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*The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 1 Peter 4:7*

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## End Time Priorities

Amen. What a glorious time of worship. He's the King of Kings, and he is coming back. Pastor Mitchell is doing well. We agreed some time ago that I would be preaching this weekend, and I'm grateful for the honor. Thank you for praying as I have been recovering from some eye difficulties. The King of Kings is returning. It is a glorious truth that defines how we live.

I remember, and this dates me a little bit, in college in 1988, reading the book, *88 Reasons Why Christ is Coming in 1988*. Somebody figured out the times and dates that the Father set by his own authority and proceeded to let the rest of us know. And in response, some folks went crazy, sold everything they owned, and moved up to a mountain waiting for Jesus to come. Well—he was wrong.

The next year the author actually published another book, *89 Reasons*. Apparently, he had calculated wrong and wanted to correct that error. And it still didn't happen! We are given to that kind of apocalyptic thinking. A few years later a book was published called, *The Coming Economic Earthquake*, warning believers about the approaching collapse within the next few years—which didn't happen.

Remember Y2K? All the computers in the world are going to go crazy. And we won't have electricity and we won't have water. And the transportation system is going to collapse in total chaos. And people actually, in response to that potential computer glitch, sold everything, moved into the mountains, built fortresses, stored up the food, the whole thing.

And for some reason, I get Facebook advertisements about buying a year's worth of food and burying it in the mountains. Probably based on other interests I have, but that is not one of them. But the people thinking in those ways are right about something. They're right about a sense of urgency. They're right that the end is coming and about wanting to be prepared for it. But they're wrong as well. They're wrong about the timing. We've seen that over and over again. These predictions take place in just about every generation since Jesus Christ ascended

into glory. People are wrong about the timing, but that's not the fatal error. The error is actually in their response.

How do we respond to the truth that Jesus Christ is returning and that the end is in fact near? The Apostle Peter helps us with our response. Peter was writing to a people waiting for Jesus to return. They were living in a very difficult age. It was a difficult time to be a believer. It was a difficult time for the church. And so Peter writes to believers who are waiting for the end, and he writes to them about apocalyptic priorities. He says, "The end of all things is near" (1 Peter 4:7). He lays out a life-changing fact—the soon return of Jesus Christ.

We have to understand that Peter is not necessarily talking about chronological time. He doesn't mean that it's 11:59 and the clock is ticking towards midnight. He means that in God's order of events, the very next thing is "the end."

Look back on the history of salvation. God created a beautiful creation in which there was harmony and peace and love. And then the fall where we fell into sin. And with this, corruption came into that beautifully created world. But then God set aside a people for himself through whom He would work Redemption and through whom he would bring the Redeemer. And then the birth of Jesus Christ—God made flesh—who walked among us. And then He went to the cross for our sake. He died for our sins. He purchased redemption. And now he has begun to restore all things. Because he rose from the dead, ascended on high in glory. And there's nothing else that has to happen yet for the End Time to come. All the events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ can begin at any moment.

Peter says that might be a day, that might be a thousand years. But that's next. That's what's around the corner. Everything else has happened. The inevitable conclusion of all things is coming soon. There will be judgment, and some will go to eternal salvation and ever-increasing joy at the right hand of the Father. And others will be given over to eternal judgment and condemnation.

This transforms how we relate to world events, the people around us, and how we relate as a church family. Peter lays out four apocalyptic priorities and attitudes that we are to have. It would be lovely to have a four-part series on this. Maybe someday, not today. Today we will touch on the first three as an example of how end-time thinking turns our natural responses on their heads. And then I will emphasize the fourth one.

### *Apocalyptic Priorities*

#### *Think and Pray*

End Times Perspective changes how we think and therefore how we pray. Peter continues in verse seven, "The end of all things is near. Therefore... be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray." Our natural response when there's something cataclysmic around the corner is

either to deny it or to get caught up in the craziness of it all. And some just want to pretend that that end is actually never really going to take place. Jesus said, “when the Son of Man returns, people are going to be going about everyday life, sowing and reaping, marrying and giving in marriage, and going to be caught by surprise.” They might say, “I wasn't ready because I was caught up in the everyday affairs of the world.” But Peter says, “Be alert because the end of all things is at hand.” He says, “be sober-minded.” Oh, how we are given to laziness and denial, and addictive thinking. To writing books like *88 Reasons* or getting caught up in a variety of conspiracy theories. Wars and rumors of wars. We dig ourselves so deeply into the events at hand that we forget about setting our minds on things above and on the truth.

