

1st Peter 4:7-11

End Time Priorities

But the end of all things is at hand – v. 7

What did Peter mean when he wrote *the end of all things is at hand*? Some preachers or theologians who don't hold a particularly high view of Scripture have suggested that Peter was wrong by his statement *the end of all things is at hand*. After all Peter wrote this epistle some 2,000 years ago and we haven't reached the end yet. Time marches on. We still look for the end of time to come. We're still looking for Christ to return and for the present order of things to give way to a much better order of things. We're still anticipating that there will be a day of judgment. But those things are all still before us and this epistle was written a long time ago. Was Peter mistaken in his understanding of when the end would come?

Such skeptics could argue, I suppose, that Peter's co-laborer, the Apostle John was also wrong when he wrote the book of Revelation. Listen to how the book of Revelation begins: Rev. 1:1 *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John*. Unless you suppose, and there are those that do actually suppose this – that the book of Revelation has already been completely fulfilled – unless you suppose that, you might be tempted think that John, like Peter, was also wrong with regard to his outlook toward the end of all things.

One well known preacher sets the stage for his message on these verses in 1st Peter 4 this way: *What does he mean? Was he claiming to know and teach that Jesus would come back in a few months or years and end this age and establish the kingdom—so that he made a mistake in his prediction? Or was he teaching that Jesus could come back at any moment because everything that needs to happen before he comes had happened—and so his coming is near in the sense of being immanent? Or is there a third possibility?*

This preacher goes on then to give an explanation for Peter's meaning that I think is so good that I can do no better than to quote this preacher at length:

My suggestion, then, is that Peter means something like this when he says, "The end of all things is at hand":

"All around us there is intensifying persecution, as the Lord said there would be. There are rumors of wars. The horizon is dark for Israel, and the judgment on Jerusalem is near.

"Not only that, the gospel is spreading like wildfire as the Spirit is poured out. Paul was able to plant churches in all the major cities of Galatia in a matter of months. Now he has completed the frontier mission work from Jerusalem all the way around to northern Italy (Romans 15:19), and he plans to go to Spain. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of other bands of missionaries are forming and going to the unreached.

"I don't know how big the world is. But if Pentecost is any indication, and if the success of Paul is any evidence, the world could be evangelized in not many years

by God's great power. Brothers, the end is near—I'm not predicting when it will happen. I mean, the things that the Lord said must happen before he comes are taking place around us, and could be accomplished quickly—even in your lifetime. "So be sober for prayer, because the great danger facing us is that we fall in love with this world and become spiritually dull and the day come upon us like a thief and we be destroyed. O pray, brothers, pray for the coming of the kingdom and for your strength to endure and escape the trap of spiritual apathy. Pray that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

And that's exactly the way I would talk about the coming of the Lord today. It is just around the corner. The end is near indeed. If anyone dallies with sin and the world, thinking, "I have lots of time," he plays the fool. The Judge is at the door. And the time remaining should be spent in earnest prayer that we not be made drunk and hard by the cares and pleasures of this world.

I like this explanation not only for what it suggests about our end time perspective but for the practical application he draws from that end time perspective. And that's what Peter has in mind – the practical application of your end time perspective. If, indeed, the end of all things is at hand as Peter writes, then that knowledge ought to have an impact on how you live and what you do. So that's what I want to focus on this morning – this theme of end time priorities.

What Should Our End Time Priorities Be?

Peter lists a number of things that ought to govern our end time priorities and we'll see in the course of this study that one thing in particular is to have the highest priority. Let's think, then, first of all on:

I. The Priority of Being Sober

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober Peter writes in v. 7. We generally think, don't we, that being sober is the very opposite of being drunk. These two things are paired and contrasted so that if you're not drunk, you must be sober and if you are drunk there's no way you could be sober.

The idea of being sober, however, is much more far reaching than merely avoiding the impact of alcohol that impairs your senses. Being sober includes that, but means more than that. If you trace that word *sober* through the New Testament you'll discover that soberness is associated with a number of things and that it's compared as well as contrasted to certain things.

