

**The Christian's Duty in a Hostile World, Part 1**

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:7a

Code: 60-41

First Peter chapter 4 is our text for the message tonight. First Peter chapter 4 and verses 7 through 11. Let me read them to you as the setting for what the Spirit of God will teach us tonight. "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all keep fervent in your love for one another because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint, as each one has received a special gift. Employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak as it were the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever, amen."

I want to speak to you out of this text for the next couple of weeks on the subject: "The Christian's Duty in a Hostile World." And I might begin by just setting the scenario a little bit of the time in which we find ourselves, particularly with regard to the church. The church today urgently is in need of spiritual revival, and that spiritual revival can only occur when we as Christians begin to do our spiritual duty. So, what Peter is saying to us here is germane to the whole matter of Christian living. If we are to be what we are to be by God's plan and design in this world, then it behooves us to fall in line in obedience to the truths that are given in these great verses. The church does need revival, and it will come when Christians get serious about their Christian life. And only when the church is revived and restored will the world begin to really take notice of us.

It is an interesting thing to even say that the church needs revival in our time because it seems that not long ago we were experiencing a kind of revival. In fact, this desperate condition of the church seems to have been somewhat new. If you go back, for illustration's sake, into the '70s, you will remember something called the "Jesus Movement." The Jesus Movement frankly witnessed an unprecedented rise in conservative biblical evangelicalism. It was, in my lifetime, the great flourishing of interest in the Bible, the greatest flourishing of interest in evangelism, Bible study, discipleship, all of those things which are the heartbeat of conservative evangelicalism. There was the explosion of new translations of the Bible starting with the New American Standard, and then came the Living Bible which is not really a translation but a paraphrase. And an awful lot of interest in personal Bible study came as a result of that. Christian broadcasting began to explode in an exponential way, far beyond the wildest imagination of most predictors of the future of the church. Along came Christian publishing, and every time we turned around there was a new publisher publishing new material for the Christian life.

And then came tapes, and then came an absolute unbelievable inundation of Christian music, proliferating to the point where we no longer have to listen to anything that isn't Christian, and we could never get through all that is available. There was a tremendous explosion in Bible-believing churches. I remember when the largest church that I knew of had 1,500 people and a church with 1,500 people today would be considered a medium-sized church. Churches now even are building auditoriums to seat 5,000, 6,000, 7,000, and 10,000 people, all as somewhat of a by-product of this flourishing exploding thing that was called the "Jesus Movement." And we all thanked God for what looked like a real revival and maybe in retrospect, as we look back, we will assess it as such.

But frankly as we move into the decade of the '90s, it becomes more and more apparent that the prevailing trend in the church has departed from that time of revival. There is no longer what I would call a revival movement in the church, a flourishing movement driven by the Holy Spirit. What has happened now is a sort of popularized institutionalization of the church.

In a recent editorial in the Masterpiece magazine, which I hope you receive, I wrote about what is called "Pop Christians, or Pop Christianity," which is what we have today. We have a popularized institutionalized kind of Christianity. It is a socially favorable form of Christianity, and in fact becoming more and more socially acceptable as it more and more denudes itself of any offensive message. It's amazing how fast this movement came, but frankly with a high speed, high tech media communication capability, I question whether any movement will last very long. They move very rapidly because communication moves so very rapidly. So, here we are coming out of the '70s and the early '80s, a time of revival, in to a completely different mindset in the church, a time of self-centered living in the church, a time of psychology in the church, a time of popularized Christianity, a time of pragmatized Christianity where the questions are being asked: does it work? What will it do for me? How much success will it produce? How much money will it bring in? Instead of the things that would honor the heart of God.

And the pop church, frankly, is everywhere. Most evident, I suppose, on Christian television and secondarily on Christian radio, celebrity variety shows and celebrity entertainment has replaced worship. And along with it, pride has replaced humility, and success has replaced excellence, and cleverness has replaced character, and on and on we go. Christian phone-in radio shows feature any guest that you can imagine with little comment on whether that guest is right, wrong, or indifferent. Christian talk shows have hosts who sit there in a ubiquitous fashion with a string of people coming across the scene, claiming every imaginable kind of thing from God, and the host makes no comment on everything or anything other than to give a platform to it all. Christian radio is proliferated with psychotherapy replacing Bible teaching as the staple. Local churches are fast becoming comfort zones, Christian country clubs, community centers with less and less redemptive impact and very little threat against sin.

