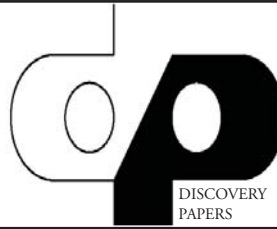


# THE END IS NEAR

*SERIES: BELOVED EXILES: STUDIES IN 1 PETER*



Catalog No. 091206  
1 Peter 4:7-19  
7th Message  
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December 6, 2009

A word of prophesy: Northern California will be struck by a strong earthquake.

You should be prepared.

No thoughtful person denies the likelihood of this prediction, or the wisdom of getting ready, but most of us procrastinate or do a half-hearted job of preparing for what is coming. Open ended warnings lose their forcefulness over time.

The title of this message is, “The End is Near.” It is a phrase found in the text of 1 Peter which we are considering today. A concern for the end of the human story, and being prepared for it, is a familiar theme in the Bible, and an important part of the teaching of Jesus. He frequently warned his followers to be watchful and ready for the end to come unexpectedly—either the end of one’s life (Luke 12:20) or the end of the age (Matt. 24:42). Earthquake preparedness is trivial in comparison.

To this point, the apostle has had much to say about suffering and perseverance in hope and about stress that makes faith grow. This instruction is rooted in confidence about the Savior’s victorious return and the raising up of those who have loved Him. We have now come to two paragraphs at the end of chapter four: 4:7-11 and 4:12-19. They both have the end of history in view: therefore make the most of opportunities (7-11) and prepare for final evaluation (12-19). We will consider these in reverse order.

1 Peter 4:12-19

**<sup>12</sup>Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering ...**

The words “painful trial” are actually ‘the fiery event’ that has come to try you. I think it denotes cleansing fire, purifying fire.

**... as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice that you participate**

**in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup>If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup>However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. <sup>17</sup>For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup>And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”**

Verse 18 is a quotation from Proverbs 11:31.

**<sup>19</sup>So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.**

Suffering is both purposeful and mysterious. When it is righteous in origin (not as a murderer, thief, criminal, or meddler) it makes us aware of Christ in His suffering. A ‘fiery trial’ is a refining heat (see also 1:6-7) that cleanses both the individual and the church. We will some day be judged (evaluated by the Lord) and need to give priority to what pleases Him. “For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God” (v. 17). The refining fire is detaching us from sinful thoughts and behavior—a process that will be completed “when his glory is revealed” (v. 13).

A final observation regarding these verses: it is easy to confuse persecution for righteousness, “Participate in the sufferings of Christ,” (v. 13) with harsh treatment we bring upon ourselves. Particularly, note that we should avoid being an unwelcome ‘meddler’ or busybody. David Roper once quoted an epitaph on a tombstone making this point: “Erected by her sorrowing brothers, in memory of Martha Clay, ‘Here lies one who lives for others, now

she has peace and so have they.” The phrasing makes us smile, but also should help us see ourselves clearly.

Let’s go back to the verses we skipped. Aware that a time of judgment is coming, we accept today’s fiery cleansing as a gift. Yet, in verses 1-7, Peter speaks of another perspective that flows from the awareness that “the end of all things is near” (v. 7).

Opportunities don’t last forever. We procrastinate. “Tomorrow; next week; I’ll get around to it some other time.” Squeaky wheels get the grease. What is important is forgotten while attending to what is insistent. Consider the four priorities spoken of here:

1 Peter 4:7-11

**<sup>7</sup>The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. <sup>8</sup>Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup>Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup>If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it 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 for ever and ever. Amen.**

Four things: 1) prayer, 2) fervent love for others, 3) hospitality, and 4) use of the gifts God has given us. None of these priorities are exotic or eye-catching. The nearness of the end does not signal a last chance for drama (buy a sports car, go sky diving). Opportunities don’t last forever, therefore, engage in important and eternal matters.

The first of them is prayer; clear minded, self-controlled, habitual prayer. I have always struggled to give prayer its proper place in my life. It is difficult for me to call my thoughts to attention so that my ‘stuff’ grows smaller and God grows greater. For all of us, prayer that includes silence, praise, and lament, (beyond a quick listing of ideas/requests) is profoundly important and needs to be renewed every time it grows dim.

Second, love each other deeply. The rationale for love is interesting—love covers a multitude of sins. Sin develops like a cancer. Its temptations grow more persuasive, and its consequences more discouraging, unless something intervenes to break the cycle. It is love that breaks the power of sin. We enter the messy world of a friend with salve for wounds and truth countering error. We bear another’s burden on one occasion and receive such help when we are weighed down. Revenge, self indulgence, denial, and blame of others give sin strength. Love overpowers it.

The third priority, hospitality without complaint, is curious. We can make a case for prayer and love as being big Bible concepts. Yet, a welcoming home seems a small thing by comparison. The Greek word for hospitality means love of strangers. In the first century there was no hotel industry, and those with limited means who made journeys in the cause of Christ depended on local believers to put them up. There was no public network for the poor who were unexpectedly displaced. Hospitality in this setting was not a nice dinner party for amiable friends; it was shelter for those in need. Responding to Peter’s instruction, we should certainly care about those around us who do not have adequate physical shelter. But shelter also includes a welcome for those who have housing, but no home. Lonely souls and the emotionally ravaged need shelter. Peter is calling us to open our arms, to appreciate people who have been tossed aside by others. Are our homes warm and welcoming to those who can’t give anything back? Consider the growing number of foster families in our church. These are good examples of hospitality from the heart – providing food and shelter, but also love and approval, for kids who would otherwise hear messages of rejection and abandonment.

The end is near, therefore, pray, love sinners, and shelter those who are in need. The fourth priority is the use of one’s spiritual gifts. Verse 10, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.” When we are united to Christ, and become the home of the Spirit of God, we are given spiritual gifts, a capacity to serve. No Christian is a spectator. Peter divides the gifts given to each one into two categories, those who will use speech, “speaking the very words of God” (v. 11) and those who will take action “with the strength God provides” (v.11). By discovering and practicing the form of serving we are made for is a crucial priority for those who know that the

window of opportunity is closing as the end draws near.

I don't know if you are prepared for the earthquake that will someday hit Northern California. But this text sounds a much more important call to action. One day Jesus will evaluate the choices we have made. Knowing how history will end, and that the end is not far away, we should give ourselves to what is important—to thoughtful prayer, to fervent love, to shelter of those in need, and to serving in the way God has gifted us. May He make us the people we long to be.

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