

Wake Up
1 Peter 4:7-11
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We've been looking at our sermon series in Peter's first letter to a group of Christians in the outskirts of the Roman Empire. So if you have your Bible, turn to 1 Peter 4. It's going to be on the screen. You can look it up on your iPhone or your Tablet as well. Hear the words. Read the words. And as we discuss the words as well. The passage we will be looking at today, we will be actually breaking it up. We'll read the same passage three weeks in a row, and each week, we'll have a smaller portion of it. So I will be reading verses seven through eleven, but I will be discussing verse seven.

In 1 Peter 4:1-6, Peter highlights how Christians are to live among people of other religions and cultural sensibilities. And because of that, they might be experiencing suffering, marginalization, discrimination, even violent hostility. And Christians are to respond to such suffering in Christ's name as Christ himself would respond to the suffering that he endured. Here, Peter is making a turn in the passage we're looking at now, verses seven through eleven. Peter contrasts what he's already been saying with how Christians are now to live among each other in light of the circumstances that they are experiencing.

So basically, at a thirty-thousand foot view, this passage for the next few weeks is basically saying—Peter is saying, “Because of everything that I've been writing to you, everything that I've been saying, and because the end is near, Christians should remain mindful of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.” It is time now for God's people to live in light of God's will. Therefore, people should be alerted to a sense of urgency, to cultivate clear thinking for their prayers, sacrificial love that includes generous hospitality to each other—and I would argue that it extends outside our walls as well—and that all gifts should be used for the good of others, so that the totality of our lives are lived in relationship to who Christ has made us, renewed, redeemed, and he's making us new as well as he's growing us. And that all of these things are in light of God's glory through his Son Jesus. So that's for this reason, we're actually going to slow it down. We're not just going to talk about this. We're going to break it up and spend more attention on what does it look like for Christians to be living in a community that is actually in contrast to the community around them. Read the words in your head, follow along as I read them.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 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.
[ESV]

The reading of God's Word. Will you pray with me?

Father, we do lift up this time. Would you be worshipped, would you be honored, by the reading of your Word? Would you move by your Spirit for us to understand? And more importantly than just understanding with our heads, would you move our hearts? Would you melt our cynicism? Would you wake us up? May we be alert to your promises, looking expectantly, anticipating that coming day with great rejoicing, and how that matters so much for even today as we wait. Help me who preaches and teaches. May we be a body that reflects who you are. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I am notoriously a bad morning person. I can be a morning person if I get a lot of sleep. My roommate in college had to endure this, because before cell phones, we had alarm clocks. And I couldn't just have an alarm clock with a snooze button, because I would, even in my sleep, I would turn it off. So then I moved it down before our loft away from me, so I would have to physically get out of the loft. But then even in my sleep, I would get down and hit the snooze button. So I had to use one of those old-timey clocks that you wind up, and it's brass—wasn't real brass, but it's metal. And it's just that annoying bell ringing. And you really can't fumble around in your sleep, because it's mechanical. You actually have to physically stop it and click the latch so it would stop ringing. My roommate had to endure me for four years, three years in a dorm and one year when we lived off campus. And he was very gracious, because he usually would just laugh at me. One morning in particular, I woke up with such a jolt that I hit my head on the ceiling. And so normally he was frustrated at me because, you know, in my sleep I would turn my alarm off. But in that morning, he just laughed. He just laughed. I could just hear him chuckling that I nailed my head on the ceiling.

What Peter is talking about this morning in a sense is a reminder to wake up, to be alert, to not be drowsy, not to be asleep. These are things that he learned in his own discipleship, as we heard the Word read from Matthew 26. What does it take to move from drowsiness to alertness? How are you awakened? How do you remain alert? What are your motivations to stay focused? Each of us is different in that regard, and the gospel calls us to that. Now, it's the same gospel, and we respond sometimes differently. We'll get into that more as we go along.

Peter is aware of the toil it takes on individuals and communities when they are experiencing suffering, which is why he's drawing their attention and their focus to this. How do you deal with just the lingering possibility of experiencing marginalization or discrimination or outright violence? Many of us, perhaps the majority of us in this room, in this country, don't actually know what that experience is like. There are people among us in this room and in this country who know what that experience is like. And Peter is likewise talking to Christians who know what that experience is like. And he's casting a vision in the midst of that, casting a vision for an alternative way of living in community while simultaneously being at odds with the surrounding culture. How do you live in both of those worlds?

