



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Peter 4: 1-11

Fall 2024

"The End is Nigh"

TRANSCRIPT

Well thank you Seth. I feel like a guest speaker here. *[Laughter]* I've been watching the 'A team' for the past, what?, eight Sundays or so—but it's good to be back. Y'all look the same; I know I don't, but this is what you do when you're lying in a hospital bed and you're recuperating; there's nothing else to do, so you grow one of these. And I've been told I look more dignified—so I wondered what I've looked like for the past 30 years. *[Laughter]*

So anyway, it's very good to be back with you, and I do appreciate all those who stood in for me: For Mark, and for Michael, and Chris, and Allen...they did a great job. I was greatly edified by everybody's sermon, and I know you were as well.

Well, as I was saying, ... now, you don't know what I was saying eight or nine weeks ago, so I thought it would be good to do just a bit of review. I don't want to spend too much time on this because we've got a long passage, but go back to chapter 1—and the first chapter and a half are very theological, and then the rest of the book is very exhortative.

Peter begins by praising God for the heavenly inheritance of the saints; and it's all due to God's sovereign grace, and election, and the new birth, and redemption, (these are great texts on all of that; passages on all of that). And then in verse 13 through 21 of

chapter 1, Peter exhorts the people. So he gives theology, then he gives exhortation based on it.

In verse 14, (*1 Peter chapter 1*), he tells them, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts...", (and that's an exhortation he picks up again in our passage today). The rest of the chapter, in verse 22 through 25, he exhorts them to mutual love for the brethren. (And again he picks up that exhortation in our passage.)

In chapter 2 he instructs them to advance in their salvation, 'grow through the Word of God', and so he tells them to, 'long for it, like a baby longs for milk'. Then in the rest of chapter 2 through chapter 3, he reminds them of their responsibilities. They are priests, and so they're to behave like that, with excellent behavior before the Gentiles. They're living in a Gentile world, and they're living in a 'hot' Gentile world, because they are under great persecution—a "fiery ordeal", he says. (1Pet 4:12).

He gives instruction on godliness to servants in the rest of that chapter and through chapter 3. And to wives and to husbands; they are to be witnesses and to be ready to give an account to whoever asks them about the hope that's in them. We're to be equally ready for that.

As I said, they're a suffering church, but Christ is their example of how to suffer even though they are innocent. He's the example of that: How He suffered, though innocent, and was rewarded greatly—with great victory. And that will be true of these saints, (it will be true of us, too...all of this applies to us).

Well, let me read our text; 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 1 through 11:

4 Therefore, (*based on what he has said about our Lord and His death*), since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ²so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. ³For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable

idolatries. (*That's quite a life they lived*), ⁴ In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*;

(Now that word, 'you', you'll notice is in italics. It's not in the original text; and I'll say a word about, 'who the maligning' involves.)

⁵ but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*.

⁷ The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer. ⁸ Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 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, *is to do it* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do it* as one who is serving 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. Amen.

1 Peter 4: 1-11

May God bless this time of study together. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, what a privilege it is to be with Your people on this Sunday morning, and I'm particularly grateful for the opportunity to be back and to have this great responsibility, a great privilege, to speak from Your Word. And Peter has just reminded us of how we are to speak Your Word. It is not our words, it's Yours. But we are to be very mindful of that, and recall and know the seriousness of it. And it is serious; it's serious to preach it and to teach—and it is serious to be under that preaching, and teaching, and to listen. And we're to listen with great sensitivity. So LORD, may the Spirit of God open hearts to do that, and prepare our hearts for that in this hour. Bless our time now, we pray, in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Most of us, if we are old enough, are familiar with street preachers who would warn of judgment, 'the end of days', maybe wearing a sandwich board that covered the front and the back with words on it like, "The end is nigh." I don't know how common that is today, but it was often the subject of humor in cartoons. People would laugh at such doom saying, because after all the drama, the world is still here, carrying on.

Well, that's Peter's message. Verse 7, "The end of all things is near." He was not a fanatical oddball; he spoke truth. It is a sober warning to the world, but a message of hope to the church. And it was the hope, that the saints Peter wrote to, needed to hear because they were a bleeding church—persecuted, worn down.

But Peter's message was, 'The sorrow will end, and glory will begin!' So Peter was encouraging them to look to the future, and understand that it will end triumphantly, and to have that hope, 'hold on to that hope', so that they will live faithfully and fruitfully, even in hard times.

