

There is a common term that is used these days and in fact there is even a TV show about it. The term is “preppers.” It refers to people who are preparing for the end of the world as we know it or preparing for the “grid to go down.” (Show magazine cover)

Prepping for the end is not a new thing. Peter was talking and writing about this in the first century.

The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers.

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¹⁰ *God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.* ¹¹ *Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.* 1 Peter 4:7-11 NLT

John Updike in his book entitled *Pigeon Feathers* presents a fictitious version of what happens to us at the end of life. It is a view not rooted in the Bible but rather in Naturalism’s belief that human history is accidental and without purpose, direction or any ultimate goal.

“Without warning, David was visited by an exact vision of death; a long hole in the ground, no wider than your body, down which you were drawn while the white faces recede. You try to reach them but your arms are pinned. Shovels pour dirt in your face. There you will be forever, in an upright position, blind and silent and in time no one will remember you and you will never be called. . . And the earth tumbles on, and the sun expires, and an un-altering darkness reigns where once there were stars.”

That is a harsh, dark and cold vision of the end of our lives on this earth. I hope you know and believe that there is a better ending than that. Peter was a first century fisherman turned preacher but he would have us believe that all of history is purposeful and that everything is heading toward God’s intended goal.

I want to take a couple of minutes at the beginning here and remind you of three foundational truths before we get to the heart of this message. Everything Peter is writing is based on his beliefs in three foundational truths two of which he witnessed firsthand.

Three R’s to remember:

1. The reign of Christ

Peter believed without doubt that we are headed somewhere. Our world is heading to a climatic event known as the return of Christ. And when He returns He will reign eternally. Christ eternal reign has been the hope of Christians since Christ came the first time.

2. The resurrection of Christ

What would cause a first-century fisherman to hold to such a worldview? It is simple, Peter was an eyewitness to Christ and why He came. He was called by Christ Himself to leave his fishing business and become fishers of men. Peter's understanding of the end of the world is rooted squarely in what he witnessed in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. It is in Christ that we find our hope. When Jesus ascended from this earth back to heaven the angels asked a great question of the disciples. They said, ". . . *why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday He will return from heaven in the same way you saw Him go.*" Acts 1:11 NLT

Every now and then I hear someone talk about all roads leading to God. If you believe the Bible at all you will see clearly that Jesus is the only plan God laid out to rescue a fallen humanity.

It is in Christ only that we see God's plan for all humanity and history. In Him, God has seen fit to give the world a King and to Him all authority has been given.

3. The return of Christ

Peter not only believes in the reign of Christ and the resurrection but he believes and hopes in the return of Christ. In verse five of 1 Peter 4 he reminds us that every non believer ". . . *will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*"

The return of Christ and the Christian conception of history is the most encouraging yet jarring teaching ever. It announces that through Christ the end has come. He has already been crowned King. God's plans are now fixed. If Peter is correct, then the only thing keeping Jesus from returning today is God's gracious design to bring more and more men and women under the authority of Christ through repentance and faith.

Peter's mind must have been overloaded with these truths. I believe that he was connecting emotionally as he wrote this letter to the church. It is no wonder that he opens verse 7 with these words: "*The end of the world is coming soon.*"

Every Christian should embrace the teaching that we are "in the last days." The end of the world began with Christ's resurrection. Let me give you a quick lesson in the theology of Christ. Peter wrote in chapter 1 that: "God chose Him as your ransom long before the world began, but He has now revealed Him to you in these last days."

We should continually wrestle with what to do with our time on this earth or the time we have left. Many of us procrastinate about spiritual things. We constantly look at the future as a time when we will get our act together spiritually and really do significant things. It's always after we get married, after our kids are older, after we buy our first home, after I retire; then I will really invest in God's Kingdom. Too often we wish our life away and forget the Biblical truth that we are in the last days and that our lives are but a vapor.

What are we specifically to be doing in light of Christ's return? (by the way we are 2000 plus years closer than the people were who first read these words.) Peter gives us some very direct and specific words that should allow us to make practical applications to our lives. Peter believed

without doubt that we are headed somewhere. Our world is heading to a climatic event known as the return of Christ. And when He returns He will reign eternally.

We are going to look at four very practical ways that we can engage the work of Christ and be found doing His work on that final day.

The way Christians live:

1. Be self-controlled and sober minded

In light of Christ's promised return and the constant challenge to be like Him we must be self-controlled and serious minded. To try to understand this better I believe Peter is saying, be clear-headed. Don't live like those in the world who are constantly looking for an escape.

People long for the weekends and evenings when they can turn off their minds and escape from reality. Often this is done through television or the social media. I think we would be shocked if we ever truly tracked the time we spend trying to disconnect from reality through these means.

The authentic Christian will be different. We will be thinking clearly about God and our role in His Kingdom on earth. Our Christianity will shape everything about us.

The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers 1 Peter 4:7 NLT

The mark of a Christian at the end of the world will be a person on their knees in prayer. Our Christian life and our authenticity are directly linked to how much time we spend with God in prayer. It's as simple as that. To be honest this ought to be sobering to most of us in this room. I'm not trying to guilt you into anything but in all seriousness you and I both need to spend time with Jesus everyday of our lives on this earth. We are to watch and pray.