In Acts 26:24 for example you have Paul defending himself before King Agrippa and Festus. The Jews have been trying to charge Paul with something that will stick. And as Paul testifies how the Lord met with him on the Damascus Road and manifested Himself to Paul and saved Paul and called him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, in the midst of his testimony, Festus becomes quite uncomfortable and in v. 24 blurts out with a loud

voice: *Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.* And in the next verse Paul replies: *I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

There's our word – *soberness*. Paul spoke forth the words of truth and soberness. From Paul's statement you're able to see that soberness effects the way we speak and has a close connection to the truth. Paul's words were words of truth and soberness. And don't you know that there is a certain soberness to the words of the gospel. And that's tantamount to saying that the gospel raises serious (or sobering) issues. It raises the issue of judgment; and it raises the issue of the eternal destiny of your soul; and it raises the issue of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. These are sober matters which means they are matters to be taken very seriously. They are certainly not matters that ought to be treated frivolously. In the case of these verses in Acts 26 the contrast would be between seriousness and frivolousness.

We see the word again in Ro 12:3 *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think [of himself] more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.* In this instance being sober pertains to the way you think. Thinking soberly means not thinking of yourself more highly than you should. In this instance you could say that being sober stands in contrast to being proud.

Our usual propensity is to think more highly of ourselves than we should. Since we're considering what it means to be sober, this statement by John Calvin is fitting. He is quoted as saying *Proud men surpass every kind of drunkenness.* You can be drunk with pride, in other words. Your head can be so swollen with a sense of your own self-worth that you come across to others as being just as obnoxious as a man who's intoxicated with booze. Soberness stands in contrast to this kind of thinking.

So you see a clear connection between soberness with humility. A true and sober estimate of yourself will be a humble estimate of yourself. So Spurgeon is quoted as saying *The higher a man is in grace, the lower he will be in his own esteem.* I like this quote as well from an unknown source which makes a connection between humility and Christ. *True humility, this author says makes way for Christ and throws the soul at his feet.*

You can see, then, from the references I've cited so far that soberness effects the words you speak, and soberness effects the way you think, especially the way you think about yourself. We could go a step further by saying that soberness also effects what may be called your spiritual alertness. Listen to these words from 1Thess 5:5ff

Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. 7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. 8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

Paul is not speaking here of physical sleep but of spiritual sleep which amounts to spiritual carelessness. Let us not sleep – i.e. let us not be spiritually careless. The light of the gospel has broken in upon your heart. You have gone from the darkness of sin to the light of salvation. Be sober, therefore – or in other words be spiritually alert. This reference probably fits very closely with Peter’s words in our text. *The end of all things is at hand*. This becomes a good argument for not being spiritually careless but being instead spiritually awake and alert.

I’ll cite one more reference on this idea of soberness and I’ve saved what may be the key verse as the last under this heading. I call it a key verse or passage because I think it goes the farthest in making comparisons and contrasts with things that pertain to be sober. The passage is found in Titus 2:11-13:

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; 13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The contrasts to soberness in this passage are with ungodliness and worldly lusts. The comparisons with soberness are found in the phrase living righteously, and living godly, in this present world. To live soberly is to live godly and righteously and your outlook to sober living is that outlook that looks for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

You begin to see, I hope, how living soberly becomes a very high priority in the matter of the Christian’s end time priorities. Those that live carelessly live with no real sense of purpose and with no real outlook that tells them the direction of this world and the issues that will arise at the end of the world. Those that live soberly do so because they live with purpose and they live with a certain outlook on the things of this world in the end.

What, then, should our end time priorities be? One priority should be to be sober. *The end of all things is at hand, be ye, therefore, sober*. But let’s think next on another end time priority which would be:

II. The Priority of Prayer

Notice again what our text says: *But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer*. Other versions translation of this verse make it apparent that Peter aims especially for prayer.

ESV: *The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.*

NAS: *The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.*

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

Only the AV captures this idea of *watching unto prayer* and I like this translation because it captures the idea of that which is to accompany our praying. Peter may have written these words with Christ's words in mind when Christ spoke of the end of all things. Lu 21:36 *Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

Paul too makes the connection between watching and praying in Col 4:2 *Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.* He also makes a connection between watching and being sober in 1Thess. 5:6 *Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.*

When Christ prayed in the garden of Gethsemane and desperately wanted his disciples to help Him bear the burden that was at that point weighing so heavily upon Him, He instead found His disciples sleeping and said to them: *What, could ye not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak* (Mt. 26:40,41).