Our attention should not merely be on what to avoid. Now, that's some of the things that Peter has been talking about in verses one through six—just the things to look out for, what's different about our cultures and what things to avoid. But our attention should be placed upon living together in a community that embodies a pursuit of God's light instead of avoiding man's darkness. Such living together is not meant to be separated from the surrounding culture; rather, the point is an alternative way of living that portrays something richer, something deeper, something truer about community.

As you follow Jesus, our lives are to be lived on those two fronts—lived in view of those outside of Christianity, and lived in connection with those within Christianity, those who place their faith and repent and believe in Jesus. They're not separate fronts. They're not disjointed. They're not meant to be compartmentalized from one another. Those outside Christianity may be pleasant and tolerant of Christians. They may be indifferent, or they may be hostile. Regardless, we are to live in light of Jesus as King of his kingdom. Therefore, Jesus calls us to a warm, engaging—may I even say a word of diplomacy in our interactions with those not in his kingdom, and to a culture of people that appropriates his love, takes on the identity that he gives us, experiencing his forgiveness through faith, through repentance. And then by that we're reflecting his love, his mercy, his kindness, his forgiveness, to one another. And that becomes the collective witness to the watching world as well.

So God, what he does as he enters into our stories, as he enters into history—he wakes us up. He gives us a perspective that's renewed. He gives us new eyes. And that motivates us to walk in his ways. And so verse seven: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." We're going to break this up into three things, briefly, as time is fast approaching. The end provides perspective. Perspective shapes thinking. Thinking impacts prayers.

So just briefly, what does Peter mean by “the end of all things”? If that’s really supposed to give us that perspective, the end providing that, what does he mean by “the end of all things”? Well, simply, he means just the point of time which marks the end of duration. Okay. What does that mean? It’s more loaded, what he’s saying there in that initial phrase. The phrase “is at hand” was a favorite of Jesus to talk about the coming kingdom. And it was even mentioned in the passage we read from Matthew 26: “His hour has come.” There’s this nearness, this presence, this entering-into. The end is near.

The phrase “all things” is used often in the New Testament to speak about the totality of God’s cosmic drama, of his creational and redemptive history, which culminates, it crescendos, it hinges, it pivots on Jesus’ life, his death and resurrection, and his ascension, and his return. The scope of God’s redemptive purposes is found in all of these events in Jesus’ life. So on the one hand, the end has already begun. We are living in the end now, and we have been since the in-breaking of God’s renewing grace that turns back the curse of the fall as far as it is found. He pushes that back by the very fact that Jesus has come to dwell with us, the very fact that Jesus took on sins, took on the full wrath of God in my stead, in my place, so that I might share in his life. On the other hand, we await the end of the end, which includes judgment. Peter mentions that in the prior verse, verses five and six. These are going to be mentioned again in the end of the chapter, chapter four. And it also includes Jesus’ return and the new heavens and the new earth.

So we are living. The end of all things is near. Peter is drawing our attention to the fact that we are in the end already, but we are not yet there. It is this tension of being in between places. So when will it take place? If you’re familiar with *The Walking Dead* or any type of apocalyptic, zombie-type end-of-the-world scenario—culture is drawn to that question. Christians are drawn to that question. They have been, at least, for the past 150+ years. Prior to that, Christians had a proper understanding of how to see the end in light of the present. Because we don’t know when the end is going to take place. Jesus never tells us. In fact he tell us in Matthew 24:36, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” So if I were to tell you when it was, you shouldn’t believe me. If you hear someone else tell you when it’s going to be, you shouldn’t believe them. But what Jesus does tell us—which, we should believe him—is that we should be prepared.

So a couple weeks ago was the championship NCAA basketball game, which I won the staff poll, by the way. Just wanted to give that up to everybody and just to let you guys know, maybe to rub it in their face, I don’t know—I repent of that pride. It really was dumb luck. I mean, I was the only one that had UNC in the final four. It was my last hope. But if you watched the game, the game was incredibly intense. It was exciting from the get-go, especially near the end. With thirteen seconds remaining, Villanova was up 73 to 71. Then Josh Hart made a free throw, which made it 74-71, up by three. Then with only six seconds remaining, Marcus Page made a three-pointer to tie the game, and it was an amazing shot. I hope you saw it. It was amazing.

The suspense of those seconds when the clock was stopped and people were shooting free throws, the suspense of “is he going to make this off-quilter, discombobulated positions, and is he going to make the three?” “Oh my gosh, he made the three! It’s tied!” Kelly and I, I mean, we were feeling—it was palpable—we were feeling it through her little iPhone screen, the energy in that stadium, the adrenaline that was pumping through the players’ veins, the audience, even us who were just watching. Our hearts were beating. I got rebuked for being loud when, later on, because I probably could have awakened my daughters. Because I was jumping off the bed. I was elated.