Christ's return should inspire diligence in the Christian life. Peter encourages that in the second half of our passage—that they would love their fellow saints and serve them.

But before Peter encourages them with our future hope, he had to disabuse them of their sordid past. It's easy to become nostalgic and think of the past as, 'the good old days', and, 'the days when times were better.' They weren't.

It seems some of the saints may have been longing for those former days—but they couldn't hope for the future, which is a sanctifying hope, an inspiring hope; they couldn't hope for that if they were still fondly looking back to the past.

So the first part of the passage, verses 1 through 6, is about reminding these Christians that the past is over. They are dead to the old life so they can live fruitfully in their new life. He has just encouraged them to be good witnesses in their trials by giving them the example of Christ to imitate, who willingly suffered in order to do the will of God.

Now, based on Christ's suffering and sacrifice, Peter gives the reason that they can, and they must, live faithfully as Christ did—they died with Him. That seems to be the idea of what is really a difficult verse; "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin..." (vs1).

Now that may mean that, 'these saints were to have the attitude that Christ had and resolve to suffer as He did, and that would strengthen them as they resolved to do what He did morally, and to be faithful rather than to avoid hardship.' Now that's a possible interpretation.

But Peter's counsel here may be more like Paul's counsel in Romans chapter 6, about having died to sin, where he wrote in verse 11, "Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." The elect were united with Christ in His death, (and Paul develops that very clearly and very importantly in Romans chapter 5, verses 12-18). And so, based on that, he makes this exhortation to, 'Consider yourselves dead to sin'—and what he's saying is, 'We died with Him, He was our representative on the cross, His death was our death. As our substitute, He took our place and it really happened to us in Him.'

So, when we were converted, that became our experience. What He accomplished on the cross was actually applied to us at that moment of faith, and then we actually died to sin and the old life. And that's Peter's meaning in the statement, "...he who hath suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin..." (vs1b). In Christ's death we suffered—and ceased from sin. The old life was put to death. He who died with Christ, (when Christ died for us), is dead to sin—free of its power and able to resist it.

We are to know that!...We are to consider that to be true, and act upon it, and be obedient! That is the "*purpose*" we are to arm ourselves with, "*the same purpose*", (vs1), Christ had who was obedient unto death.

Peter explains that purpose in two ways in verse 2. We are, "...to live the rest of the time in the flesh...", (that is in this life), *first*, "...no longer in the lusts of men, but..." ,

"...for the will of God." (vs2). No longer for unrighteousness—we are to live for righteousness. Paul wrote we are, "dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Rom 6:11). So: 'Live no longer according to the principles of this world, (in lusts), but being alive to God in Christ, now live obediently to Him.' (vs2).

Now, being 'dead to sin and alive to God', 'dead to the old life, alive to the new life', doesn't mean we are now able to live perfectly, or that sin is no longer a problem and that we reach a high level in which life is easy. —Not at all. Life is a great struggle; and I think, really, the reality is the more we mature in Christ, the more we grow, the greater the struggle becomes, the greater the battle—the more we realize what we are and the needs that we have.

Well, Peter recognized that struggle here. We still are tempted to sin. The old life is still alluring; it pulls on us—and it did on these saints in Asia Minor. But we need to, 'consider, reckon, realize, we are now new creatures in Christ, and we are dead to sin.' (Rom 6:11). We have new abilities; that is part of our new nature. We have the Holy Spirit, who enables us to live that way. We are well armed.

But it begins with the mind—with thinking correctly about ourselves. We are not part of that old life and those worldly ways. And then, (with I think maybe some irony or understatement), he explained further to them the reason that they should do God's will and not go back to the old life, to 'the good ol' days', to 'the good times.' He told them simply, directly, that they had already done plenty of that; "For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desires of the Gentiles..." (vs3a). In other words, 'You've done enough sinning already.' And then he lists some of the degrading, mind-numbing activities of their past; "...having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries". (v3b).

In fact, as I read that I think, 'That's what Christ saves; that's the grace of God, that He can save such as these—or some of us because we're no better.' We're just as dead spiritually as they were. But this is the people that He saved, and saved from all that.

I think it's just human nature to sanitize the past, to romanticize it, when the reality is, it wasn't really all that great. People have done that with the 1960s, which was a turning point in society. I think every decade seems to have a label. The 1920s were 'the jazz age', the 1950s were the 'Fabulous 50s'. The 1960s are known as 'the swinging 60s': The age of the drug culture, the sexual revolution, of Woodstock and Stonewall (Riots). Someone said, "If you can remember the 1960s, you really weren't there."
[Laughter]...I can remember them.

