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Living as Exiles in a Hostile World – The Epistle of 1 Peter

Part 28– Our Prayers and the Return of Christ March 5, 2017

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 4

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 3

1 Peter 4:7-11 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. (8) Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (9) Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (10) As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (11) whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him

belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Just as a follow up on our subject from last time – the crucial and vital necessity of reliance upon the Holy Spirit in our interpretation and application of Scripture – listen to this statement from an early Protestant confession of faith (The Bern Synod, 1532) –

Chapter 37: How the minister should study and read the Scripture

The holy Scripture ‘makes wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given from God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be lacking nothing, equipped unto all good works.’

We must of necessity consider the duty we have industriously to read the Scriptures. The order to be followed is that before we take up the Bible we should begin with a prayer that is

sincere and spiritual. This prayer from the heart is of such a nature that he who prays is impelled by the Holy Spirit, so that first with increased love he thanks God for blessings received. From this will spring consolation and a stronger faith.

Next, the Holy Spirit urges him to request that the Lord might further removed from us the destitution, shortcoming, and folly, which are yet holding us in wicked oppression. This gives rise to a longing and ardor which the Lord has called a hunger and thirst after righteousness, and which in turn is always followed by satisfaction and true bliss.

Thus it is evident that prayer is an emptying and preparation of the heart, so that the intention and counsel of God, which lie hidden in the letter, may be comprehended and retained.

Otherwise, omitting prayer, one is accustomed to read holy Scripture as though it were a mundane history, for the perusal of which one need employ only reason. That brings forth nothing less than a conceited, fleshly wisdom, which afterwards is presented to the poor congregation as coming from God and from the Word of God.

Accordingly, it is well said in the Epistle of James, ‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and he

will give with simplicity, etc.’ (James 1)”

Let’s move in then for a closer look at Peter’s words here in vs 7-11. We won’t rush, and if we do not deal with all five of these verses thoroughly today we will take them up next time.

Sober, Prayerful Vigilance

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. (vs 7)

We are living as elect exiles in enemy territory, not in our real homeland where our citizenship lies – the new heavens and earth, the kingdom of God. How then are we to live while here? This is Peter’s purpose in writing this letter.

While Christians are joyful and can certainly enjoy the good things the Lord gives us in this present life (we are not to be dull, boring, ascetic nay-sayers), nevertheless we must be what Peter calls, “sober-minded.” Serious-minded people who are serious-minded because we know and believe certain serious facts. Namely,

“The end of all things is at hand”

Knowing that we are living in the very last age of this world, and that Christ is

coming at any moment to judge the world and to bring us into the New Creation, we are to be people who take things very seriously. We are to be self-controlled (not running to the evil excesses the pagans are characterized by) and we are to be sober-minded. These are sobering truths. It was, I am sure, a very sobering fact for Noah that the flood was coming to destroy the world. He took his life and his ark-building quite seriously.

The end of all things is at hand. Notice that Peter connects this fact with *prayer*. “...for the sake of your prayers.” What does he mean?

I think that if you listen to the following Scriptures that deal with this same connection – prayer and the end of all things – you will understand Peter’s point. Here we go:

1 Peter 1:13-16 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, **and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** (14) As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, (15) but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, (16) since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

1 Peter 5:8 **Be sober-minded; be watchful.** Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Matthew 24:42-44 Therefore, **stay awake**, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (43) But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. (44) **Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**

Matthew 25:10-13 And while they were going to buy, **the bridegroom came**, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. (11) Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' (12) But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' (13) **Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.**

Luke 21:31-36 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. (32) Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. (33) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (34) **"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and**

cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. (35) For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. (36) But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Luke 22:45-46 And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, (46) and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? **Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.**"

Romans 12:11-13 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. (12) Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, **be constant in prayer.** (13) Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Ephesians 6:16-18 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; (17) and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, (18) **praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert** with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

Colossians 4:2 **Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful** in it with thanksgiving.