In other translations, Peter is quoted as saying, ". . . the time is at hand." This is the same phrase that Jesus used in the Garden when He was encouraging His disciples to watch and pray with Him.

The time is at hand when we must be about the Father's business. Be self-controlled, earnest and disciplined in your prayers.

2. Be sincerely loving

⁸ *Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.* 1 Peter 4:8 NLT

Again we are looking at preparedness instructions for the end of the world. There are two observations to be made here.

Peter says to show DEEP love. . . this simply means that our love should be genuine, sincere, and real. This means that Christians should be the most loving people on this planet. If you have lived very long at all around the church world you will know that while this is certainly true for all Christians it is not true for everyone that attends church and may think that they are a Christian. Secondly we must focus on the words one another. He drives home this point time after time, even in the next verses that we will look at today.

In the last days we should be living a “one another” kind of life. Remember Peter is writing this to churches in what is now modern day Turkey. It would appear that he wants this truth to penetrate across geographic regions.

In a multi-site context we must practice this. I can tell you as the lead pastor of this church that I love all of our sites. We are unique and different. The temptation might be for some in the larger churches to feel more important or more valuable than the smaller sites. From my perspective nothing could be further from the truth. I wish at times those in the smaller sites could feel this or realize this. The proof of our love for one another is seen most clearly when people go from site to site to serve. Remember our motto is to attend one and serve one. Attend a service and serve in a service. I love it when people go from one site to the other to serve. Why? Because it proves that it’s not about us and them.

There is a curious phrase added to this verse: love covers a multitude of sins. It is simple really and a wonderful description of the power of love. Think of it this way: Love takes the oxygen out of sin the way a blanket chokes the air from one caught on fire. As long as oxygen is present, forest fires rage but if you could remove the oxygen or take the air away they would settle down and great tracts of land and acreage could be saved.

May we love each other in this way. May nothing evil be allowed to breathe for long. May we keep short accounts.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT

3. Be about showing hospitality

Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. 1 Peter 4:9 NLT

Make sure that you don’t lose sight of a very important word in this verse. The word is “cheerfully.” Context is everything when trying to understand the bible. In the first century there were no hotels or motels. You might find an inn but they were not plentiful or did not resemble anything we could compare them to other than a “bed and breakfast.” Even that is not a good example. People relied on the hospitality of kind people to put them up for the night.

Hospitality is about opening your heart and your home. It is about showing love to strangers as well as our best friends. I would remind you again that in the context of this room you can

practice hospitality. Find a person who looks alone or someone you don't know and talk to them before you go and talk to your friends. It doesn't have to be a long conversation but introduce yourself and be friendly.

Jon Dennis when envisioning the start of Holy Trinity Church wrote these words:

“The key with hospitality is to begin. It doesn't matter if you live in an apartment, a dorm, or a home. Once a week opening our home, baking a few cookies, saying hello in the elevator, checking up on an older neighbor, and borrowing sugar from the next apartment. Yes, the city is a place of isolation. But it may be that through our doors, all kinds will come, one who is hungry, and intellectual questioning, a colleague in crisis, a student from a far off land. It may be that God's new people from the nations will sit around our table. It may be that having shared a meal, and having tasted of Christ, their own table will be for the gospel in a country we would never reach. Hospitality is not something we do pragmatically. We do not practice hospitality “to get conversions.” We practice hospitality because we are God's people and because it is the right thing to do. We share God's goodness through our home because God has shown His goodness to us.”

Henri Nouwen, the great spiritual writer was going to a monastery for a retreat. The monks observed vows of silence and the retreat was to be meditative and prayerful. Nouwen was delayed and was late getting to the monastery on that miserable, rainy night. He rang the bell, well after bedtime, and was met at the door by one of the brothers. The brother warmly greeted him, took his wet coat, brought him to the kitchen and made him a cup of tea.

They chatted in the late night hours and Nouwen began to relax and feel ready for the retreat. But he knew this monk was supposed to observe silence, so he finally asked him, "Why are you willing to sit and talk with me?" The monk replied "Of all the duties of the Christian faith and the rules of my order, none is higher than hospitality."

4. Be intentional about serving one another

Peter now shares the fourth practical way we should be living with the end of the world in view.

¹⁰ God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. ¹¹ Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to Him forever and ever! Amen. 1 Peter 4:7-11 NLT

It is fascinating to me that he doesn't make a big list of spiritual gifts or human strengths. Instead he just focuses this directive about serving one another in two areas.

The first one is speaking. Those who serve the church by speaking and teaching should recognize and be held accountable to understand that you are speaking about the things of God. In some cases you are speaking for God. The people who teach the most elementary lessons in the nursery should recognize this as much as one who stands on a platform and addresses crowds

from a pulpit. If you are in a position to teach others it is critical that you understand the dynamic that has to happen. I remember a few years ago receiving a call from a person sponsoring a career day for high school juniors I think it was. She wanted to know if I would set up a display offering ministry as a career. I tried gently to explain that being called is not something that you wake up one day and decide that you want to do. It's not something you choose over being something else. The call of God to be a pastor chooses you. I can't explain that but it is not something that just everyone can do. And know this. Those of us who do it cannot do it effectively without the calling and the help of the Holy Spirit.