Well that could have been said of the former life of these Gentile saints in the early church. They were saved out of a degrading, self-indulgent, drunken, pagan life. It wasn't liberating; it was enslaving. But that behavior was typical of the Gentiles; it was their way of life. And so Peter said that their friends, their neighbors, "...are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses..." (vs4).

That's an interesting expression, "*run with them*". It almost sounds contemporary; but the sense of it is, 'the frenzied pace of sin'. They all used to run together, "...into excesses of dissipation...", (vs4b). *Dissipation* speaks of 'uncontrolled indulgence in seeking pleasure'. In fact ... well, it's used of the loose living of the prodigal son. It's not the exact word, but the word very closely related to it is basically the same word. It is 'a wasteful life' —and he's a good example of that. But this is an 'overflowing of it'. It is "excesses of dissipation"; *debauchery*. They had lived corrupt lives.

But Christ came to save sinners, save the worst of sinners, and save them from the penalty of sin, and the power of sin, and to save them from that very destructive life. These people were running headlong toward destruction, eternal destruction, when He saved them. And their salvation was obvious to all, for it resulted in a dramatic change in their social life; 'they stopped running.' Their old friends and drinking buddies were surprised—and then angry; and they started *maligning* them.

This word, *malign*, is actually the word for *blasphemy*: 'They blasphemed'. And as I mentioned, in the Greek text the word, *you*, is not stated in verse 4, so it may mean, 'they blasphemed God'. Probably, 'the maligned' are these Christians as well as God.

So why did they do that? You know the world is supposed to be 'tolerant'. We hear a lot about tolerance, and they think that we're to be tolerant—and expect that of us. But the world is not tolerant, not at all. Peter didn't give the reason, but it is because, 'men love the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil.' (Jn 3:19). And they don't like the light shining on them, exposing their sin, and exposing them as guilty.

In one of his books, James Boice told that in ancient Greece there was a man named Aristides. I looked him up...a very interesting character. A great general for the Athenians, and he was considered to be a great man by them. He was called Aristides, "the Just", because he was honest.

But he was put on trial for something ... a trumped up, evidently, accusation against him. When a citizen of Athens came to him, (and spoke to him not knowing who he was), and asked him to vote for his own banishment, Aristides asked, "Why? What harm has Aristides done to you?" And the man said, "None. I'm just tired of hearing him called 'Aristides, the Just.' "

Men don't like to be reminded of their own lack of justice, of their own unrighteousness. And so these men slandered the Christians, and mocked their God and their new course in life. That's to be expected. Old friends soon turn away because they have nothing in common with the Christian, and who is also an indictment on their way of life—his or her very presence is.

But they can't escape the responsibility or the consequences of their actions, these Gentiles. Peter wrote in verse 5, that, "...they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." Mike, (*Black*), in his lesson today, turned to the end of the last verse of Ecclesiastes where Solomon makes that very point. There's a judgment day coming. God knows everything; He sees everything, and He'll judge the good and the bad.

And that's what Peter is saying here; "...they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." (vs5). That shows, really, the insanity of sin and unbelief because men think that if they just don't consider those things, they won't have

to face them; life will just keep going on. They don't seem to want to take into account that it doesn't—and there is a judgment coming, a day of reckoning. It will come; Hebrews chapter 9, verse 27, "...it is appointed for men to die once and after this judgment..." —and no one will escape it.

I noticed that in the neighborhood I live in, at Halloween there are lots of skeletons. It's weird. These people decorate their houses in the most macabre way. I thought, 'You know, I think a good way to decorate my house next year is to put a big sign up and have a couple of skeletons lying there and quote this verse. "It is appointed to man once to die, and after this comes judgment." ' *[Laughter]*. I'd probably be the most unpopular person in the neighborhood, and I'd get my house papered—so maybe I won't do that.

Now judgment could happen at any time; God "is ready to judge", Peter wrote. (vs5b). Christ has been appointed to be the judge, and He will come like a thief, unexpectedly. But even before that, people die unexpectedly, irreversibly—and suddenly they face God.

It is the dead that Peter wrote of in the next verse, verse 6. But this was the reason that the Gospel was preached to them when they were alive on earth, so that they would avoid that judgment to come. He says, "For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*." (vs6).

