

“Grace On Display”

1 Peter 4:7-11

Tim Nichols and Craig Wiseman are a couple of Nashville song writers who have written several award winning songs. Fifteen years ago, the two of them had a mutual friend who received a medical misdiagnosis involving a particular form of cancer. The situation it created led them to begin talking to other friends who had been through cancer battles and had lost loved ones to the disease. There was a common denominator with each person they talked to. Those who were told they had cancer were given a new perspective on life upon realizing that they only had a limited amount of time left to live.

The two men got together to write a song that they hoped would inspire someone in such a situation. Within a week after having written it, the song was chosen by country singer Tim McGraw to be his lead single. The name of the song is “Live Like You Were Dying.”

The song tells the story of a man who has a conversation with another man in his early forties who gets the news that he has an unspecified disease and only has a limited amount of time left to live. Upon being asked about how he dealt with such a blow, he said that he intended to live life to the fullest and do things that he always wanted to do—skydiving, mountaintop climbing, and even riding a bull. More importantly, the man also said that he became a better husband and friend. He finally got around to reading the Bible and took a long, hard look at what he'd do differently if he could do it all over again. And the idea behind the song is that the man hoped his friend would get the same chance to live like he were dying.

What would you do if you were told that you only had one week left to live? How would news of your impending death change the perspective with which you live?

Well, it shouldn't take cancer or illness to get us to a point where we live like we are dying. Peter is going to tell us in our text that believers ought to always live with a sense of urgency because the time we have left is short.

It is important to remember that he is writing to suffering believers, men and women who were in the thick of conflict for the sake of their faith. There didn't seem to be any relief on the horizon for them. But he suddenly introduces a thought that was sure to alleviate their struggle and help provide them with hope. He says in verse 7, "The end of all things is at hand." And what follows in this passage are several, intensely practical instructions. Beginning here and continuing through verse 19, he gives ten individual commands, each of which reflect God's grace in their lives.

In this text, notice in verse 10 that Peter says living for the glory of God involves being good stewards of His manifold, or multi-faceted grace. God has a matching and sufficient grace for whatever trial you face. The grace of God is supplied to the people of God, and it is all to the glory of God. I want to show you just a few ways that God's grace is to be on display in your life as a believer.

1. ACCOUNTABILITY to be anticipated (4:7a)

"The end of all things is at hand..."

It is obvious several times throughout the epistle that Peter writes with a strong sense of urgency. Keep in mind that fact that he had a sense of his own impending death for the sake of the gospel. It would only be three or four years later that he would be martyred. Tradition says that Nero had Peter crucified upside down. (Clement of Rome)

As Peter looked around, he could see the tension between Rome and Christianity beginning to boil, and it would not be long before it became a cauldron of open persecution. Hence, the urgency with which he writes.

The 'end' that he refers to here in verse 7 is not the end of their troubles, or the end of persecution. Rather, Peter is referring to the end of the age. He is speaking of the consummation of all things when Christ comes again. It is a reference to the future hope that he has already mentioned back in chapter 1 when he said that believers are being guarded by the power of God:

1:5—“...through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

He is calling on Christians to live the rest of the time in the flesh with their hope fixed on what they will receive at the end. We are to live in eager anticipation of Christ's return.

Whenever the glory of God is foremost in our thinking, the return of Jesus Christ is what we look forward to the most.

It impacts how we live our lives in the here and now. What exactly does such 'anticipation' do for us practically?

Produces urgency

There is no time for us to delay or put off obedient living, for time is slowly ticking away. Again, remember what Peter has said back up verses 1-2:

“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.”

Each one of us have an unspecified amount of time left in the flesh, in the body. Either Christ will come first, or the time will come when we will take our final breath in this life. Therefore, there ought to be a sense of urgency that is being produced in our lives. Time is short.

Establishes priority

Since the end of all things is at hand, we no longer slog through our days with a lack of purpose. Instead, we live each day to the fullest. We live for those things that matter most. Every detail matters. Each opportunity we have to serve God is better seen for what it is.

Pretend that you have a bank account that receives a fresh deposit of \$86,400 every single day. You are free to spend the money any way that you want, but the unspent balance is not carried forward to the next day. Regardless of what you have spent by the end of the day, the balance is reset daily at \$86,400.

What would you do with that account?

Now consider the fact that each dollar represents the number of seconds in one day—24 hours per day times 60 minutes per hour times 60 seconds per minute. This equals out to 86,400 seconds every single day. Once they are “spent,” they disappear. The balance is reset at midnight with a new day.