Switching gears a little bit—if you read the Harry Potter books, the history of Voldemort, right? His rise and fall is woven together with Harry’s parents and Harry’s own life as an orphan. You might wonder, why did Snape dislike Harry so much? What did Dumbledore know? What did Dumbledore not know about the future? Who was the prophesy really about? How was Voldemort be defeated? Some of you, that means nothing to you. For some of us, that’s incredibly powerful story-telling that’s happening

in those books. Or what about the movie *Inception*? Did the spinning top keep spinning, or did it fall? Don't know.

But you see, the end provides perspective. The end refrains how we see all the events leading up to those final moments. It helps us to see that every free throw mattered, that every foul that took place—the cumulative effect of fouls might have impacted people who were on the bench when they should have been in the game, with crucial scoring opportunities. The end of Harry Potter shows you with new eyes the depth of the story. Your animosity towards Snape melts when you see how he could be so disdainful of Harry, and yet even that was not powerful enough for his loyalty to the man he admired or the love he had for Lilly. And don't get me started on *Inception*, because I go back and forth. And depending on how the top falls at the end, impacts how you interpret the movie.

Knowing the end redirects our attention on what is important and meaningful in any given moment, and each present moment moves us forward to the end. And so it's with Peter's original recipient—are the original recipients of the letter. And so it is with us today. He draws our attention to the sufferings of Christ, and he has encouraged us, those who have faith in Jesus, who repent and surrender and believe that Jesus is not a liar, as was mentioned earlier—that we, too, are to walk in Jesus' example when we experience suffering in his name.

So the question: how do you tend to respond when the end of something approaches? Just quickly, we'll go through some of these. For some Christians, yes, you accept the fact that Jesus is coming back, but it doesn't have any real meaning to the present. You just sit back and wait. He'll get here when he gets here. Or we wait and we consume ourselves with only spiritual things, because only spiritual things matter. In this case, it's a pursuit of personal piety, because everything else in this world is going to burn—which isn't what the New Testament is saying. But some Christians have taken it that way. "Jesus is coming back," other people might say, "but we have plenty of time." I mean, it's been 1,500+ years, almost 2,000 years. I think I'll have tomorrow. And this can be a pursuit of personal security, because you hope to have a long life before you die. Your bucket lists. Your excitement. Your nest egg, for instance, maybe. Or it can be a pursuit of carefree sloth, because in the end, this life matters little compared to his future glory. And for others—and I would argue that perhaps maybe even in this room, your response may be, "Come on. Really? You really believe that Jesus is coming back?"

Listen, man. There's an end to all things. We only have today. Which, that gives us several different responses, too. We pursue our own meaning out of life, in most cases, and we do the best we can with the time we have. And that could play out as "eat, drink, and be merry," or compassionate altruism that seeks to make the world a better place. But the gospel of Jesus proclaims that the end is in focus now. There is a change. If you've read any C.S. Lewis, the Witch's winter is melting. He rules and reigns present in power and glory through his Spirit's presence, and that gives rich meaning to our lives today, in our relationships, in the raising of our children, in the caring of aging parents, in our vocations, the flourishing of your life and your neighbor's life. We are moving forward to a future that we get to experience foretastes even today.

The end, again, provides perspective to wake up and be attentive to what God is doing to the present as he is dwelling among us. And he will, in the end, also, in Christ's return, so that now we can faithfully follow Christ. And this perspective then shapes our thinking, moving to the second point. Peter uses these two words: "self-controlled" and "sober-minded". And he's making a connection. "Therefore, be." He draws attention to these words that actually are very synonymous. When you look at the different resources, they really kind of mean the same thing. And that's his point. He's using two words to describe a single concept, and it's this mental capacity. It's processing information that actually has impact of how you understand that information, but then how you make decisions based on that information. It says it's keeping alert. It's being reasonable. It's being sensible, able to think soundly, with prudence and sobriety. It's like when the coach says, "Look, the game is on the line. Keep your head in the game." You've got to

think. What are you going to do when the ball comes to you and there's one second left? That doesn't always play out that dramatic.

But why is Peter saying this? Verses seven through eleven come after verses one through six, and in verse one, there is again this verb of thinking. "Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking," referring to Christ. He's connecting something that's put in contrast to how the pagan world of the first century was thinking, how they lived their lives. And he gives us those things of what the surrounding community were doing, and he uses the word—and in the translation that we—in the ESV. I'm not sure what the NIV says, but the "debauchery." Now, that's not a word that we use in regular, everyday language. If you've ever heard the word, it probably only comes from maybe the Bible has said it. But debauchery is wastefulness. It's just lack of constraint. It's a giving over, out of controlness.

