

# Living with the End in Mind

1 Peter: Hope Away from Home

1 Peter 4:1-11

Pastor Josh Black

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Good morning, First Free family! Thank you for joining us. Let me just say at the start that this is a little strange. I don't even like to FaceTime with one person, much less livestream to the whole church. But I think we're all out of our comfort zone right now. Some are confused. Some frustrated. Some scared. But everybody's out of their comfort zone. And maybe that's right where God wants us.

God has prepared us for times like this in his Word. Just think of what we've learned from 1 Peter over the last few weeks. The truths from this book should ground Christians and give us confidence, when our world is full of so much anxiety and uncertainty. As we begin, let me remind you of some key verses from 1 Peter 1.

1 Peter 1:3-5 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."<sup>1</sup>

Even though things may seem uncertain in our world right now, if we belong to Christ, we have great certainty! We have an inheritance that God is keeping for us. This gives us great hope. And should also give us great joy.

1 Peter 1:8-9 says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

We also know that the trials we face in this life are designed to test the genuineness of our faith. How we respond in times of crisis is where the rubber meets the road. And it's my prayer that your faith would be proven genuine and that God would be glorified (1 Pet. 1:7).

Now is a time for our faith, hope, and love to shine forth. Now is a time to apply the command to keep our conduct among the unbelieving world honorable so that they may see our good deeds and one day glorify God when Christ returns (1 Pet. 2:12).

We've learned that part of keeping our conduct honorable involves submission to human institutions. And that's one reason we're willingly and gladly submitting to the ban to not meet in groups larger than 250. But we're also not meeting, because we believe this is a way to bless others in our community, as 1 Peter calls us to do. We're doing what we can to slow the spread of this virus which will help us to protect the most vulnerable in our community.

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

### *The End is at Hand.*

Jesus told his disciples the last days would be marked by wars, natural disasters, famines, and persecution (Mk. 13). I don't know if Jesus had things like the coronavirus in mind when he said this. But a pandemic certainly affects people like disasters and famines. These things remind us that we're living in the last days.

Everybody who has ever lived between the first and second coming of Christ has lived in the last days. Nothing has changed with the coronavirus. It's just that things like this remind us that we're living in the last days.

And that reminder should help us to focus on what really matters. We should live with the end in mind. Christ said when we see these things spinning out of control, believers should remain watchful. I don't think that means we should try to figure out the date of Christ's return (as some of the emails I've received in recent days are doing!). I think it means we should live our lives with focus, expecting his return. Don't focus on the crisis in front of you. Focus on what's coming on the heels of all crises—the end of all things!

Or the way Peter puts it in our passage this morning: get your mind right! In verse 1, he says, "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking." In verse 7 he says, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers."

In light of the end, we need to get our mind right. Is your mind right in this crisis? Are your eyes on the right things? Is your heart in the right place? What are you spending your time thinking about? What would the people around you say?

If our mind is right, we need to realize our dependence upon God. And that will lead us to our knees in prayer (v. 7). But that's not all. There are two other ways we need to get our mind right in these last days. One has to do with our relationship with the world. The other with our relationship with the church. We need to be ready for suffering. And we need to be ready for serving.

### **READY FOR SUFFERING (1-6)**

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Let's begin with suffering. Look at verses 1-6.

#### **1 Peter 4:1-6**

*<sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. <sup>3</sup>For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. <sup>4</sup>With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; <sup>5</sup>but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. <sup>6</sup>For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.*

What's Peter saying in these verses? Well, bear in mind he's been talking quite a lot about how Christians relate to the world around us. We need to bless others. We need to live in such a way that we might win others. So, to use the familiar phrase, Peter assumes Christians are engaged in the world. But here he reminds them they should not be of the world.

When a person becomes a Christian, it's not as though the battle against the world just floats away. No, the battle is still quite real. And so Peter says, "Since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" (4:1).

What he's saying is your decisions to obey God rather than your passions and desires will lead to suffering. If you're going to be done with sin, it's going to hurt a bit. That's the Christian life. Christ himself learned obedience through suffering. But he was also raised to glory. And you will be too! Get your head around this. Get your mind right!

For the Christians in Asia Minor, they were being pulled in a number of ways. The entertainment of their day was pulling on them. The violence of the chariot races or the gladiator fights. The sensuality and risqué behavior of the theater were all in their past. And they still had family and business gatherings where there would be heavy drinking and even idol worship. That was their old life in the world. And it was still pulling on them.<sup>2</sup>

We face something similar today. Think of our own entertainment industry. Media, full of violence and sexual immorality. Don't you ever feel the pull to participate in it? Or what about your own family gatherings or business parties? Are there ungodly traditions that pull on you? What about when you're with your old friends at the bachelor party or the wedding reception? Do you feel the pull there?

If so, Peter is saying get your mind right. Be ready to suffer going without because of all that you have in Christ. And because of where you're ultimately going.

He also says you need to be willing to suffer the impact your Christian life will have on your relationships. Peter says when you don't join in with others living like the world, at first they'll be surprised, but then eventually they'll malign you (v. 4). How does this work? I think what happens is people begin to feel judged when you don't join in their flood of debauchery.<sup>3</sup> Then they may lay into you.