In my own life, I know that if I only gave as much time to the truth of God's Word as I sometimes give to the news of the day my thinking would be so much more sound. And as Peter says here, I would be better prepared to pray, to be alert, and to be sober-minded so that you can pray. End-time perspective changes how we think and then enables us to come before the Father with the mess and the vileness of our current reality. With all the fear that surrounds us and to bring that to him, to receive guidance, wisdom, truth, and power to live in the way he calls us to live.

### *Apocalyptic Priorities*

#### *Love*

End Time perspective changes how we relate to each other. “The end of all things is near. Therefore...Love.” Love each other deeply. Love covers over a multitude of sins. Our natural way of living is to hear something offensive and then become more deeply offended. We question the motives of others and dig into the ways someone has sinned against us. But end-time perspective makes us say, *You know what? That doesn't matter.* Have you ever been deeply embroiled in conflict, and something awful happens and suddenly that conflict doesn't mean a thing. I suddenly realize there are more important things in life than my perceived offense. I love my brother or sister and desire their very best because of the Kingdom of God. And I'm not worried about that offense. Small or sometimes even major because it just doesn't matter when Jesus Christ is returning.

Love covers over a multitude of sins, particularly in light of eternity. And of course, we cannot skip over the reference here to the love of Jesus Christ, covering our immeasurable Sin against Him. And so, in forgiving others, we are merely following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

### *Apocalyptic Priorities*

#### *Offer Hospitality*

End-Time perspective changes our relationship to our resources. Peter says, “The end of all things is near. Therefore.... offer hospitality to each other without grumbling.” The previous examples of apocalyptic thinking talk about hoarding and gathering my resources to myself, and

about living in isolation. Apocalyptic thinking seeks to protect myself against things outside of myself that I fear. And Peter says, “No, the end of all things is at hand. Therefore, your priority is giving.” Your priority is to open yourself up to others in need and to practice hospitality without regard to your own resources. So those are three examples. They could be three sermons. End-time perspective changes our priorities.

The thing that we're really going to dig into this morning is this, “The end of all things is near, therefore... serve one another. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10, 11).

### *Apocalyptic Priorities*

#### *Serve. Use your Gift*

The end of all things is at hand. Therefore... use your spiritual gift. Now, that sounds a bit anticlimactic, doesn't it? Basically, he's saying the end of all things is at hand, therefore, do what you ought to be doing every day anyway. Serve one another in the particular way that God has enabled you. Do you see the parallels and how very closely this ties in with the sermon series on the upper room discourse that Pastor Mitchell is preaching? Pastor Mitchell emphasized that Jesus’ hour has come; event-oriented thinking that says, the day Jesus is waiting for, the day not yet come, is now at hand.

The Upper Room Discourse is the penultimate moment in Jesus' life before he goes to the cross. And so he communicates to his disciples the most important things. He prepares them for what is coming. He talks with them about service. He talks with them about loving one another. Peter listens to these words. Peter saw Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, in his beauty and in His glory, and Majesty. Peter, fled at the crucifixion but was restored after the Resurrection. Peter says the hour is at hand for *all* of us. Glorious Jesus Christ is coming and will be visible to everyone and will establish his eternal kingdom.

Therefore, serve and love each other. Peter talks specifically about serving in the context of spiritual gifts. We could talk about this for a long time. There's a lot of teaching in the New Testament about spiritual gifts. But the emphasis here is that we recognize and use the ways that God in His grace, has prepared us for ministry and service.