And the trends of this sort of pop Christianity, I believe, are more subtle than theological liberalism. Theological liberalism attacks the church head on. It's very easy to see it; it's very easy to deal with it. But the pop church gives lip service to the truth while quietly undermining it. Popular Christianity has a tendency to make the basis of faith something other than the Word of God. The basis of faith now is experience. The basis of faith is emotion. The basis of faith is solving problems; it's the need theology again. The Charismatic Movement has led the way with a new basis of faith and that is private revelation, private words from God, private insights, private prophecies, private visions and so forth. Secular psychology has been somewhat quasi-sanctified and offers self-help therapy that also reflects this drift away from the Word of God as the basis of the living of the Christian life. Christian ministry has become riddled from top to bottom with pragmatism, with manipulation, with professionalism, with consumerism; all of those things indicate a less than biblical foundation to our faith.

And along that line the focus of pop Christianity and the pop church has not only moved away from the biblical basis of faith but it has moved away from the person of Jesus Christ. That needs to be stressed. Something or someone else is on center stage, not Christ. It is the celebrity, it is the evangelist, it is the project, it the fund-raising campaign, it is the new building, it is the miracles supposedly, it is the so-called healings, it is anything and everything but Jesus Christ. And we have a pop Christianity that is not Christ centered and not biblically based. It has a new basis of faith; it is a new object of affection. They are in love with the celebrity, they are in love with the system, they are in love with the building, the facility, the program, or whatever. There is sort of fantasy faith, not affixed on Christ, but a sort of nebulous faith that wants to attach itself to miracles, healings, health, wealth, prosperity, comfort, personal gain.

And, of course, in that kind of environment, easy believism, a cheap gospel flourishes. And we have to ask ourselves: where is that strong faith? Where is that Christ-centered faith that stands, and holds its ground in the midst of hard trials, rather than that fragile emotionalism called faith that is little more than selfish escapism? Christ is not the message any longer. Though He is named from time to time, the focus is on man; man is the message and how man can solve his problems and live a more comfortable life is the issue. The pop Christian focus of the church is least of all interested in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, because that would be to end their enjoyable trip on this particular pop train.

In fact, I would add a third note, and that is that the focus of the pop church is on something other than holiness. It is happiness. It is satisfaction. The pursuit of the church today, its basis is not that of the Word of God, its focus is not on Christ. And so its goal is not holiness, its goal is happiness. Whatever makes you happy, whatever satisfies you is what you pursue. And I really believe that all of this is eating out the heart of the church.

Think about it. What could Satan do to try to destroy the church that would be more effective than undermining the basis of faith which is the Word of God, the object of faith which is Christ, and the goal of faith which is holiness? Still talking about faith, still talking about Christ, still talking about virtue, but really undermining all of that. A new basis of faith, my experience. A new object of faith, my hero, my program, my spiritual kingdom, whatever it is. And a new goal in life, happiness not holiness. There couldn't be a better strategy. That's the strategy of Satan.

But what is it going to take to bring revival to the church? Where is the focus to be placed? How are we to live so as not to lose our power and so as to be useful to God? Peter gives us the answer right here in this text. And I believe what you have in these very few verses, verses 7 to 11, is really an insight into the unimaginable genius of the Holy Spirit of God. It is only the Holy Spirit who in an economy of words can say an eternity of truth. And that's what you have here. Everything in our Christian life can be boiled down to these statements in verses 7 through 11. And I confess to you that it is a very difficult thing to preach through this without staying here the rest of your life, because every word in this particular passage provides for me an infinite number of possible tangents which I will fight greatly to avoid, for the sake of being merciful to you dear and faithful folk.

But this is a loaded portion of Scripture. In fact, I have been studying personally and preaching on this particular portion of Scripture for probably 25 years; not here at Grace Church for we've never studied 1 Peter here except one other time when I first came 21 years ago, but in many other places I have gone back to this passage because of its salient and basic teaching. It gives to us a summation of everything that Peter wants to say about the duty of Christian living in a hostile world.