Now 'the dead' that he's speaking of here are Christians who were condemned by pagan judges and put to death. But even though the world condemns Christians and kills them, God's judgment will vindicate them. That was incentive for the struggling, world-weary church to persevere to the end under intense trial because that's not the end of things. The persecutors will not have the final word: The saints will be exonerated before the world in that day and live forever. —Not under judgment for eternity...but live forever!

But Peter added further incentive in verse 7 to what he just said; "The end of all things is near..." That means that all the major events in God's plan of salvation have occurred and now all things are ready for Christ to return—and the kingdom to come.

Now, I don't think Peter meant that Christ could return at that very moment, on that very day, because he knew that he had to die a martyr's death before that could happen. Christ told him that in John 21, verses 18 and 19. But the stage was set for the Lord's return. It was a real hope for that generation who was suffering—as it is for the church in every generation. And that should stimulate effort on our part and to be sober/serious in our way of life. Peter wrote, "...therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit*..." (vs7b). In other words, 'Make wise choices.'

That's true for all of life, but specifically here. What he's saying is, 'That should be the way we live in order for us to pray properly.' The reason for being, "...of sound judgment and sober *spirit* is for the purpose of prayer. " he says. (vs7c). It is so that they pray more appropriately and effectively.

To do that we need to be alert. We need to understand the events around us, what is happening in our midst, what is happening among ourselves. Now I'm not talking about current events, (but that's important, I think, for us to be wise about what's going on in our generation), but I'm referring here to what's going on in our assembly, among ourselves. We need to take care of one another, and pray for one another. Pray for the church with wisdom, with correct evaluation of things, and according to God's will.

Eschatology, the study of the last things, 'the end things', has ethical implication—in fact, every doctrine of Scripture does. And so you have, in the first chapters of this book, Peter going over the soteriological doctrine. He talks about election; he talks about their inheritance, and the regeneration that gave them that inheritance. And then he gives exhortation. So it's all practical. So eschatology is like that—it has ethical implications, as I think is born out here.

And that doesn't lead to, (should not lead to), what I think it was Ed Bloom that called it "eschatological frenzy", 'over-doing it with prophesy and that kind of thing'. The church had been in existence, when Peter wrote this, for about 30 years—and Christ still has not returned, has He? Now He may come soon, or it may be a millennium from now; we just don't know. We don't know when that event is going to happen. We know that it's going to happen...the 'when', we don't know.

What we do know is that we're not to be setting dates for that. We are not to spend all of our time on eschatology, fascinating as it is. We are to know the whole counsel of God, and live responsible lives now. That itself is a witness—living responsibly.

But, having said that, eschatology, the return of Christ, is part of the whole counsel of God. And John wrote, in 1 John chapter 3, verse 3, "Everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.", (just as Christ is pure). Set your mind on that.

Our hope is in the future, 'For time and eternity'. It will be glorious. Matthew 19, verse 28: Jesus called the kingdom to come "*the palingenesis*". It's a rare word in the Greek text. It means, "*the regeneration*." So it won't be like this; we look around ourselves...'This is where the kingdom's going to be?!' Yes, but it won't be like this—it will be a *regenerated* earth, a 'reborn world', 'paradise regained.'

And it is purifying to think on that future because it helps us get our priorities right, it gives us incentive to live for what is good, what is righteous, rich and eternal—for what is best and for what lasts for all eternity. The things we do today count for all eternity for there is reward for obedience. That hope and perspective leads people, (who truly believe it, truly believe that hope), to live orderly, responsible lives. It is a witness to those Gentiles around us. We're to be working. That's what Christ should find us doing when He returns. What we do, (to repeat what I just said), affects our lives—and the lives of others, now and forever. It matters for eternity.

And eternity is soon coming. Eternity for everyone in here is soon coming. You don't know when you're going to pass away. You don't know when you're going to leave,

young or old. But if you lived to be 60, 70, 80, [snap] gone—like that! So eternity is upon us. It's coming. And who knows, the hope we have is Christ is coming....He may come soon.

So Peter sets forth the kind of life we are to be living when He does come, the kind of lives that we want Him to find us living when He returns. It's a life of love, and a life of service. Verse 8, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." The word, "love" here, is *agape*. Edwin Bloom made the point in his commentary, (as he probably did in lessons here when he taught at Believer's Chapel; I know he did this in the Greek class I had with him), but he writes, "Agape love is capable of being commanded because it is not primarily an emotion." Now it involves emotion, but he's saying it's not primarily an emotion but, "a decision of the will leading to action."