It’s important to understand the root of the word *gift* does not have to do with a transaction of giving and receiving, but rather, it has to do with God's grace. When Paul discusses money or financial gifts, he uses different terminology. Here we are not in the realm of transaction, we are in the realm of grace. When the Apostle Paul and here when Peter talks about this kind of gifting, he is talking about another manifestation of God's grace in our lives in which he pours

out his undeserved favor upon us. And one way that he manifests his grace is by giving each one of us a particular ability to serve for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Please recognize that the gift, whatever it might be, is what a spiritual gift is about--building up others within the body of Christ. It's about increasing the body of Christ by serving and telling others about Jesus. Each one of us should use whatever gift we have received. The teaching of the New Testament is very clear that it is the Holy Spirit who determines how each one of us is supposed to serve. It is the Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts according to his wisdom. The Spirit knows best how the Body of Christ functions together. And He knows best who we are as individuals and the best way we can serve.

### *Apocalyptic Priorities*

#### *Serve. "Each One"*

So Peter says, you've received this manifestation of God's grace, enabling you to build up the body of Christ by speaking or by serving. So use that gift, every one of you. He puts an emphasis here on the fact that *each one* has a gift. Isn't that beautiful? Because I know so often we think I don't have anything to do. I'm not needed. I can't sing like Danny. I can't preach like Pastor Mitchell. I'm not bold like that evangelist. I don't have a place. How could God use me? *Each one* has been gifted in order to serve. And the fact is that if we do not all serve in the way that God has enabled us, then the whole body misses out.

Paul is very clear on this teaching. No part of the body can say to another part, I don't need you. Every part is necessary. Every part is important. If you don't serve in the way that God has gifted you to serve in our church family, and in the world, then other people miss out. And on the converse, if you do, then everyone else benefits.

The Holy Spirit enables you to serve in a particular way unique to you for the benefit of the whole body. And that is part of the beauty of the church. Part of the beauty of the body of Christ.

### *Apocalyptic Priorities*

#### *Serve Faithfully*

And so Peter says, "The end of all things is near. Therefore...let each one serve according to the various gifts that they have received and do so faithfully to do so as a faithful steward."

His word for stewardship is just so rich. The basic idea of a steward is a servant, one under authority, but who has been given a responsibility to carry out. A great example is Joseph. We read about him in Genesis. Given great responsibility. First in the house of Potiphar, and then second in command under Pharaoh. But Joseph was a slave. He was sold into slavery and purchased by Potiphar. Joseph had no position in life. But God, by his grace, enabled Joseph to

serve wisely such that Potiphar elevated him to the position of a steward under whom everything else in the household took place. “Nobody will do anything in my household.” And then later on, Pharaoh says the same thing. “Nobody will do anything in the Kingdom of Egypt unless you say so, Joseph.” But this didn't mean he was no longer a slave. Because he belonged to Potiphar and served under Pharaoh, he could be removed from his position.

In our day, a steward is someone who deserves nothing, but by God's grace, has received a responsibility and carries out that responsibility faithfully. We are called to be in a relationship of humility, and service, and to faithfully carry out the task God has entrusted to us.

Peter describes how we faithfully serve and lays out two categories, one of speaking and one of serving. So if you are speaking, then do it in this particular way. If you are serving, then do it in this particular way. I love the idea that he doesn't list out a whole gamut of spiritual gifts at this point. We want those lists, don't we? And you can go into the New Testament and find three or four different places where the spiritual gifts are listed. But that list is not exhaustive. None of those lists completely correspond to the other. Each one adds something else. And then in a couple of places, Paul says, Oh, there's this gift, and, oh, there's that gift.

It doesn't matter to Peter what the particulars are of the gift we have. Peter calls all of us to recognize that we can speak and serve for the glory of God. I love too that he doesn't even have any particular hierarchy of gifts at this point. He doesn't say, “Well, if you can't manage to speak, at least you can serve.” He simply says, “there is speaking and there is serving.” We see this lived out in the life of the early church in Acts 6. The apostles have a Ministry of Prayer and the Word of God.

But there are widows being served on a daily basis. The church is providing for those in need. But a conflict arises about how this can equitably be done. And the apostles realized, this is bigger than us. We can't do everything. Let's choose seven men to carry on this particular ministry. And what I love is they lay out qualifications for these seven men to be sure food is distributed equitably. He says, “choose from among you men who are filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom.” Wait a minute. You're talking about waiting on tables. What is Holy Spirit wisdom have to do with that?