So as you can see there's a close connection between praying and watching. And watching serves the purpose of leading us to pray based on what we see. Watching stands in contrast to sleeping and sleeping corresponds to spiritual carelessness. This spiritual carelessness is what characterized the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. I can't be too hard on them. They didn't know. They didn't know at that point why Christ must suffer and die. Even though He had explained it to them it went over their heads. Had they the least inkling of what Christ was about to suffer and why He had to suffer perhaps they would have been able to watch with Christ.

But if the disciple's sleepy spirit is understandable the same cannot be said for you and me. We've been told that the end of all things is at hand. And we've been told that not only by Peter but we've been shown that by Christ Himself in the gospels and by the Apostle John in the book of Revelation. We know the complete story of redemption. You know what this world is headed for and what the ultimate outcome will be.

So we're to watch and we're to watch unto prayer. And what this means is that we're to be alert to what's going on around us. I know I've said this before especially with reference to the campaign season of a race that involves the Presidency. We're so bombarded with advertising and propaganda that I find myself having to take in the news in limited doses. Even in the aftermath of the presidential election I find myself having to do that. The demonstrations and the political rivalries that lead to resistance and obstruction – it can become so wearisome and depressing if you allow yourself to be dominated by it all.

But on the other hand – we can't be oblivious to what's going on around us and especially when it comes to the hostility toward Christ and the hostility to God's Word and the hostility toward the people of Christ. We can't be oblivious to what it is taking place in other parts of the world where we find Christians being persecuted to the point that they're

being martyred as never before. We have to be alert to these things. We can't afford to be careless these days.

I receive regular email updates from various Christian political action groups – Groups like Tony Perkin's Family Research Council or Tim Wildmon's American Family Association or Jay Sekelow's American Center for Law and Justice. There are other groups as well as well as Indiana State versions for some of these groups. They're all fighting the good fight and they're all seeking financial help through donations. I try to give to one or two of them each month and I wish I could contribute more than I do when I read of their efforts to defend Christians that are in danger of losing their businesses and their homes and their life's savings.

I'm afraid there's no way I could adequately contribute to all of them but what I can do and what you can do is watch unto prayer. Pray over the matters they bring to your attention. Pray for those that are being persecuted that they'll be given the grace to stand true to Christ, come what may. Pray for your own soul that you'll be given the grace to stand when the persecution comes closer to home. Pray that you'll be able to withstand the perverse cultural shifts that are making every form of moral perversion acceptable and Christianity to be a form of hatred when it propagates the truth of God.

Let me give you again the words of that popular preacher that I quoted in my introduction. He brings the matter of watching unto prayer close to home when he says: *The end is near indeed. If anyone dallies with sin and the world, thinking, "I have lots of time," he plays the fool. The Judge is at the door. And the time remaining should be spent in earnest prayer that we not be made drunk and hard by the cares and pleasures of this world.*

So watching unto prayer means being alert to the things that are going on around you. But it also means something more – something that's very positive. Watching unto prayer means watching with the awareness that the end of all things is at hand. Listen to the way Christ puts it in Lu 21:28 *And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*

When Peter writes that the end of all things is at hand, he's reminding us that history serves a purpose. As confusing as the unfolding events in this world may seem especially to those that are outside of Christ, we know that this world is on a trajectory that's been ordained by God. The Bible gives you the story of that trajectory from start to finish and the story ends with redemption being consummated.

Christ will return and there will come a new heaven and a new earth. There's coming a time when sin will be no more. Tragedies will be over; sickness will be eliminated; spiritual warfare will be done; the sins that too easily beset us will be forever behind us; and we'll be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God forever. And every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We read earlier in the service that description of the end that is given to us in Rev. 21. This is what we watch for and this is what we ultimately pray for when we watch unto prayer. I know of no better way to close our study this morning than to direct your attention again to that which we watch for. Listen to these words from Rev. 21:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

I'll end the description at v. 7 that I might leave you with the challenge of the passage. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things* the verse says. Let this be the thing that challenges you to watch unto prayer. Oh Lord give us the grace and the help of your Spirit that we must have to be overcomers. Show us our Savior that we may be more than conquerors through Him that loved us and let us be persuaded as we watch and pray that *neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

These are just a couple of things, then, that should be our end time priorities. In our next study we'll see how Peter assigns the highest priority to our love for one another. *And above all things he writes in v. 8 have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*