Now, let me just give you a little bit of a feeling of the background of the text as we move into verse 7. Remember that in every chapter of this epistle so far, the dear Apostle Peter has challenged the believers who are the readers of this letter. Remember, they are scattered, they are persecuted, they are maligned, they are reproached, they are abused, they are suffering Christians. They are living in a very difficult and hostile world, and in each chapter he has called on them to focus on the truth, focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and focus on holy living. In other words, he has said to them, "Be sure you keep the basis of your faith, the Word of God; be sure you keep the focus of your faith, the person of Jesus Christ; and be sure you keep the goal of your faith, holiness." Be godly, live those exemplary pure winsome joyful lives, even though you must suffer in the process. And, in fact, if we look at this epistle from that viewpoint, we can find here several motives for their Christian living in suffering.

He starts out, for example, by saying you ought to live the Christian life even though you suffer, one, because of our precious salvation. And from chapter 1 verse 1 through chapter 2 verse 10, he talked about our precious salvation. Our salvation is so precious it should demand the best out of you. And then, secondly, in chapter 2 verse 11 through chapter 4 verse 6, he says you ought to live a holy life in the midst of suffering not only because of your precious salvation, but because of your present

situation. And your present situation is that you are called upon to be a witnessing community, no matter how difficult it is. And now, he comes to the third section of the epistle and he says, "You should go on with your Christian living focused on the Word, on Christ, and on holiness not only because of your precious salvation, your present situation, but thirdly, because of His personal Second Coming." You must live in the light of the return of Jesus Christ and that is his theme from chapter 4 verse 7 through chapter 5 verse 11. That whole section is given in view of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In fact, he mentions the Second Coming, alludes to it in verse 7, mentions it specifically in verse 13, the revelation of His glory, refers to it again in verse 4 of chapter 5, the appearing of the chief shepherd who will bring the unfading crown of glory.

And so, here he is taking his suffering church and moving them from a view of their salvation and a view of their situation to a view of the Second Coming. These three sections then lay out the basic motives for which we are to live the Christian life: because of the precious salvation God has given us, because of the present situation in which we are to be witnesses, and because of the personal Second Coming of Christ where we will have to answer to Him for the life we have lived. Tonight, then, we come to that third section.

Now, I want you to notice that saying that this is the heart and theme of this third section does not mean that there has been no prior reference to the coming of Christ. That would not be the case. There have been prior references to the Second Coming of Christ. In fact, way back in chapter 1, he talked about the fact that there is waiting for us an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, that will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. And the implication is that someday He's coming to take us there to receive that wonderful inheritance. We find that in verse 13 of chapter 1 he says, "Gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the *apokalupsis*, the revelation of Jesus Christ." Chapter 2 verse 12, he talks about the day of visitation; that is, the day when men face God. So, there is a time to come when Jesus is coming, and Peter has already alluded to that, and here again he makes it the theme of this final section. He is calling us to holy living based upon the immanency of the coming of Jesus Christ.

So, in this section two things come together: we are to live a godly life in suffering in the light of the Second Coming. Those two things merge. If we want to do our Christian duty, we must know how precious our salvation is, and what attendant duties will demonstrate our gratitude for it. We must know that He has left us in this present situation as aliens and strangers to lead men and women to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and we must live in the light of eternity, the light of heaven and the light of His soon coming.

Now, how are we then to live? What is our Christian duty as we suffer in this world pursuing holiness in the light of Christ's return? First point comes in verse 7, let's call it the incentive. Then, we'll look at the instructions and finally the intention will be our attention next week. But for right now, the incentive. Verse 7. "The end of all things is at hand." Stop right there. That's the incentive: the end of

all things is at hand. I want you to get a grip, if nothing else, on this statement. The term “end” is the Greek word *telos*, a very familiar word to any Bible student. And when it is translated “end,” it could convey the wrong idea. It could convey the idea of cessation. It could convey the idea of termination. It does not mean either of those things. It is never used of a temporal end in all of the New Testament. It is never used of some kind of chronological end as if it simply means something stops. It always has the idea of a consummation.

To put it another way, it has the idea of a goal achieved, or a result attained, or a purpose consummated. It has the idea of fulfillment realized, of ultimate destiny. It's not just the end of something; it is the culmination, the conclusion, the success, the goal, the realization, the fulfillment, the consummation. So, he says, the consummation of all things is at hand.

