

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 7/25/93
I Peter 4:7-11 "A Prescription for Living in the End Times"

Intro:

Quite often someone will say to me, "We've got to be living in the end times. What do you think?" What they mean, of course, is that sin is so rampant, and the effects of sin so ugly, that the return of Christ must be near.

Q: Are we living in the end times?

I think you might be surprised what the apostle Peter thought about that question. Turn to I Peter 4.

Scripture Reading: I Peter 4:7-11

Notice that first phrase.

V 7 "But the end of all things is at hand."

Do you believe Jesus Christ is coming again? Do you believe He could come today? If you believe God's Word, you do!

Peter heard two statements that marked him for life.

Jn 14:2-3 "I go to prepare a place for you. If I go, I will come again."

Acts 1:11 (the angels said), "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."

Q: Since Jesus left, and is coming again, how are we supposed to live in the mean time? That's the question God's Word will answer for us this morning.

I Pt 4:7-11 is "A Prescription for Living in the End Times."

Proposition: We have 2 responsibilities, according to I Peter 4:7-11.

I. Keep looking UP (7).

II. Keep looking OUT (8-11).

A. For opportunities to love one another ((8-9)

B. For opportunities to minister to one another (10-11)

1. Speaking Gifts

2. Serving Gifts

I. Keep looking UP (7).

V 7 "But the end of all things is at hand..."

The end is at hand.

Now I know what you're thinking, "Wait a minute. Peter's timing was a little off, wasn't it? Peter didn't live in the end times, did he? After all, more than 1900 years have passed since he penned those words!"

Peter's purpose is not to lay out an eschatological chart. He's concerned with moral responsibility, not a chronological diagram.

Remember Peter was a Jew. In Peter's day, Jewish eschatology was pretty basic. Jewish rabbis divided human history into 2 ages: First there is The Present Age. That's obvious. Next, there's The Age to Come.

The Jews believed the Age to Come would be a time of both judgment and blessing, resulting ultimately in the establishment of the New Heavens and Earth. The Jews also believed the Age to Come would be inaugurated when the Messiah entered history. They called that the "Day of the Lord."

Now here's where the confusion entered in for the Jewish scholars in the first century. In their study of the OT, they failed to see that the Scriptures predicted, not one, but 2 comings of the Messiah. The Messiah would come the first time to as the Suffering Savior, and the second time as the Reigning King.

Now plug all that background into v 7.

How could Peter say "the end of all things is at hand"? When Jesus the Messiah came to this earth 2000 years ago, He inaugurated the Age to Come. There's actually an overlap. When Christ left, He told Peter and the apostles He'd come again. Key: The Bible refers to this entire period between His 2 comings as the "end times" or "the last days."

Acts 2:16, 17 (Peter's sermon, quoting Joel) "...in the last days..."

II Pt 3:3 "Knowing this, there shall come in the last days scoffers"

I Cor 10:11 "Now all these things happened unto them for examples, and are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come."

Now do you see why Peter was so dogmatic? "The end of all things is at hand." If that was true in his day, how much more so in ours! The return of Christ is immanent.

Illust:

We're living in the last days. The end is near.

Q: So how should we live?

A: Our first responsibility--Keep looking up!

Notice the 2 imperatives...

1. Be ye therefore soberminded.

The word means to be of a sound mind, to keep your mind steady and clear. In the modern vernacular, we'd say, "keep cool."

It's a warning against wild thinking about prophecy. We must always approach eschatology with a sense of balance. Don't get caught up in an unbiblical emphasis on prophecy. Don't set dates for Christ's return.

I'm not saying don't study prophecy. But never forget that God's intended purpose for prophetic texts is to affect our lives today.

2. Watch unto prayer.

Peter had a firsthand experience with this one. In fact, he blew it. When he should have been watching, he was sleeping.

Q: What does it mean to "watch unto prayer"?

Wiersbe says it means to be alert in our praying. There's no room in the Christian life for laziness. If we're going to survive in end time living, we need to be in constant communication with our Lord through prayer.

