durso's, but potentially releasing several others to move with them to see a revitalized work in an area ready for gospel saturated teaching and those living it out. That means we are cutting down our margin here, meaning there are less people to continue doing the necessary work around here. We are looking for even greater participation **from the hundreds of ministers in this church**. 2018 could be the year that we do not lack help in children's or youth ministry, or that no one staying in the hospital or home is without a visit, or that someone in physical need goes without. The needs here are many, and can only be accomplished when we ALL step up and serve the way we've been gifted, equipped, and empowered.

It also means we need to keep training leaders and teachers, not only giving them opportunities to demonstrate faithfulness, but honing their gifts. When I came to this church 14 years, I loved telling friends outside that at 25 years old, there was immense encouragement as I fumbled forward learning how to preach. That is a tremendous legacy. We not only want to stand stalwartly on preaching God's Word alone, but want to be a place that loves seeing young men how to preach and young women to teach, encouraging them along the way. This means an investment of time, training, and even releasing as we seek to send more and more qualified workers into the harvest.

So we celebrate what is going to happen in Rancho, but we do not rest, but continue to pray, to love, and serve each other, continuing to train up the next generation and entrusting them with this sacred trust of the gospel

The End Is Near, so God's Glory Must Fuel our Worship

1 Peter 4:11b *in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

The reality of the imminent return of Christ is motivating, but there is an even greater motivation that Christ points to: the glory of the Father that comes to us through Jesus Christ. Jesus who condescended from glory to seek to glorify His Father on the cross (John 17:1-5), bringing many sons to glory so we could see His glory (John 17:24). In other words, Jesus died to glorify the Father. He died so that we could be reconciled with the Father and experience His glory forever. We are called to glorify God in everything, since glory and dominion belong to Him.

What this means for 2018: We all want life to matter, and want to make sure that there is purpose behind all of this. That is why our knee jerk reaction to having a limited time to live is typically doing something grandiose and out of the normal. But here is the glorious reality of our life in Jesus: **we have been called to something far greater than ourselves, greater than gaining possession or wealth, greater than anything that we can do in this life or world. We are called to glorify God in EVERYTHING.** And He tells us **how** to actually do this: pray, love, and serve each other. Is there more to our Christian life than this? Yes, but there is certainly not less. Let's commit these things to God's glory this year, asking ourselves what areas in our lives still need to yield to the Lordship of Jesus, what things we need to die to, so that we can think, love, and serve well.