Now, beloved, that has to refer to the return of Christ. If he had said the consummation of your trouble is at hand, we could say well maybe he was referring to something temporal. Or if he said the consummation of your persecution is at hand, we could have assumed that maybe a different kind of government might come into play in their lives and treat them more kindly. But he doesn't say that. He doesn't say the consummation of your difficulty, your trouble, your situation. He says the consummation of all things. And the consummation of all things points directly to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It must refer to that. It can't refer to anything less than that, for that and that alone is when all things are consummated. And it takes us back to 1 Peter 1:5 again where he says we are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. And then, verse 7 he says that we will be found in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

So, he has the revelation of Christ which is another way of speaking of His Second Coming, connected to the end times there in chapter 1. And that is what he is referring to here. When he says the end of all things is at hand, he is referring to the consummation, the time of great reward at the coming of Jesus Christ.

Now, notice the word there, very simple one but needs our understanding, “is at hand.” That is only one word in the Greek. It is the word to come near. It could be read this way, “The end of all things is about to arrive,” or to come near. It is a perfect tense, and has the idea of a process consummated with a resulting nearness. And I believe it refers to immanency. That is, the coming of Christ is imminent; the next event can happen at any time. It is near. Peter is reminding them then that they are to live in anticipation of the nearness of the return of Jesus Christ. We could say that they are to live with, here's the word, expectancy. Do you realize that every generation since then has therefore lived in that same expectancy? All of us live today, or should live, in the expectancy of the coming of Jesus Christ. Not to do that is not to be a faithful church.

First Thessalonians was written to a faithful church and you'll remember that he commended them because they were waiting for Jesus Christ from heaven. First Thessalonians 1:10. There they were 2,000 years ago and they then were waiting for Jesus Christ. And that waiting creates a pilgrim mentality. It creates a sojourner mentality. It creates a sense of my alienation. It reminds me that I am a citizen of heaven. I'm just waiting to be taken there. I'm just waiting for Christ to show up, to arrive.

You say, "Well, how could they be waiting then and we waiting now? When is He going to come?" Well, in Acts 1:7 here are the words of Jesus, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority." Bottom line, God hasn't chosen to tell us when Jesus will come. He hasn't been willing to do that for obvious reasons. If we knew when Jesus was going to come, it would take away one of the driving motives in the life of the church. In other words, we would get very lazy if we knew He wasn't coming soon, and if we knew He was coming soon, we'd get very panicked. So, He's eliminated both of those and all of us have to live in expectancy. To show you how secretive this whole matter is, I remind you of Matthew 24:36 where Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son but the Father alone." God knows, and Jesus in His self-imposed incarnational limitations did not even know. Peter is saying to his readers, "You must live in constant expectancy as if Jesus was to come at any moment."

And I remind you again, beloved, that that is an unpopular doctrine today, most people not interested in that. In fact, I believe with all my heart that one of the compelling reasons why people today want to teach a post-Tribulational Rapture is because at least it gives them a lot of warning before Jesus gets here, and they would like to think they're going to live through all of that time. It removes that pressure of imminence, of expectancy that calls us to a high level of accountability. "After all, if I'm going to live through the Tribulation, hey, I can live any way I want now 'cause I'll recognize the abomination of desolation in the middle when they sacrifice on the altar in the temple of Jerusalem. That will be in the newspaper. I'll know when we're there, and I'll know when the seals are broken and all that stuff starts to happen, and all those terrible plagues come on the world. We'll know that. I'll see that. And when the sea turns to blood, I'll see that. And I'll be able to see all of that, so I'll know exactly where I am and I can deal with it when I get there." That removes any responsibility that I have to deal with it now.

You see, you take away expectancy and you take away immanency and you feed the monster, in a way, and that's now why you make your decision but I think that's part of the motivation of this new wave of preoccupation with the post-Tribulationalism, which means that Jesus won't come till the end of the seven-year Tribulation. And we can chart our way through that real easy so we're going to know when He'll arrive or at least pretty close.

But that's not Peter's message. Peter's message is, "Hey, that is near." And if you go back to verse 5 of 1 Peter 4 which we studied in our last lesson last Sunday night, you remember it says there that they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. Now, God has committed

all judgment unto Christ. Christ, when He comes, will judge the living and the dead in His great Second Coming. And so, Peter is talking about that. He says in verse 5 He's ready to come, and in verse 7 he says the end of all things is very near, it is imminent, it is next on God's calendar. So, we are to live in expectancy that the one who is coming will come as judge of the living and the dead and that that is very near.