Key: If we're going to survive in the end times, we've got to keep looking up.
Caution: This implies we have a relationship with the Lord. Do you?

Q: How much time did you spend in prayer this past week? For yourself? For your kids? For our church? For our country?

Keep looking up!

Illust:

Tran: In Peter's prescription for end time living, there's our first responsibility. Keep looking up.

II. Keep looking OUT (8-11).

Our first responsibility is to keep looking up. Why? We need the Lord. Our second responsibility is to keep looking OUT. Do you know why? Because we need each other.

So keep looking out.

Q: For what? For opportunities.

Q: What kind of opportunities? Peter mentions 2 kinds...

A. For opportunities to Love one another ((8-9)

Vv 8-9 "And above all things have fervent love among yourselves..."

Jesus said, "By this will all men know that you are My disciples if you have love one for another." Paul said, "But the greatest of these is love," and "But the fruit of the spirit is love." John said, "Beloved, let us love o.a. for love is of God, and everyone that loves is born of God, and knows God" (I Jn 4:7).

Love is the preeminent virtue for the Christian. Peter echoes the same. Above all things have fervent love among yourselves.

Let's lay something out on the table. Love is NOT easy, and love is NOT natural. Love is something we have to work at.

The word "fervent" means stretched, or zealous. It's a word that pictures an athlete straining to reach the goal. It speaks of intensity and effort.

Did you ever notice how the Bible commands us to love? That goes against modern thinking. Our culture says, "You can't command love." Do you know why our culture says that? Because the world views love as an emotion, a feeling. And you can't command me to have feelings for someone!

That's true. But that's not biblical love. Biblical love is not an emotion, but a decision of the will that leads to action.

Illust: "Pastor, I don't love my spouse any more. What should I do?"

Learn to love your spouse! Make a decision that you're going to love your partner. The same goes in the church.

Love is a powerful thing. Love covers the multitude of sins (quoting Pr 10:12). What's that mean? In part, it means we treat each other the way God treated us. Love doesn't condone sin. But love covers sin.

Illust: Remember what happened to Noah in Gen 9? He got smashed, and shamefully uncovered himself. His son Ham came along and found his dad. He went out and told his 2 brothers, Shem and Japheth. What did they do? They went in, walking backwards, and covered up their father and his shame.

We need to be looking out for opportunities to love one another.

Q: What kind of opportunities? Look at v 9...

V 9 "Use hospitality one to another..."

The word hospitality means "to love strangers."

Remember, for the first 200 years, churches did not have buildings. The early church met in homes. If there was no hospitality, there was no church! What's more, in Peter's day there were many traveling missionaries and teachers. There weren't many motels, and the ones around were indecent and even dangerous. So homes were needed for hospitality.

Listen to Peter's plea, "Use hospitality to o.a." And notice the precaution. When you show hospitality, do it "without grumbling."

Not that hospitality is without discretion. There's an old Italian proverb that says, "A guest is like a fish. After 3 days he stinks."

Illust:

Q: What's the point?

If we're going to survive in end time living, we need to keep looking out, for one another. We're in serious trouble when our focus is IN instead of OUT. Self-centered people are warped and dangerous people. But selfless and self-sacrificing people are as refreshing as a cool breeze on a sultry summer day!

Challenge: We need to be aggressive in looking for opportunities to love o.a.

Illust:

B. For opportunities to **Minister** to one another (10-11)

This is a great section! Back in April of 1989, we investigated this text as part of a series on Spiritual Gifts.

Vv 10-11 "As every man has received the gift..."

Q: What is "the gift"?

A: A "gift" is any God-given endowment which may be used for the benefit of the church. Peter has in mind spiritual gifts.

Q: Who has a spiritual gift? EVERY man has received the gift.

Q: What's the purpose of spiritual gifts? "MINISTER the same one to another"

Stop right there. Don't miss this. According to this verse, WHO has received spiritual gifts? EVERY person. Not just clergy. Not just Christian professionals. If you are a Christian, you possess a divine investment for some form of ministry.