1 Thessalonians 5:6-9 **So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.** (7) For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. (8) But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. (9) For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, (12) training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, **and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,** (13) **waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,**

Revelation 16:15 ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! **Blessed is the one who stays awake,** keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")

Did you see certain themes here stated over and over again? They are exactly what Peter is telling us:

- Keep the fact of Christ’s return prominently in your thinking.
- Remember the promises of the blessings of the New Creation that are going to be ours
- Pray for the strength and wisdom to reject the temptations of the folly of this world, remaining serious and sober-minded about the end of this present world rather than being drawn off by it into Vanity Fair.
- Stand guard. Be watchful. The devil and his lying temptations are going to be fired at you. Don’t fall asleep on guard duty.
- Constantly pray. Let your faith and hope in the return of Christ and the destruction of this present world guide and direct your prayers.

In this light then, listen to Peter’s words again-

1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

For the sake of your prayers. I conclude that Peter is telling us *to let our prayers be directed by the fact that the end of all things is at hand.* By “directed” I mean that the content of our prayers, the things we pray for in other words, are to largely be prayers made in light of the fact that we are

living as elect exiles in a wicked world, subject to many temptations, subject to growing careless and falling into the trap of the evil living of this world that we see all around us.

Constantly we are bombarded – *come on, join the party!* But we must not. The sobering, serious truth is that one day, just as it was in Noah’s day, the wicked of this world are going to be partying on, living as if this present world were an end in itself, and Christ is going to come again. The flood, you see.

The Christian then is a sober, serious, watchful person who separates themselves from the lifestyle of the world. Our prayers are to be guided by these things. *For the sake of your prayers.*

Listen to the Lord Jesus once again from the Gospel of Luke -

Luke 21:31-36 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. (32) Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. (33) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (34) **"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. (35)**

For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. (36) **But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."**

This really is about as clear of a statement of these themes in the Bible, and it is exactly what Peter is instructing us about in verse 7.

- The kingdom of God, the return of Christ, is near
- All of the present heavens and earth are going to “pass away”. They are not eternal.
- The Christian in this world must keep “watch” diligently.
- What we are to keep on guard for is that we are not drawn away from Christ to an embracing of this world and a participation in its partying ways that are driven by a mindset that the world is going to go on and on and on.
- So we are to pray all the time that we would not be drawn away from Christ and into the temptations of this world, and as a result we will not be ashamed when Jesus comes again.

Notice especially this verse again –

But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with

dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

See it? *For the sake of your prayers.* Let’s see if we can condense it a bit more so we can be sure to remember-

The world tempts us to slip into a weighing down or a dullness of our heart so that our affections are drawn off from Christ and onto the world’s trinkets. The world is constantly trying to lull us into a delusional sleep, and the antidote is for us to constantly pray in light of the fact that Christ is coming again and the end of all present things is at hand.

It IS easy, isn’t it? To be lulled into thinking and living as if this world, this present life, is all there is. To become infected with “Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.” One sure sign of this disease is when our prayers become empty and superficial, concerned primarily with life in this world.

Think through this very, very soberly and carefully. Think about the things and events of our daily lives that tend to consume our thoughts and energies and worries-

- Money
- Relationships (especially relationship problems)

- Movies
- The News
- Sports
- Facebook
- Texting
- Hobbies
- Cars and trucks
- Our families, relatives
- Illness
- Suffering, death
- Concern about food, clothing, shelter
- Jobs
- Fun and leisure

And on we could go. Now there is nothing necessarily sinful about these things, and in fact we must deal with most all of them as we live out our present lives in this world.

But the Scripture is warning us about the danger of being consumed by these things so that we are so concerned and weighed down by them that we are drawn away from the real thing we are to have our eyes set upon – Christ, His return, the New Creation. If we are careless and we fail to keep watch for Christ and His kingdom and our real eternal destiny, then what is going to happen is that we can be lured into the “dissipation, drunkenness, and cares of this life.”

Matthew 6:31-34 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or

'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' (32) For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (34) "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

How many people today who profess to be Christians are evidently living simply for this present world? Many, I am afraid have been lulled to sleep and their eyes are not focused on Christ and His promises, specifically His coming again.

Now, Peter goes on to show us even further how we must live in this world –

1 Peter 4:8-11 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (9) Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (10) As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (11) whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him

belong glory and dominion forever and
ever. Amen.

We will plan to look further at these verses next time. Just what does the often quoted and more often mis-used phrase “love covers a multitude of sins” mean? To these things we will look next Lord’s Day.