

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

A Christian's Duty in a Hostile World

1 Peter 4:7-11

Part One

Theological liberalism or modernism represented a major shift in theological thinking that occurred late in the nineteenth century. One of its major features was its rejection of “religious belief based on authority alone.” They would say since the Bible is the work of men who were limited by their times, it is neither supernatural nor an infallible record of divine revelation and thus does not possess absolute authority. The “essence of Christianity” replaces the authority of Scripture.

This was viewed by many within the church, and rightfully so, as a major threat. In fact it was during the height of the modernist movement in North America that Bible churches such as ours were given birth.

Certainly liberal theology continues to impact the church of Christ but I believe there is an even greater threat facing the church today. We might call it “Pop Christianity.” Pop Christianity in contrast to liberal theology will not deny the authority of God’s word in principle, but will unfortunately undermine the authority of God’s word in practice.

It is as if we have received an unmarked box filled with a lot of different parts and there is a book inside labeled instructions. We look at the book and do not deny that it contains the instructions for putting the parts together but we feel confident that we can accomplish the task at hand by flying by the seat of our pants.

Pop Christianity says, “If it feels good it must be right.” Pop Christianity says, “If it works it must be from God.” Pop Christianity says, “If it is popular it must be inspired.” These are lies.

God wants His church and those who make up the church to be holy. We are not going to arrive there flying by the seat of our pants, but only by the careful study and application of God’s word.

Those to whom Peter was writing certainly needed to understand this. They as a church had begun to experience extreme persecution. If they under those circumstances had approached the matter of holiness with the mindset “If it feels good it must be right” or “If it works it must be from God” or “If it is popular it must be inspired” rather than being a lean, mean, fighting machine they would have become the Pillsbury Doughboy FLAKY.

God has not placed us in this world to be flaky but rather to be faithful and to fulfill our rightful duty, no matter how difficult the circumstances around us might be. In **1 Pet. 4:1-6**, Peter addressed his readers and told them, “**For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles**” and then spells out specifically what he had in mind. Now in **1 Pet. 4:7-11** he speaks of a contrasting lifestyle. A lifestyle which is our Christian duty.

1 Pet. 4:7-11, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. (8) Above all, keep fervent in our love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (9) Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

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(10) As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another; as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (11) 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.”

Before we became Christians we were enslaved the lusts of the flesh, but Jesus has set us free and we have a new master and therefore new duties. What do we learn about Christian duty from this passage?

THE INCENTIVE

We first of all see a very powerful incentive for performing our Christian duty. Let us look at **V. 7** **“The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.”**

What does it mean that the **“end of all things is at hand?”** What do you visualize? Do you see some form of nuclear holocaust where everything as we now know is destroyed? A world that is only a smoking ember with no life or structure? What do you see?

What does this mean? Let us first of all look at the word itself. The word “end” is the Greek word TELOS. This word does not convey the idea of cessation, or termination. It does not mean either of these things. It does not refer to a chronological end. Rather it refers to the “fulfillment or consummation” of something.

And what specifically would the something be? In order to answer this question we need to answer the question, “Who is Peter addressing in this epistle?” The answer is quite simple. Peter is addressing the church. He is not addressing the Jewish nation, or the Gentiles, but rather those who had placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation.

And exactly what event will bring everything to an end for the church? Or in other words to “completion” or “consummation.” There is no question as to when this will be? It will be at what we have come to call the rapture. This event is described in great detail in **1 Thess. 4:13-17**, **“But we do not want you to be uninformed brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (15) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (17) 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.”**

The “end of all things” for the church in respect to the things of this world is described in these verses. It is the day when the living as well as the dead who are in Christ will be given their glorified bodies.

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And the whole of the church from all the ages will be united together to enjoy fellowship with Christ forever. Theologians call this the rapture.