This is exciting. This is why we say that at WBC, every member is a minister! Every person here who knows Jesus Christ has a spiritual gift. The Spirit of God has equipped you to perform a very special function in this church.

But listen. God didn't give you your gift to hoard it. Your gift is for the benefit of the people of God.

Tragic: When we don't use our gift, the whole church suffers.

Illust: We hate it when someone hoards what we need. One summer I worked construction for LPZ. The foreman told me to move a pile of gravel. I worked for a couple of hours with a shovel and wheelbarrow. Then a guy brought over his bulldozer. He moved more gravel in one swipe than I did in 2 hours! I don't know where the guy was 2 hours earlier when I needed him.

Listen. There's no need for burnout in the church. It's tragic that in most churches, 90% of the work is done by 10% of the people. I'm thankful that's not the case here.

Yet I wonder. Have you identified your spiritual gift? Are you using it?

Objection: "What kind of spiritual gifts are there?"

Great question! Look at v 11. There are 2 categories of gifts.

1. Speaking Gifts

V 11 "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God"

There are speaking gifts. God has equipped some Christians to have an oral ministry. They are to be God's mouthpiece in the church. They speak for God. Their job is to handle and proclaim the Word of God.

Eph 4 talks about gifted individuals with speaking gifts, "When He (Christ) ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (8). What kind of gifts? V 11, "And He gave some apostles...pastor/teachers." Why? "For the perfecting of the saints."

The church needs people with speaking gifts to use their gifts.

Q: What are some ministries in which speaking gifts are used?

A: It could range from preaching behind a pulpit, to a word of exhortation after the service. Those with speaking gifts can serve in SS ministries. They can teach children and teens. Or at rest homes.

But don't miss the guideline for using speaking gifts.

"let him speak as the oracles of God"

When you speak in a ministry in the church, don't give people your opinions. Don't give them your pet-peeves. Give them the Word of God.

Illust: If a farmer feeds his cattle a lot of rich, green corn, what will happen to the animals? They'll gorge themselves and bloat. They don't know any better. The farmer is responsible.

If you have a speaking gift, God holds you responsible for what you say.

James 3:1 "My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment."

Illust:

You may be thinking, "I can't talk in front of groups. Do I have a gift?"

2. *Serving Gifts*

V 11 "If any man minister..."

The word "minister" is a general word (diakonei) which means "to serve." Sometimes we minister with our talk. Sometimes we minister with our walk.

Those with serving gifts are specially endowed with God's grace so they can minister by deeds of kindness.

READ Rom 12:5-8

There are several types of serving gifts mentioned in the NT: mercy, giving, administration, the gift of faith, just to mention a few.

What type of ministries can utilize serving gifts? Peter just mentioned one area in v 9--Hospitality.

Key: Your ministry should reflect your spiritual giftedness.

Illust: If you're working in the shop, you don't use a saw to drive a nail. Nor a t-square to cut a 2x4. Why not? That's not what they were designed for.

So it is with spiritual gifts. If God has given you a serving gift, what do you think He wants you to do with it? Serve! If you have the gift of mercy, then He probably doesn't want you to be trying to teach a S.S. class. He may want you to be visiting shut-ins, or ministering with people who have terminal illnesses.

Illust:

Q: What's our aim in using our gifts?

V 11 "that God in all things might be glorified..."

Spiritual gifts are not the same thing as talents. And the purpose for using spiritual gifts is not entertainment. Take for instance, music. The purpose of "special music" is not to make you feel good. It's certainly not to feed the ego of the singer. What is the purpose? "That God in all things may be glorified..."

The same goes for preaching, and any other use of gifts.

Challenge: There's God's prescription for survival in the end times. Keep looking UP. And keep looking OUT.

How is your relationship with God? Are you looking up?

Are you looking out? Are you using the gift God has given you?