

1 Peter 4:7-10

Hope in the storm

Living Near the End



I've always been one for picking up the pace as I'm running out of time. It's just the way I've always been wired. I was not a good student. I often really didn't care if I got a good grade in a class. But I also had enough pride that I couldn't let myself fail or even get a bad grade. A "D" was unacceptable. The truth is, that the importance to me of how good of a grade I got in a class was in direct proportion to how interested I was in the subject matter. If it did not interest me, then there was no motivation to study for the class. Papers, projects, and tests, would get a minimum of time and effort, so ending up with a "C" in those classes was fine by me. But sometimes, by half way through the class, that running score in the back of my mind told me that I was behind – maybe doing "D" work, or even failing. So the second half of the class I had to do "B, or even "A" work to get a "C" in the end. So I'd really apply myself and finish with a flourish! It would still only net me a "C", but at least it was not a humiliating "D" or "F". My motivation to bring my grade up was that time was running out. Running up against a deadline has a way of motivating most people, not just me, to redouble their efforts. Even today, I am running up against a deadline every 7 days, as I prepare to deliver a sermon every week. In the past decade or so I have finally developed better study habits. It used to be that Saturday was the day to sermonize because I was motivated by the Sunday deadline. I was able to focus better. My thinking cap stayed on my head better on Saturday. In the last few years that has changed. These days I'm working on it on Tuesday already, Thursday at the latest, and then only if I've been very busy. It's a lot easier on the mind and certainly gives me more time to think about my subject matter and research it better.

The End is Near!



Peter is trying to motivate Christ-followers by telling them something he fervently believed. There isn't much time left! Make the most of it! Serve Jesus with renewed vigor! Be obedient to the will of God in every area of your life! ***Be*** who and what He has made you to be! Do what He has given you to do! Prove to ***yourself***, to ***others***, and to ***God*** that your faith is genuine and not mere words! Let Him live through you powerfully, consistently! This is not the time to sit back, put up your heels, and take it easy! You are fast approaching the throne of God one way or another! If there ever was a time to pick up the pace it is NOW! **So what does that look like?!**



He starts out with "***Be clear-minded***" [vs. 4:7] If they thought it was short then, well then, it's ***really*** short now! . That is one thing that happens as the deadline approaches. It is easier to focus. All the normal distractions/diversions that usually can claim our attention cannot turn our heads any longer because there is no more time left! It's now or never! * Its like the end of the basketball game, 3 seconds left in the game and your team is one point behind, and you are at the free throw line shooting a one-and-one – in other words you have to make the first one to earn a second free throw! You need to make your first free throw to tie the game and put your team into overtime, and you need to make the 2nd free throw to win the game and be the hero! You can either be the hero or the goat! You can step it up or you can choke! But to make these crucial shots with the game on the line, you have to be clear-headed! Your focus must be absolute! All the fans trying to distract you – yelling and screaming insults – all the head games the opposing players are trying to distract you with - they have to all blur into the background. They become a non-factor. Your whole universe becomes just you, the basketball in your hands, and the rim of the basket about 14 feet away! Now, **THAT** is a clear mind!

We really need to live our lives like today is one of our last days! If the throne of God looms large to us, our focus will be so much better. I worry about Christians that are obviously getting toward the end of their lives and are living complacently. I know that the physical/mental ravages of old age or ill health tends to do that to a person, but I hate when people just give up! NEVER give up! Live for Jesus so that you can die easy, without regrets

[Heb. 10:35-39]

“...clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray”. Clear minded also had the connotation of being *pure* minded. How can a person pray if they are indulging themselves with thoughts that they know displease God – from sexual fantasies to being in a perpetual mental/emotional state of outrage and judgment, to living in a state of fear! None of this is of God! All of this and more clogs our mind with garbage, makes us unstable, until we are unusable to Him – out of fellowship with God and out of the game! It is not that we cannot talk to God. If we did, He would graciously hear us. But as it is, in the midst of our unrestrained thoughts, as dark as they are, we generally won’t! *As a young child, it was when I had done something wrong that I wanted to run away from home. That is an instinctive human reaction that has been there since the beginning



[Gen. 3:8]! When Adam and Eve sinned against God in Eden, if you remember the story, the first thing they did was hid from Him! That has also been the reaction of all of their descendants! We hide! We are ashamed and naked before Him, and we hide from Him! So, of course, there is little in the way of communication with Him! No, that is no way to have a relationship with God. We need clear minds, focused minds, pure minds! We need to utilized the natural ability that God has given us to discipline ourselves. We are not helpless before our lusts, passions, and base impulses, the voice in our head, our sins. No – not helpless! His grace is intended to rid us of sin, not enable us to perpetuate it! The Spirit of God is our help, our power, but He will not do it all. He will come alongside and work with us, but He will not do it for us! We must want what He wants more than we want to indulge our lusts, passions, base impulse, and in general, our sins. We must want the new life more than we want our old life and we must exorcise our will. But having said that, our will will never be enough! The Spirit of God gives us the edge we need to put us over the top so that we can obey God consistently. It is what we want most, and we always **do** what we want most! We have to desire intimacy with God more than anything,.. ANYTHING! We must want our relationship with Him uninterrupted by things that grieve Him! The things that grieve the Spirit of God are the very things that make us get into the gutter of common base lusts, and which destroy our lives and make us useless to God!