Now, the New Testament is filled with passages that deal with this expectancy. Let me show you some of them. Get your Bible now and follow me along a little route starting in Romans 13. Romans chapter 13 verse 12 says this, "The night is almost gone and the day is at hand." And again, that's that concept of nearness or immanency. The night is almost gone and the day is at hand. Verse 11 tells us what that has in mind. He says there, "Now, salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." You better wake up. You're closer to the full salvation that will be yours in heaven than you were when you believed. The night is almost gone; the day when God breaks through is near. We better lay aside the deeds of darkness, we better put on the armor of light, we better behave properly, verse 13 says. Get rid of the carousing, the drunkenness, the sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, and jealousy and we better put on the Lord Jesus Christ and stop making provision for the flesh. Why? Because He could come at any moment.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 29 says, "But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none, and those who weep as though they didn't weep, and those who rejoice as though they didn't rejoice, and those who buy as though they didn't possess, and those who use the world as though they didn't make full use of it, for the form of this world is passing away and I want you to be free from concern. We're in a dying world. We're moving fast toward the coming of Christ, Paul says. You better hold everything in this life very loosely. Did you get that? Very loosely. Don't get too embroiled in this life, in its emotions, in its possessions, in its relationships, in its economies. Don't get too involved. It's all moving very fast toward its end.

The time has been shortened. The word "time" here is not *chronos*, it's *kairos*. The epic, the season, the fixed time has been made briefer as we await the coming of Jesus Christ.

Now, someone says, "Well, look, everybody is waiting and He doesn't come. I mean, how can we all believe He's going to be coming but He never comes in our life time?" That's the whole point. The Lord never said when He was going to come so He left everybody in immanency. And those early Christians believed that Jesus was going to come at any time. And of course they would believe it since the Lord didn't tell them the time and since He did tell them His coming was near. And having been so near to His first coming, it would have been easy for them to expect it would come immediately. God wasn't hoodwinking them; He wasn't deceiving them. He was merely saying to them, "You need to live every moment in anticipation of the coming of Christ and hold to the things of this life very loosely." Jesus could come at any moment. What might seem like a long time to us,



2,000 years, is not a long time. We all know that statement, "A day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day."

Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 51. And here again is this same kind of expectation, anticipation of the coming of Christ. He says, "Behold I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed, for this perishable must put on the imperishable and this mortal must put on immortality." In other words, everything's going to change. It's going to change in a twinkling of an eye. What is the twinkling of an eye? That's not a blink, that's the time it takes to refract light off your pupil. That's how fast we're going to be changed. And the idea here is: it's a mystery, it's not been revealed in the past, it's going to happen suddenly. The trumpet will sound and instantaneously when that trumpet sounds, we're gone. And it can happen at any time.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 is another message about the immanency and the expectancy in which we are to live. First Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 15 says, "There will come a great event," and it says, "We say this to you by the Word of the Lord." In other words, this is revelation from the Lord Himself. "That we who are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not proceed those who have fallen asleep, for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the archangel, with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then, we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and thus we shall always be with the Lord." And the tone of Paul's language to the Thessalonians is a tone of immanency. He is not saying those people who are alive then, or those folks who around when. He says we, we, we, we, we. It is always the church's responsibility to live in the light of the return of Christ.

In James chapter 5 and verse 8, you have it again. James writing to persecuted believers who are going through some very, very difficult times, says to them in verse 7, "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." Well, was the Lord coming in their life time? As it turned out, He didn't. They nonetheless lived in that expectancy. He says in verse 8, "Be patient, strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is," there's that same idea, "at hand, near, imminent, soon."

That's always on the heart of the true believer. Jesus is coming and He could be coming at any moment. In Hebrews chapter 10, the writer in verse 25 says that we are not to forsake our assembling, that is, coming together like we are tonight. We're not to forsake that, we're to be faithful to that as is the habit of some. There are some who habitually do not come. We're not to do that. We're to gather to encourage one another, now listen to this, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Now, if they could see the immanency of the day drawing near, here we are 2,000 years later, how much nearer are we? You better be gathering with God's people as you have seen the day drawing nearer. Hebrews 12, I point you to one verse, verse 27, "And this expression yet once more denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken as of created things in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." The verse before, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." God had promised through the prophet Haggai that He would do some shaking in this world. And here the writer of Hebrews reminds us that there is a shaking to come, the removing of the things which can be shaken. That is, this material world and the establishment of things which cannot be shaken, God's eternal Kingdom and glory.