Because it's the church. Because every ministry is a spiritual ministry. Whether it's changing the light bulbs, fixing the toilets, taking a meal to somebody who's hungry, teaching in a Sunday school class, serving on a leadership committee, or any of the myriad of things that take place. It is people who are filled with the Holy Spirit, carrying out these ministries. Each of these ministries work together so that the Body of Christ can function for the building up of the saints in maturity and in the image of Jesus Christ, and for the spread of the gospel around the world.

And so you have these two areas of ministry of equal significance within the Body of Christ speaking and serving. But whichever one it is, it needs to be done faithfully. If it's speaking, it needs to be done in the recognition that these are the words of God that we are sharing. Paul gives a solemn charge to Timothy to prepare well, to be found as a workman who is approved in carrying out that ministry of speaking. Whether God has gifted you to speak a word of encouragement into someone's life or pray for them or to teach them in Sunday school or share the gospel in your neighborhood—whatever that ministry of speaking is, make sure that it's the Word of God, because that's the infallible and powerful truth. If you're speaking, do so faithfully, speaking the very words of God.

And if you are serving, do so faithfully living in the power of God. Peter talks here about the energy that is required for service. This reminds me of Paul talking about serving faithfully and tirelessly with the energy of Christ at work in Him. It reminds me of how Jesus talks to the disciples in the upper room. Jesus talks about the necessity of the life of Christ flowing through us because it is only in Him and in His life that we can see fruit as a result of our ministry.

So if we are speaking, we speak the very words of God. If we are serving, we are living out the very life of Jesus Christ in us.

### *Apocalyptic Priorities*

#### *Serve For God's Glory*

The Purpose, serve for God's Glory. This is incredible. The sovereign Lord of all the universe wants to get glory for himself, so he gave *you* a gift—to serve faithfully so that in these very desperate times, *He* can get the glory.

Do you see how all of this is the opposite of our own tendencies when we consider that the end of all things is at hand? We want to think about ourselves instead of thinking about others or thinking how best to glorify God. We want to hoard our resources rather than be generous. We want to protect instead of reaching out. We want to look out for number one, instead of looking out for one another. Recognizing that it is our neighbor who is actually number one. We want to stay instead of going out with the message of Jesus Christ. But the end of all things is at hand, and Jesus is calling us to love and glorify Him by serving others. So do what you ought to do every day. When the Son of Man comes, will we be found faithful?

This morning, right before Sunday school, A woman was coming in and I opened the door for her. But she said, "Wait a minute. I just saw that so-and-so is coming. She's got a bundle of kids. I'm going to go help her." If Jesus had come at that moment, she would have been found faithful. Yesterday we had a newcomer's class. And we came into the room and there was a man cleaning off the sprinkler heads. (We had an inspection last week and the fire inspector said, "Your sprinkler heads are dirty.") If Jesus had come at that moment, he would have been found doing exactly what God had gifted him to do. Serving.

There are so many things that we can be doing. So many ways we can speak and serve as the Holy Spirit has enabled us to do. Holding babies in the nursery, making coffee, serving in the sound booth, teaching a Sunday school class, showing kids the way to Jesus, serving a widow in your neighborhood, building up her steps, showing her the love of Jesus Christ, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ for those around us. And the list goes on and on.

I know that there are two people in here hoping that I will mention children's ministries. There are so many of you who can think back to a Sunday school teacher who invested lovingly in you. You are where you are today in Jesus Christ because the Holy Spirit worked through that teacher. And we have the opportunity over and over again when the end of all things is at hand, what do we want to do? Well, one thing we want to do is look out for our kids. The end of all things is at hand. Serve in children's ministries. Serve on the technical team. The Holy Spirit has given you a gift. Serve like somebody's life depends on it. Jesus Christ is coming back, and we must be found faithful at his return.

*Heavenly Father, how amazing it is even to consider that we can serve you. You are holy, holy, holy. Thank you for the gift of service. You've made us your servants. And even more than that, you've made us your friends. And you enable us to be a part of your amazing work in people's lives. Enable us to be faithful servants. Lift us up to think about heavenly things and not earthly things. Open our eyes to see the needs around us and the particular way that you have so very graciously enabled us to serve in the power of Jesus Christ. We ask that you would do it for your glory and for the joy of your people, and for the joy of those who surround us in this world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

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