And so that's what Peter's contrasting. Be sober-minded. Be self-controlled. Don't be wasteful. And so literally, don't give yourself over to drunkenness. Again, Paul says something very similar. He connects the word "debauchery", or contrasts it, with being filled with the Spirit. And that's what Peter's talking about. He's talking about the fruit of the Spirit, being self-controlled. You can't muster that up. That's practice over time. That's failing. That's being corrected. It's trying again. It's gaining wisdom. And it's shaping something—it's our mind, our capacities. But even that, recognizing as far as the curse is found—we can't just trust that, either. That has to be rooted somewhere and in someone.

John Calvin said this: "For as an indulgence in surfeiting and sleep renders the body unfit for its duties, so the vain cares and pleasures of the world inebriate the mind and render it drowsy." "Surfeiting" is a word I had to look up. It's overindulgence, drinking too much, eating too much, just indulging yourself. That's what's counterintuitive—the seeking out of pleasure, the thing that actually is by itself not necessarily bad—but where we're seeking the experience, we're seeking the excitement that those things provide us. Those things listed in verses one through six, they're alluring. They're exciting. We've had tastes of them. Maybe some of us in our own past know what that really is more like. And so Peter is saying, in a sense, to borrow Paul, "Be filled with the Spirit."

We are to delight in Jesus, not be distracted by the world. So I keep harping on this thing, that it's a thinking capacity, the faculties of our mind. But it's more than that. It's not just merely cognitive and behavioral, understanding of human function and motivation, as if we can merely be reduced to right thinking always leads to right living. Our thoughts and feelings and actions are all interwoven together. We do things that make us feel a certain way, which then informs our thoughts about the things we did. We do things with little to no thinking, and then we feel glad, or we feel sad, or we feel excited or shamed that it did or didn't work out. We feel scared and anxious, and then our thoughts become consumed with worry. When it feels crazy out there, it's so easy to unravel in here. Therefore, Peter is calling the church to be self-controlled and clear-minded.

Just some questions of application for this. What are you filling your mind with? Where are you seeing the fruit of the Spirit? Galatians 5, self control being a fruit of the Spirit. Where is it bearing fruit in your life? What about the Spirit's work of grace in our midst as a body, as CPC? Where are we seeing the Spirit bear fruit in our lives as a church? Are you persuaded more by experiences? Do you fan into flame any feeling, as long as it's feeling something? Do you trust that over your mind? Or do you trust that over what the Word says? Are you ruled more by your head? Some of us, that is equally a problem. Does your thinking impact your affections? Does it flow into actions, or is it just living in your head? The call to you is to step out of that as well. It's making the connection that to have self control and sober-mindedness impacts the way we live.

Point number three, as we bring this to an end, this thinking that Peter is talking about, this very robust, interwoven way of what it means to be a human being made in the image of God, renewed in the image of Christ—it impacts our prayers. Prayer is just conversation. It's petitions. It's speaking to God. It's asking something. But sometimes that's what we only leave it to. We leave it to the asking. Whereas,

prayer is an invitation to that intimate relationship with the Trinity. Now, that intimacy makes us very uncomfortable. I don't know what your experience was like even today when we prayed. What do you do in that space? Are you full of doubt that there's anybody listening? Are you wondering, is he listening to you? Are you ashamed so much that you can't even come into his presence?

I must admit, this has been a very difficult week for me because of this verse. Because I pray. I pray faithfully. But even at the same time, it is uncomfortable to come into that space to a holy God and to talk, and to feel, and to ask, and to doubt, and to invite him to search my heart. I don't want that, naturally. Naturally, I don't want that. And we see in the garden when Jesus is praying and he invites Peter and John and the others to be nearby, there's a loneliness that Jesus felt. And there's a loneliness that then he experienced knowing that his friends could not stay awake. "Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation." And he's reminding them, the Spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.