Kent Hughes writes about preaching: "There are times when I am preaching that I have especially sensed the pleasure of God. I usually become aware of it through the unnatural silence. The ever-present coughing ceases, and the pews/seats stop creaking, bringing an almost physical quiet to the sanctuary – through which my words sail like arrows. I experience a heightened eloquence, so that the cadence and volume of my voice intensify the truth I am preaching. There is nothing quite like it – the Holy Spirit filling one's sails, the sense of His pleasure and the awareness that something is happening among the hearers."

I believe that if you are serving others by teaching there will be moments when you will sense the presence of God surrounding you.

It's not always that way of course. Jim Dunn was serving as the pastor of the First Baptist Church, and his wife, Gladys, was very friendly and welcoming to people.

One particular Sunday when the sermon seemed to go on forever, many in the congregation fell asleep.

After the service, to be sociable, she walked up to a very sleepy looking gentleman. In an attempt to revive him from his stupor, she extended her hand in greeting, and said, "Hello, I'm Gladys Dunn."

To which the gentleman replied, "You're not the only one!"

But Peter doesn't just write about speaking he also writes about serving. He refers to this as the gift of helping. What a tremendous gift that is. The ability to see a need and respond to it without being asked. The desire to serve others by helping them in any way possible.

The word that is used here translated as helping others is really based in the language of being a servant. Servants were the men and women who gave themselves to the running of the house. They worked long and hard to ensure that the environment was conducive to healthy family life.

You know I can bottom line this for you real easy. You and I can't be Bible Christians if we are not involved in serving others. It may be in the context of the church or it may be at work or in your neighborhood but Christfollowers will serve.

You may think that your time is so valuable that you don't have time for other people but that is not a Biblical value. Our goal as a church is to make sure that we are making Christians and not just church attenders.

There was an elderly missionary returning to the United States to retire. He & his wife had spent over 40 years serving in Africa. But now he was alone. His wife & two children had long since found their final resting place in the soil of Africa. As he got off the plane he saw a great crowd of people waiting at the gate. Some were holding signs, others were waving banners, & he could even hear sounds of music above the shouting voices. For a few seconds he thought, "Can it be? After more than 40 years of service, all of these people have actually come out to welcome me home?"

But no, that was not the case. On his plane was a politician returning from a visit to Africa. During his visit he had been catered to and waited upon and all his needs had been met. And now he was being welcomed back with all the ceremony his nation could provide. As he waited and waited at the airport, the contrast was almost more than the old missionary could bear. For a moment he began feeling sorry for himself, and he started to pray. "Father in Heaven, why? I've served You faithfully and for so long, and yet, look. I don't expect much. But is it wrong to desire that there be some kind of a welcome home?" Then, almost as if God had spoken out loud, the old missionary heard Him say, "But my son, you're not home yet."

Let me remind you how Peter ends this passage. His mind is still on the end of all things. That day is coming and that is the day we will find our home for eternity. For now we work, we labor as Christians to change this world but one day we will see Jesus return to this earth.

¹⁰ God has given each of you a gift from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. ¹¹ Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God Himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to Him forever and ever!

Since the end is at hand, we are to give ourselves to self-control and sober mindedness through prayer. We are to be known for our sincere love for one another and our neighbors. We are to practice and show hospitality and we are to serve each other through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The scenario's the world offers are pretty sad. I guess you can buy into World War Z if you want to but there is something to look forward to beyond that. The fact is that Jesus Christ is coming back. Call it the end of the world or whatever you want but I prefer to think of it as a beginning. The beginning of eternity.

Winston Churchill said, "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

A group of geography students studied the "Seven Wonders of the World." At the end of the lecture, the students were asked to list what they considered to be the present-day Seven Wonders of the World. Although there was some disagreement, the following got the most votes: 1) the Great Pyramids of Egypt, 2) the Taj Mahal, 3) the Grand Canyon, 4) the Panama Canal, 5) the Empire State Building, 6) St. Peter's Basilica, and 7) the Great Wall of China. While gathering the votes, the teacher noted that one student, a quiet girl, hadn't turned in her paper yet. So she asked the girl if she was having trouble with her list. The quiet girl replied, "Yes, a little. I couldn't quite make up my mind because there were so many possibilities." The teacher said, "Well, tell us what you have, and maybe we can help." The girl hesitated, then read, "I think the Seven Wonders of the World are: 1) to touch, 2) to taste, 3) to see, 4) to hear... " She hesitated another moment, and then continued, ". . . 5) to hope, 6) to laugh, 7) and to love." The room became so silent it was deafening. You see, it is far too easy for us to look at the exploits of man and refer to them as wonders, while we overlook all the amazing things God has done, regarding such blessings as merely ordinary. Life itself is wondrous, amazing, and miraculous. Why don't we notice this and declare it to be so with each breath and within every moment we live here on the earth? To do so is to truly LIVE.