The great apostle tells us to love each other deeply [1 Pet. 4:8], and “from the heart [1 Pet. 1:22]! For the Christ-one there is no other way to love. One way we cannot love is to have a shallow love and to love only with words, or to just love in principle! No - we love hard, especially when it is hard to love! We love when we are betrayed, or hurt, or disappointed. We love people like we love our own children. Our children can certainly hurt us and disappoint, but we would never consider abandoning our love for them, because, of course, they are a part of us! **But so are the people in our church!** Our fellow believers are a part of Christ, as we are! To abandon our love for them would be like abandoning Christ! That is why when someone just walks away from church never to return, I simply don’t understand how that is even possible? Can a person just walk away from their family?! Unless they never considered the church their spiritual family! Something is wrong with a self-proclaimed Christ-follower who cannot connect in a loving way with the people of their own church! So, it is just so cold hearted to walk away, so un-Christ-like! Does God just walk away from us when we are bad, or irritating, or disappointing? No! Neither can we just walk away from our brothers and sisters in the church - unless we absolutely have no choice. I’ll admit that there are times when we **should** leave a particular fellowship of believers, but it should never be easy for us! If it is easy, then there has been no sense of deep love! Leaving people behind would be and should be a heart-rending decision! We are family, we are friends, we are connected in Christ and by His Spirit! There are no natural bonds with people who are not of our blood, but when we are together in Christ the bonds are blood bonds of a different sort – ***supernaturally*** bonded by the blood of Christ! Never forget the love that holds us together. It begins and ends with the unfathomable love that God has for us! And the best part of this love is that He forgives the betrayals of flawed people and loves us still! Stop insisting that to love people they must be near perfect. Even God doesn’t do that! You will never love anyone that way! We love what we can about someone for as long as they are willing to be loved by us!



Vs. 9 – Yes, as you may have suspected, this verse no longer applies to Christians – certainly not in the COVID-19 era! I’m kidding! It is a very strange time though. Since Karen and I have had the virus in September, we have enjoyed immunity for over a couple of months now. It sure has been nice to relax a bit and not live in fear of this virus, or to live in fear of giving it to anyone else! But with my surgery coming up tomorrow, we have had to be careful once again for the last couple of weeks, because I cannot afford to get even a cold! So, I could not even attend my mother’s 95th birthday celebration yesterday! That broke my heart as my brother is here from Washington, and my sister and her husband came from Tennessee for that momentous event,... and I could not be a part of it! BUT,.. once I’m on my feet again, we will have our own belated celebration with her, I’m sure! So, anyway, how do we practice this Christian hospitality in such a strange age? Well, how about... ***carefully!*** So we are on hold for a while! We’ll get back to it as soon as this blows over! What we are finding out in this age of COVID is how much we need each other – how much we need contact with people! Being deprived of contact is proving how detrimental isolation is to the human psyche. We were not made to be isolated. Isolation kills our spirit. Christianity, especially, is a connection, and it is not just me and God! Christianity is me and you and God! That is the way it works! That is why Christ instituted the church! To connect people to God AND to each other! So when Peter tells us to practice hospitality without grumbling, he is telling us to function within the perimeters of how He has made this thing to work! We have phones these amazing cell phones! Use them. Call someone up and encourage them! Check on each other! Call someone up from church out of the blue and surprise them with something like, “*Hi - How are you doing? I’ve been thinking about you, and when I think about you I want you to know I pray for you! I was just wondering if there is anything specific that you would like me to pray for?*”



Listen! This pandemic is proof that life is a precarious entity! We don't have much time on this earth to begin with, but the truth is that it can end for any one of us at any time! The overall deathrate of is low for COVID, but it seems to strike randomly. If your body's immune system overreacts to the virus, it doesn't matter how old you are, it will be very hard for you to keep living! Not many people's immune systems are over-reacting at this point, but the scary thing is that we don't know who it is that this will happen to! It could be me, or it could be you! Here is the thing - we need to live with a sense of urgency, as if these are our last days, because they very well might be!

Someone said "*live both like you will live forever and like you will die today.*" Live as if these are the last days, says Peter. He, and the early church were certain that Jesus would be returning soon. But this is how Christ-followers are supposed to live – like the end of our life here is near - like we really could be kneeling before the throne of God by day's end! There is a judgment for Christians too, you know! We will not be judged on the basis of our own works like everyone else, but on the basis of Christ's works so that Heaven is assured – a shoo-in – but because of Christ's character, not our own! But the quality and consistency of our service to Christ will be judged, if you remember, and revealed by the fire of judgment to be gold, silver, precious stone, or hay, wood, or stubble, depending upon our motivations when we served Jesus. Did we do it for people's approval, or did we do it because we needed to be needed, or did we do it because it was our job, or did we do it with a good or bad attitude - (like Peter points out that we should not be grumbling about having to provide hospitality for other Christians). Or... did we do it for the love of Jesus and out of the pure and sweet motive of serving Him! We need to heed the Holy Spirit here as he was speaking through Peter. The time is short. Who can doubt it?! If they thought it was short then, well then, it's **really** short now! But it may be even shorter for any one of us, because life is that precarious, day to day! Let's find a way, even in these frustrating weeks and months of the perpetual COVID emergency, to serve Jesus! Just because the COVID is here does not mean that the purposes of God have gone away or are playing second fiddle! No – the work of God is more urgent than ever!