Life must be viewed as a sacred trust to be used wisely. A person can't read through the gospels and not see that the truth of the second coming should promote urgency and establish priority in our lives. Jesus said a lot about it!

Gives clarity

The things that matter the most are kept front and center when we live with the end in mind. Peter says, “The end of all things is at hand!” That ought to make a

difference in the way that you spend your days in this life. It ought to impact how you plan for the future. It is this thought that will help you become patient through life's struggles.

What's interesting to me is that Peter wrote these words in 63 AD. That was 1,955 years ago in past history. How could the end of all things be at hand if there were still at least nearly two millennia of future human history left to be written? Whenever you study the New Testament you will notice that both the apostles and the early church expected Jesus to return in their lifetimes. Were they mistaken to think in such a way?

The answer is no! The New Testament does not teach the immediate nature of Christ's return—it teaches the imminent nature of His return. Whenever we refer to the 'imminence' of Christ's return, it simply means that Jesus could come any moment. It is the next thing on God's prophetic calendar.

Peter is going to explain further about how the imminent 'end of all things' should motivate us to live in a practical sense. Notice that he points out some:

2. ATTITUDES to be reflected (4:7b-11a)

"...therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies..."

The attitudes that he mentions in these verses all serve as evidence of God's grace on display in the life of the Christian. Each one comes in the form of a

specific command, implying intentionality and responsibility on our part as believers.

Be self-controlled and sober-minded

Rather than living on impulse like those who don't know God, the Christian displays self-control.

Self-control serves as evidence that a person has come alive spiritually to the things of God. It is listed with the fruit of the Spirit that the apostle Paul describes in Galatians 5.

The word that Peter uses here is a different word than the one used by Paul. The word used in Galatians speaks of a control of one's appetites. The word that Peter uses here implies sound judgment or discretion.

The NASB translates verses 7 this way:

"...therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit."

If I were to paraphrase it, Peter is essentially saying, "Keep a level-headed perspective. Don't go off the deep end in your thinking and living." Keep calm and carry on!

When it comes to end time speculation, there are two extremes to be avoided. On one hand, we must avoid living in a way that is dismissive or uninterested in the truth of Christ's return. On the other hand, we must avoid an overly preoccupied interest that sets dates, or builds fall out shelters like some doomsday prepper. We don't look around in panic, quit our jobs, and become cave dwellers.

We must live a level-headed life that seeks to glorify God in the everyday details of life, while looking for Christ's return.

We must not become intoxicated by the spirit of the age, but live in a 'sober-minded' way. We must think clearly.

“Sober-minded” — *word is ‘nepho’ and means to be discreet or watchful; to be calm and collected in spirit*

Paul uses this same word to describe Christians in 1 Thessalonians 5 where he speaks of the coming day of the Lord. Though it will come like a thief in the night, it won't catch those who are sober-minded off guard.

1 Thessalonians 5:6—“So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.”

Peter says that we are to think soberly 'for the sake of our prayers.' I find it interesting that prayer and intentional, godly living go hand in hand. Prayer is what keeps us in a state of preparedness. It keeps us spiritually sensitive. Prayer is how you and I become aligned with God's will.

In my sermon preparation, I have a process that I go through every week without exception. First, I read myself full. Then, I write myself clear. But I've not done anything until I have prayed myself hot! Once all of that is done, only then do I try to preach myself empty.

Now, I don't know what your weekly responsibilities involve in life. Yours are different than mine, but no less important. Whether you're a stay-at-home mom, or a construction worker, or an office executive, or even retired, prayer is the way you make it through life. Prayer is the key to close communion with God and critical for our effectiveness.

Keep loving one another earnestly

While we watch and wait for the appearing of Jesus, we have our marching orders. We are not to live out the rest of our time in isolation from others, but in close community with ‘one another.’ (used 3 times in these verses)

One of the unfortunate side-effects of our American way of life is a proud individualism that chips away at community. Some have reduced the Sunday morning gathering of the church to nothing more than something that a person can optionally attend for their own personal benefit.

When we read the New Testament through our Western lens, we automatically apply these commands to ourselves in a personal way. And yet if we aren't careful, we can miss the corporate application. Peter is speaking to believers.

Scott Sauls — *“Membership in a local church means joining your imperfect self to many other imperfect selves to form an imperfect community that, through Jesus, embarks on a journey toward a better future...together.”*

Peter says, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly.” It is impossible to obey this command if you are not in a close relationship with others.