We must live in the light of that as those in the New Testament time did. Look at Revelation, two passages I bring to your attention. Chapter 1 verse 3, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy." In other words, you want a blessing, there's one, read Revelation. People say, "Oh, I'd like to be blessed, I really would like a blessing." Good, there's one, read Revelation. "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and take heed the things which are written in it." Why? "For the time is," what? "Near." Again, they were always living in that light, that Jesus could come at any moment.

What do we have at the end of the book of Revelation? These words, chapter 22 verse 20, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.'" And what is John's response? "Amen, come Lord Jesus." John too lived in the anticipation of the soon return of Jesus Christ.

You say, "Well, isn't Jesus supposed to return in the last days?" That's right. But do you know when the last days began? Let me help you. First John 2:18. First John 2:18, "Children, it is the last hour. It is the last hour, and just as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have arisen, from this we know that it is the last hour." The last hour had begun already when John wrote 1 John. The last hour, listen carefully, began with the first coming of Jesus Christ. That ushered in the last days. That's why the apostle Paul in writing to Timothy is so explicit about the last days. The Spirit explicitly says that in the later times, some will depart from the faith, 1 Timothy 4:1, and those later times had already come and that departure was already taking place. And 2 Timothy 3:1 which was read to us this morning, realized this that in the last days, difficult times will come. And those were the last days and the difficult times had already come on Timothy.

See, the last days came when Messiah came. You say, "In what sense?" Listen very carefully and I'll give you this little picture. They had seen in their lifetime, the Jews and the people alive at the time of Christ's arrival, they had seen the end of a whole era. They saw the end of an Old Testament dispensation. They saw the end of the old covenant. Messiah came into the world to bring all of that to an end and to inaugurate the new covenant. The last days were the days of Messiah. The prophets of old said Messiah would come in the latter days, that He would come in the end of the age. They would come at the last time.

And so, when He came it was the last time. It spelled the end of all the previous epics, seasons, eras. They had seen the whole system of ceremonies, and rituals, and sacrifices, and temples, and priests, and offerings all collapse when the veil of the temple was ripped from top to bottom and God opened the Holy of Holies to everybody, He said that's the end of the system. And then, in 70 AD when God sent judgment by way of the Romans, He destroyed the temple, destroyed Jerusalem, and wiped out to this very day the whole sacrificial ceremonial system. It happened in their life time.

Jesus had said on the cross, "It is finished." What He had finished was the inauguration of the new covenant. The temple veil was torn. A few years later, the temple was destroyed. Jesus said in Matthew 24:2, "When it goes down, there won't be one stone left upon another." Why? It symbolized the devastation of an entire Old Testament economy. The old order was ended and a new order was begun: the order of the Messiah, the order of the last days.

Hebrews 9:26 puts it this way, "Otherwise," it says speaking of Christ, "He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world, but now once at the consummation of the ages, He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." What a tremendous statement. Jesus came, put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself at the consummation of the ages, the end of the ages. Christ came, offered once to bear the sins of many, listen to this, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin to those who eagerly await Him. Did you get that? The first time He came at the consummation of the ages He was manifested to put away sin. The second time He comes, He doesn't put away sin anymore. He comes to establish His Kingdom of salvation.

But the last days were begun when the ages were consummated in the arrival of the Messiah. When Messiah came, when Messiah died, when He rose again, He ended the old covenant system, He established His own Kingdom. He said the Kingdom of God is in your midst, and through the gospel of Jesus Christ we are taken out of the kingdom of darkness and placed into the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, says Paul to the Colossians. Christ defeated sin. Christ defeated death. Christ defeated hell. Christ defeated the penalty of the law. Christ defeated Satan. Christ defeated demons. Christ established His authority, and Christ began to build His Kingdom. And we are now living in the last days Kingdom. The Kingdom now is spiritual and inward, and some day it will be outward and universal when He establishes His throne on the earth and in the universe.