So love, '*does for others*.' It serves. When love abounds in a Christian fellowship, a Christian community, offenses are dealt with—and forgotten. When it doesn't abound, jealousy and anger do—and division results, (and those are a terrible witness before the world). So Christian love puts others first. It doesn't broadcast other Christians failures, it doesn't gossip; it covers their failures and it doesn't take pleasure in scandal.

In verse 9, Peter gives a very concrete way in which love puts other first, and in a very practical way, and that is the practice of *hospitality*; "Be hospitable to one another without complaint." (vs9). The word, *hospitality*, literally means, '*love of strangers*'. The strangers here are fellow Christians, because Peter has just told this group to be fervent in their love for one another.

It's not easy to do that. It's certainly not easy to be hospitable, particularly if it's someone you don't know, (if it's a stranger). It can be very inconvenient; and we don't like inconveniences. Now that's evident from Peter's command here that, 'It's not easy, just do it without complaint—but do it!'

But it was especially needful, as it always was in that day that they were living in, because there were no convenient inns or hotels. They had them, but they were

unpleasant, usually places that were not very sanitary, so people would often just sleep under the sky. Hospitality, then, was necessary—especially in those times, those days, and especially in days of persecution.

Well, I experienced some of that. Years ago I was in Romania with a group of Christians from Bucharest. Some of you who've been here for a while know, that back in the mid- 80s, the Constantinescues, (who joined our church in 1985), asked me to go visit their church in Bucharest—and this is when it was communist.

And so I did that. And I made connections with people, and then I began to go back every year, and would minister there ... and be ministered to, I must say, because I was impressed with those people, and with their knowledge of Scripture, even though they lived under harsh rule.

But one of those days, (this is still during the communist era), we were traveling in the Carpathian Mountains, up north, visiting small churches and speaking. And one afternoon we couldn't find a hotel, and it was getting dark. Fortunately, one of our members was from a small town nearby—the town of Rucăr. It's a logging community with a sawmill, and it employed many of the people there. But remember, this was the communist era and economy, and no one was wealthy; they were all poor. And this family was poor, a simple family; and there were about seven of us. We came to the house, (and I didn't hear the conversation), but the parents let us in—happily!

The hosts offered me their bed. I declined, but they insisted and I ended up sleeping on the bed of this poor couple. The bed was a plank of wood on a frame; but I slept well...and I was grateful. They fed us breakfast in the morning, (and it was a large breakfast). It probably took most of the food that they had. I can remember them standing behind us smiling, ready to wait on us and serve us. I was a stranger, and they were happy to take me in, to sacrifice and show hospitality. That's what we're to do.

Within the fellowship of the church, the love of God will be shown in people being helpful to one another; through hospitality and also through the use of their spiritual gifts. In verses 10 and 11, Peter wrote of the gifts. They are not for our own

advancement; that's important. They are not for our own advancement or our own, personal edification. We might be edified by using our gift, but that's not the purpose; it's to edify others; it's for the benefit of believers.

Verse 10, "As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Each Christian, every Christian, each one of us has received a gift—at least one if not more.

There are many gifts. Some are verbal, like *teaching* and *evangelism*. Some are nonverbal, like *helps*, and *giving*, and *mercy*. And all of these gifts have a variety of uses. That is an expression of "the manifold grace of God", (vs10), the many faceted, the multi-colored grace of God. Not every teacher teaches the same way. Not every evangelist evangelizes the same way. Not all service occurs the same way. There are all kinds of ways these gifts are used. And the church that is vital, the church that is alive, has members who use their gifts.

Again, gifts are not directed inwardly for personal, private edification. They are outward, "for the common good", as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 12:7. "...for the edification of the church", as he put in 1 Corinthians 14, verse 12, where a lot of this is discussed. They are given for service, not for ourselves, but for serving others, serving the church.

In verse 11, Peter lists some of the gifts, (and really they're more '*categories*' here than '*gifts*'), '*speaking*' and '*service*'; and he gave direction on their use; "Whoever speaks is to do it as one who is speaking the utterances of God;...", (vs11), (which doesn't mean that the teacher can claim that, '*his words are God's words*'—they're not.) And everyone who comes to hear someone teach the Scriptures is to be like the Bereans, and be examining it in light of Scripture—'*putting him to the test*'. It means that they are to speak with all seriousness, as one who's handling the Word of God, and not with carelessness.