The disciples asked Jesus, "How must we pray?" Or, "How ought we pray?" And Jesus very simply responds, "Our Father in heaven, make your name great." Make your will be known. Make it come to fruition here on earth as it's being done in your courts above. Would you enter into our present reality and make yourself known? Thy will be done on earth as it is being done in heaven. Provide my needs. I'm scared. I'm afraid. I'm broke. May I come to you because I doubt. I believe; therefore, help my unbelief—is an awesome prayer to pray. Lead us into your arms, rather than to the arms of the evil one, and participating in evil. Because your kingdom, your power, your glory is weighty. It's holy. It's majestic. It's all-encompassing. And we can't enter into that space by ourselves. We can't enter into that space, because we're not clean enough, we're not holy enough, we're not right enough. And that is why we need a mediator to be forgiven, to be washed, to be cleansed, but then to know that Jesus is praying for us, that he invites us to come into the throne room of God, to sit before the seat of mercy as he mediates our relationship with the Father.

Prayer is a mighty thing. It's a thing that terrifies us, but it's a thing that gives us so much freedom to come into that presence of God. This is why prayer is often, throughout history—and theologically it's discussed as a means of grace. What does that mean? It's how God mediates his relationship. It's how he draws near to us. It's how he communicates with us through his Word and by his Spirit, that prayer becomes a way of transformation. Not because we're saying words magically or rote as if this is going to give some exchange with God. But when we are coming before his presence, he's transforming us. He's washing us over with his grace and his mercy. We can come to him as the psalmist comes with cries. Why are you cast down, oh my spirit? Why are you so downtrodden? He can cry out to God, "Lord, hear my pleas. I'm being oppressed. Where are you?"

I'll close with a quote. I've gone on and I've gone beyond. James K. A. Smith is a philosopher, and he's doing great work in his more technical writing, but also in his more popular writing. He has a new book out right now called *You Are What You Love*. And he says this quote—or he says this paragraph. The context is about families, but just think of it broadly as a household, a family. So it can be your own home, it can be your community group, it can be the family of God. It can be any sort of collection of community, together.

But what does it look like to parent lovers? What does it look like to curate a household as a formative space to direct our desires? [So insert thoughts there: self-controlled, sober-mindedness. Remember how it's interwoven.] How can a home be a place to recalibrate our hearts?

Every household has an unspoken "vibe," the constant background noise generated by our routines and rhythms. That background noise is a kind of imaginative wallpaper that influences how we imagine the world, and it can either be a melody that reinforces God's desires for his creation, or it can (often unintentionally) be a background tune that is dissonant with the

Lord's song. We need to tune our homes, and thus our hearts, to sing his grace. You could have Bible "inputs" every day and yet still have a household whose frantic rhythms are humming along with the consumerist myth of production and consumption. You might have Bible verses on the wall in every room, and yet the unspoken rituals reinforce self-centeredness rather than sacrifice.

Each of us should assess the routines our household takes for granted, precisely because those are the routines we don't usually think about—and hence, whose formative power we don't recognize. We think of them as "things we do" and might not recognize that they're doing something to us.

Jesus never says that you must stop watching Netflix—these are my words, not his. Jesus says that you must stop watching Netflix. But Jesus does get close and personal, and he asks, "Why are you watching so much of it? Why aren't you talking with me? Why aren't you having fellowship with me? Why are you not having fellowship with me, with others? Why are you being distracted? Why are you drowsy? Why are you seeking to be woken up with those other stimuli that's out there?" And it's abundant. It never ends. It never stops. Why are your hearts restless, and why are you seeking rest in those things which will not provide it?

Peter, in his overall letter, is saying, don't be disdained for how you act in the world. We'll talk about this more in the coming weeks. Rather, expect being misunderstood, because you place your faith, hope, and love in God's redemptive actions through Jesus Christ. That is something we have to remember. It's something that we have to be constantly brought to the foreground to be refocused, to have our attention brought back to the wakeup call, that a dead man rose from the grave. That changes everything. And that dead man who rose from the grave, he ascended, and he sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. And he will be the judge that both judges the living and the dead. This is all the stuff that's embedded around 1 Peter's letter right here. And that man who sits on the throne is going to be coming back with great power and great glory. And that day matters today. So please, brothers and sisters, be encouraged. Take comfort that tomorrow matters today, and to know that Jesus is with us today as well. Let us pray.

Father, we give you thanks and praise for your Word. How we forget, how we get drowsy, how I get drowsy, and how I have to repent, how I have to reorient my affections, my loves. Would you be the song, the tune, the melody of my heart that is louder and cleaner and more beautiful to the ears that it brings a rejoicing spirit in my own soul? And that that would, in turn, be reflected to everybody I interact with. And the beauty of that song, that it encompasses everything. Because some of us are rejoicing, God, and some of us are mourning. And both are valid. Both are worship. Jesus, hear our cries. Hear our songs. And through prayer, as we draw near to you by the blood of Jesus, would you wake us up. In Jesus' name. Amen.