So, there is a Second Coming. But the last days began the first time He came. So, we are living in the last days, the last times, and the last days of the last days. You might put it this way: the Kingdom has come in a state of grace; it will come in a state of glory. The death of Jesus Christ, His resurrection, His exaltation to the right hand of God the Father brought a new departure to the course of history. And it took place once for all at the close of the ages, and it brought in the dawn of a new day. The Kingdom of Messiah is here in its spiritual reality and soon to be here in its visible form.

So, when Peter says the end of all things is at hand, is he talking about termination? Yes, in the sense that the old ages have terminated. But more, he's talking about consummation, and the full end is very, very near.

Beloved, I want to close with giving you an insight into how we are to live in light of this. In the Scriptures, we find that because the coming of Jesus Christ is imminent, it could happen at any split second, at any moment, it leads us to a right kind of attitude. The attitude of expectancy should not turn us into zealous fanatics like the people who put on their pajamas and sit on the roof. It should not turn us into lazy dreamers who do nothing but lie around, as it were, waiting for it to happen. It should turn us into watchful pursuers of holiness, watchful pursuers of holiness.

Let me show you why. Second Corinthians chapter 5 verse 9: "Therefore also we have as our ambition whether at home or absent to be pleasing to Him." If you're a Christian, that is true of your life. Did you hear that? Whether you're at home or absent, your desire is to be pleasing to Him. That should be underlined as the mark of a true Christian: you want to please Christ. If you don't want to please Christ, then that's evidence that the new life is not in you. So, we want to please Christ. Now, verse 10, why? "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." In other words, we're going to have to give an account for our life. "That each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done, whether good or worthless." The apostle Paul says, "Look, I live in the light of the fact that someday I'm going to have to stand before Jesus Christ and it's going to be made visible to me in His presence whether my works were good or useless." Not going to parade sin, that will already be dealt with, that's already been covered at the cross, but whether or not my life was effective, dedicated, devoted, serviceable, useful will be manifest. And since it's the heart's desire of a true Christian to want to please Christ, he has to live in the light of the fact that someday it's going to become revealed to him whether or not or to what degree he did please Christ.

In 2 Peter, if I might borrow from our future study of that great epistle, chapter 3, Peter is talking about the coming of Christ. He's talking about it in chapter 3 verse 10 as the day of the Lord, which will come like a thief unannounced. The heavens are going to pass away, and all that's associated with that will take place. He then says that we are looking, verse 12, and hastening the coming of the day of God. For those of us who are believers, we're looking for it, we want it to hurry and get here so we can live in blissful perfection with Him. We are looking, verse 13, for that new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells. If we're true Christians, we ought to be sick of the sin of this world and longing for a righteous place. Then, verse 14, brings it down to practicality. "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." When He gets here, you want to be in peace, spotless, blameless. And in order to do that, verse 18 says, "You need to be growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Go to 1 John chapter 3, the next epistle, verse 2. “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him just as He is.” That’s our heart cry to be like Him, to be like Him. Remember Philippians 3? “I press toward the goal for the mark, the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” What is it? To be like Him. And verse 3, “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure.” If you want to be like Him, and you know you’re going to be like Him, and you know you’re going to face Him, you want to be pure. You want to be pure.

First John 2:28 John says, “We want to be before Him when He appears with confidence, not shrinking away in shame.” We want to live in such a way that we face Christ with a joyful confident heart, not like unbelievers who will be shamed. And if we really look for His appearing, as Paul wrote to Timothy, if we love His appearing, then we will seek to be pure so that our lives are right should He arrive in the next moment.

I close with this, Luke 12. Jesus, doing so much teaching here, directs our attention to this same idea. Verse 35, He says, “Be dressed in readiness, keep your lamps alight. Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will gird himself to serve and have them recline at the table and will come up and wait on them.” Is that amazing? If you’re ready when He comes, He’ll wait on you. Whether He comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. And be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he wouldn’t have allowed his house to be broken into. You, too, be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.

This is a warning to the unregenerate world. This is a warning to false religionists. But I believe it speaks directly also to those of us who are believers, that we must also be ready for we don’t know the moment our Christ will come. The end of all things, very near, nearer than it’s ever been before. That’s incentive to live a holy life. Let’s bow in prayer.

Father, thank You again for this reminder. May our hearts be committed to loving Your appearing, that great time when we shall receive our reward, being made like Christ. O God, may we ever live in the light of that and say with John, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” It cannot be soon enough. Amen.

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