Once, Billy Graham was invited to play golf with President Ford and a PGA pro. After the round, one of his friends asked the pro what it was like playing with the President and Billy Graham. The pro erupted with cursing. He said, "I don't need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat." And he stormed off. Later his friend asked him what Graham said to offend him. To which the pro replied, "He didn't say anything. He didn't even mention religion. I just had a bad round." Graham wasn't dishing out heavy-handed evangelism. It sounds like his presence alone made this man feel judged. So he maligned Graham.<sup>4</sup>

Nobody likes to feel judged. But here's the thing: we will all one day be judged. And we won't be judged by other humans. We'll be judged by God. Peter says in verse 5, "They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

Peter draws our attention to the end, so that we can get our mind right now. All of us will one day stand before God. That should help us to focus on what matters. And what matters for us who live in the light of the last days? Sharing the gospel.

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<sup>2</sup> Karen H. Jobes. *1 Peter*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

<sup>3</sup> Jobes

<sup>4</sup> David R. Helm. *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ's Sufferings*, Preaching the Word

Look at verse 6: “For that is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.”

What does this mean? It doesn’t mean that the gospel was preached to the spirits of people after they died. What this means is that the gospel was preached to people who are now dead, before they died so that they could come to know Christ before the judgment.

Some people in Peter’s day may have jeered at the Christians and said, “What good is all of your holy living really going to accomplish? Christians die at the same rate as us pagans. The prudes at the same rate as the partiers.”<sup>5</sup>

People in our day may say something similar. Or they may say disease hits Christians just as much as it hits non-Christians. Or they may say, “Why would you believe in a God who allows death and disease in the first place?”

These are hard questions. But we have a really good answer to these questions. We have the gospel. The gospel is not a promise of avoiding death in this life. In fact, all of us will die unless Christ returns very soon. We’ll die from disease or disaster or something else.

But the gospel says that after we die, we don’t have to face the judgment of God with fear. Christ has died for our sins and is raised from the dead. And if we repent of our sins and trust in his death as the payment for our sins, we will live eternally.

This shows us just how good our God is. He’s provided life for his people beyond the grave. We must demonstrate this hope in our attitudes and actions in these days. And we must declare this hope with our words.

Get your mind right. We must be ready to suffer because of the gospel. That’s how we live with the end in mind in the world. Let’s now turn to see how we should live with the end in mind in the church.

## READY FOR SERVING

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Be ready for serving. This comes out in verses 7-11.

### 1 Peter 4:7-11

*<sup>7</sup>The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. <sup>8</sup>Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup>As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: <sup>11</sup>whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Isn’t this amazing? Peter has said the end of all things is at hand. He wants us to focus. He wants us to pray. And with this focused perspective, he says the number one thing you can do is keep loving one another in the church.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner. *1, 2 Peter, Jude*. The New American Commentary

As important as our witness is in the world, one of the most practical ways we can show the world who we are is through our love for one another in the body.

And Peter gets very practical. It's not a sentimental kind of love. It involves serving one another. He gives us two very tangible ways we can love one another in the church. Through hospitality and stewarding our spiritual gifts.

### *Hospitality*

We've talked a fair amount about hospitality in the last year or two. We've learned that hospitality is risky in the New Testament. It's sometimes even dangerous. But it's worth the risk. It's creating a space where a stranger can become a friend. It's often used in the New Testament as a way to start relationships with unbelievers. But it's also a way to serve the body of Christ.

In the first century they didn't have church buildings and so the church would meet in homes. This was inconvenient at times, but critical for the mission of the church.

Hospitality is critical for us as well. It always is. But maybe especially now in the weeks ahead. As people in your neighborhood are cooped up in their homes, could you open your home? Could you create space for a stranger to become a friend? As we're prevented from gathering together as a whole church in our building, could you open your home to help us to continue to fulfill our mission?

I want to encourage you. Be prudent and be safe. But don't completely isolate yourself from one another. If you can and if it's safe for you, you may consider getting together with your community group. That's what our community group is doing, even now as I speak.

If you don't think that's wise for you, you can always use technology to reach out to people. You can pray with others or encourage them over the phone or email or FaceTime.

We need each other during this time. Hospitality creates a space to learn of the needs people have. And that leads me to the second way we can love one another.

### *Serving*

Through using our spiritual gifts. I want you to notice the emphasis in verses 10-11. It's on God's grace. Everything we have is a gift from God. And all we have is given to us for a purpose—to serve others.

Even the talents we have are gifts we've received from God. And so, we don't keep them to ourselves. We share them with one another. We're stewards of gifts that came from God and belong to God. Not only our financial resources, but all we have.

In days like these, when people are scared, they can easily take on a scarcity mentality. I mean come on! How many rolls of toilet paper does a family really need?

But in these last days, we're called to be marked by generosity, not hoarding. There's a fine line between prudent prevention and panic.

As God's people, we have no reason to be afraid. God "who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things" (Rom. 8:32)?

We have all we need. We have eternal life through Christ. And we're rich in blessings. So let us seek to bless others with the blessings we've received.

If you've been blessed with speaking gifts, then use them to encourage people with the Word of God. People don't need any more opinions right now. They need the timeless truth of God's Word.

If you've been blessed with serving gifts, then use them with the strength God provides. Look for opportunities to meet the needs of those in the church and those in your community. Reach out to others to learn their needs and then seek to meet them in ways that make sense for you. Not recklessly, but sacrificially.

Throughout the history of the church Christians have been known for being on the front lines, when plague and pestilence is at hand, because they had hope beyond this world. Hospitals were founded by Christians in crises like these. May we be people who also rise to the occasion where we can.

God has given to us all things by his grace. And so, when we give ourselves to serve others, God gets the glory. And hopefully through our witness in these days, some will come to ask us of the hope that we have. And hopefully we'll be ready to give an answer.

In a world that's been turned upside down over the last week, I pray that people at First Free would stand firm. That we would get our minds right. Be ready to suffer for the gospel. Be ready to serve for the good of our community.

And for the glory of God.