- “Above all”—of supreme importance
- “Keep loving one another”—implies initial start
- “Earnestly”—fervent in application

The love that we are to have for one another is not surface level emotion, but involves an act of the will as Christian men and women love one another as brothers and sisters. If ever there was a time we needed to remain close to one

another, that time is now. We live in a time of deep seated division everywhere you turn. The church of Jesus Christ should be different.

Notice that Peter says when we love one another with this type of willful, intentional, Spirit-produced love, it 'covers a multitude of sins.' That simply means that it doesn't hold the shortcomings and failures of others over their head. Rather, love is most vividly seen through forgiveness.

Show hospitality without grumbling

The 'hospitality' mentioned in verse 9 is a willingness to serve. In the first century world, those who traveled didn't have hotels quite the way we do today. Instead, travelers were often dependent upon others to open up their homes and provide shelter. The early church used these as an evangelistic opportunity. Many unbelievers came to faith in Jesus through the generosity and hospitality of His people.

In many ways, it has become offensive to us in our culture when someone knocks on our door unannounced. We don't answer our phones when we don't recognize the number, and we don't want to be inconvenienced when a stranger rings our doorbell unless they're making an Amazon delivery. Could this yet be another unfortunate side effect of individualism and prosperity?

Notice the 'one another' emphasis again.

Hospitality without grumbling means that it is no longer an imposition for us to open up our lives to someone else. It is an opportunity for us to reflect God's grace. And it should be especially true for those of us in the same family of faith. How have you done so lately?

Speak and serve by God's strength

“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace...”

Whether you realize it or not, you are a gifted person. The Bible says that every member of the body of Christ is uniquely gifted to meet specific needs in the body. The grace of God gifts us to serve one another to the glory of God. God is glorified in His church when we selflessly serve one another and seek to build one another up.

“...whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.”

Peter broadly describes spiritual gifts by putting them into two categories—speaking gifts and serving gifts.

Those who speak must not spout their own opinion, but rather speak the ‘oracles’ of God. That is, divinely revealed truth as contained in Scripture. We must be a people who are saturated in the Word of God.

Those who serve must not do so in their own strength or self-reliance, but rather do so from divine dependence.

Taken together, all of these attitudes are descriptive of how Peter says we are to live out the remainder of our time in love and service to one another. The end is at hand!

And yet what is to be our ultimate motive?

3. AMBITION to be upheld (4:11b)

“...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

This is Peter's main emphasis in these last two chapters—they were to have the same mindset that Jesus had, they were to live with urgency, they were to love and serve one another—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Christ!

Why? Because to Him alone belong glory and dominion.

Walking through a passage like this provides us with an opportunity to take inventory of our lives. Ask yourself, "How am I making the best use of the rest of my time?" Since the end of all things is at hand, you and I ought to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God. How is it on display in your life?

Perhaps you would do well to ask yourself a series of probing questions:

- How much time do I spend at work, and what is my motive?
- How much time do I spend in leisure?
- How much time do I spend with family and loved ones?
- How much time do I spend in the Word? In sacrificial service? In sharing my faith with others?

Do you want to know what I feel like a big part of my job is week after week? It is to get you to do now what you'll be glad you did then. Giving for the glory of God. Serving for the glory of God. Going...Sharing. All for His glory.

Martin Luther said that there are really only two days that we need to be concerned with on our calendar—this day, and that day. What we do this day matters when we view in light of that day, the day of Christ's appearing.

1 Peter 1:6-7—“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested

genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

That’s what the Lord wants for your life. He doesn’t want your life to be wasted with empty pursuits. Hopefully, it won’t take illness or impending death for us to begin living with the right perspective.

For various trials, God has varied grace!

He wants you to have a tested faith, one that will result in praise and glory and honor when Christ appears. When He appears, when we see Him face to face, every ounce of sacrifice and suffering in His name will all be worth it.

Has Jesus Christ changed your life the way that Peter outlines in this passage? He describes a deep, inward change that has taken place in the life of the person who has truly believed the gospel. This change shows up in a tangible way. If there no change, perhaps there is no Christ. Turn from your sins and trust Him now for salvation. He loves you. He died for your sins. He conquered death through His own resurrection, and He stands ready to give you eternal life and satisfy your thirsty soul.

“Father, thank You for the reminder that the end of all things is near. Help us to live and prioritize those things that matter most. For those who aren’t saved, I pray that that Your Spirit brings conviction to their hearts. May Your grace be on fully display in our personal lives and in our church, all to the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.”