And he says, "...whoever serves is to do it as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies;..." (vs11b). Service is time consuming. It is tiring. But the strength is

not our own to do it. We look to the LORD, and He supplies. He's the source of strength; He's the source of energy. And He will give it. He's faithful to do that. And that is an infallible and an inexhaustible source of energy.

We look to Him, and He will supply. We walk by faith, which in part means, we are to do what is right, what the situation requires. We need to know the Word of God, and need to understand the principles of conduct in the Word of God, so that you know when to do what you should, and how to do it.

And that life of faith requires that, and requires that we step out in faith, maybe sensing that we're not qualified or capable of doing this work of help or service or instruction, but trust God, and He will supply us with strength and wisdom. That's the life of faith—it is moving forward in obedience and seeing how He blesses.

Paul recognized the weariness that comes with service when he gave encouragement in Galatians chapter 6, verse 9; "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary." So don't stop running the race of faith and service. This is how the church is blessed, and then the work of God is furthered by consistent, diligent service from us—all of us! That's how the church functions.

Now, it's not what we see normally today. Typically today the Christian church has functioned, and expected to function, by the work of a professional class: 'The clergy' —a pastor and his staff. But the reality is, the New Testament church functioned with an "every-member ministry." That's how John Stott described it, and I thought that's a good expression: "every-member ministry". We all have a gift, or gifts, and we are to be using them.

But the ultimate purpose of service does not have as its object 'us', but God. We serve, and God strengthens us to serve, Peter wrote, "...so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever. Amen." (vs11c).

Everything we do...our words, our deeds, our actions...should be helpful to one another for the building up of one another—but ultimately that's not the purpose; the purpose is God's glory. Do it for that. —That's our primary motivation.

Well how do we get that motivation? —because to do anything we must be motivated and have the incentive to do it. And the only way I can explain it is through a life of diligence in prayer and study. Then, as we pray, God opens our mind to things—and as we study we learn who God is and what He has done; and asking God to then deepen our appreciation of it. It's an ongoing process, all through this life. The glory belongs to Him, not to us. The dominion belongs to Him, and He will rule. His Son will rule, and we look forward to that.

In the meantime, the dominion is His. He rules us now and we should be living increasingly to give more of ourselves to His service. And as Paul said, "We will reap if we do not grow weary." (Gal 6:9). There will be great blessings—blessing to others and blessing to ourselves, if we do not grow weary. The time to do that is short, but “the end of all things is near.” (vs7). That is both a warning and a promise. The warning is, time is God's gift to us: It is full of opportunity to serve, to serve Him, to serve one another; to give back to Him who has given us everything.

So we must see time as valuable. It is a great blessing. We are to use it. We are to be on guard not to drift, not to be lulled into complacency by life's routine, and think ‘There is always tomorrow; we can always put things off.’ No! Time is short. Jesus said in John 9:4, "Night cometh when no man can work." So as Paul said to the Ephesians, "Redeem the time, for the days are evil." (5:17).

But “The end of all things is near”, is also a promise. It's a glorious promise: Christ is coming again to save us out of this present evil age, and to bring us into His glorious kingdom. We are already victors. That hope would have been especially encouraging to a suffering church who has been encouraged to accept suffering, and

suffer well to God's glory and the Gospel, as a good witness to unbelievers. That is hard. And we don't even imagine how difficult it is, and what those early saints went through.

But it won't last forever. The end is near, when the war will be over and God's truth and glory will fill the earth. We should think of that often, have that always on our minds, so that we will live for what is to come and what is eternal. Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come." John ended the Book of Revelation with the Lord's promise, "Yes, I am coming quickly", and John's prayer, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (Rev 22:20).

Well, that should be our prayer. May God make it so.

Are you ready for His coming, and ready for His appearing? It's the glorious hope. If you put your faith in Christ, you have it.

But if you have not, that should terrify you. The right response is not to mock and dismiss it as foolish. The end is always near. If not the end of days, then the end of your days. "We are all just a vapor," James wrote, (4:14). We may be gone tomorrow. The only way to prepare for that is, 'Believe in the Savior, now.' May God help you to recognize that and number your days—recognize your need of the Savior and trust in Him for forgiveness and salvation. He will receive you.

(Closing prayer) LORD, we give You praise and thanks that the sinless Savior died for sinners, and that by Your grace we've been brought to a saving knowledge of that, and faith in Him. Thank You for that, Father. Thank You for saving us out of a worthless life, and giving us a life of eternal value.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. Amen.

(End of Audio)