This is the same event that we saw alluded to in **1 Pet. 1:6-7**, **“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, (7) that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”**

At the rapture or revelation of Jesus the “church age” is finished. God will then turn His attention back to the nation of Israel. During this seven year period God will prepare Israel to enter the Messianic Kingdom. After having done this Christ will then return physically to this plane, to the Mount of Olives to establish His kingdom. During this 1000 year period God will literally fulfill all His promises to the nation of Israel made through patriarchs and prophets of Israel. And finally having accomplished this there will a destruction of the heavens and earth as we now know it in order to prepare for a new heavens and earth which is spoken of in **Rev. 21**.

As you can see there are numerous events that the scriptures still speak of being in the future. But when we think of the church and what is ahead for the church in respect to this world and God’s program for it, there is only one event that we are looking forward to and that is the rapture.

This event for those suffering as greatly as these believers were suffering would be very exciting. And certainly they would be eager to know when it would be? What does Peter tell them?

He says that, **“The end of all things is only a few years away.”** No He does not say that. What does He say? He says that, **“the end of all things is at hand.”** We need to be careful in fact not to assign minutes, hours, days, weeks or years to his expression of **“at hand.”** This is not at all what Peter is trying to convey. Rather Peter is trying to convey “imminency.” For the church this is the next event. These readers were being encouraged by Peter in effect to live in anticipation of this event which could occur at any time.

People often talk of the “last days” as if the last days are somehow in the future. This is not so, we are presently living in the last days. Consider the words of John in **1 John 2:18**, **“Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen, from this we know that this is the last hour.”** We have been living in the last hour, the last days ever since the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. This has been so because Jesus from that moment to this moment could have come to gather us to Himself.

This is how all Christians are to live. We are to live in light of the imminent return of Christ. And it is commendable for Christians to live that way. Consider the words of Paul to the Thessalonians in **1 Thess. 1:9-10** **“For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, (10) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.”**

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They were waiting because they believed that his return for them was imminent. They believed that his return was at hand. They believed that Jesus could return at any moment. And we are also waiting because we also believe His return is at hand or in other words imminent. We need to have a sense of expectancy. And this should have a significant impact on our behavior.

Sometimes my wife goes away to visit her mom. And when the time of her return is at hand or imminent I make sure certain things are ready for her return. I make sure the house is picked up, the house is clean and the dishes are done. I want her homecoming to be a pleasant one and so it is with Christ.

Romans 13:11-12, “And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. (Is this true? Of course it is true!) (12)The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” In other words we better get about cleaning house because Jesus could be here any moment.

Is that desire to clean house because we are filled with terror? Of course not. How could we be afraid of the one who loved us and gave Himself for us. We want to clean house because we want to be pleasing to Him. And pleasing to Him in the accounting that will be taking place at the time of this glorious event. We see this clearly stated in **2 Cor. 5:9, “Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed or his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”**

When you think of that time when the end of all things for us as Christ’s church sweeps over and know that we will be standing before Him how does this make you feel? There is one Christian poet that expressed his thoughts like this.

When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ
And he shows me His plan for me
The plan of my life as it might have been
and I see how I blocked Him here and checked Him there
and would not yield my will
will there be grief in my Savior’s eyes, grief though He loves me still
he would have me rich though I stand there poor
stripped of all but His grace while memory runs like a haunted thing
down a path I can’t retrace
then my desolate heart may well nigh break
with tears I cannot shed I will cover my face with my empty hands
I will bow my uncrowned head
Oh Lord of the years that are left to me
I give them to Thy hand
take me and break me and mold me to the pattern that Thou hast planned.

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No believer that lives in anticipation of Christ's return will want to be empty handed. Doesn't this make sense? Let us consider the words of **John** in **1 John 2:28** "**And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.**"

CONCLUSION

Why should we fulfill our Christian duty, and fulfill all of the responsibilities that will be spelled out for us in this passage? Because of our Incentive **THE IMMEDIATE RETURN OF CHRIST..... "THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND."**