

## WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Reading: 1 Peter 4:7-11

### 14. READY FOR HIS RETURN

Charles Swindoll tells that during World War 2 Winston Churchill encouraged and supported the people of this country through endless dark hours. He made many memorable statements and speeches, but one particular one stands out. He was speaking to Parliament just after London had been bombed to smithereens, and he sensed the people were losing heart. It seemed as though Churchill never did. He must have had low moments, but his speeches don't reveal it. So he said to those people in Parliament, who were probably quaking in their spirits.

***“This is not the end. This is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps the end of the beginning.”*** The Lord Jesus said the same sort of thing to His disciples, telling them in essence, “*When you see these things occurring, it isn’t the end.*” “*And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, see that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*” ( Matt 24:6 )

If you live in the light of Christ’s return each day of your life, it does wonders for your perspective. If you realise as a believer that you must give an account for your service, your conduct, your ministry, at bema judgment

seat, it does amazing things to your behaviour. It also makes you recognize how many needless activities we get involved in on this earth. Like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. *Don’t bother. Don’t get lost in trivia. Christ is coming soon. Recognise the urgency and the simplicity of the hour.* Now Peter seems to have got this message. For here he says, “*the end of all things is at hand.*” ( 4:7 ) Now the Greek word for end ( telos ) is never used in the New Testament as a chronological end, as if something stops. Instead the word means a consummation, a fulfillment, a goal achieved. Now the end in view here is not the consummation of persecution for Peter’s flock, nor did he have in mind a change in government that would result in more lenient treatment for believers. Rather Peter is thinking of the Lord’s return. He says “*the end of all things is at hand,*” imminent. He is simply reminding his readers that the return of Jesus Christ could happen at any moment. You may say, “***But wait a moment, preacher, you say that the end is at hand, but when Simon Peter wrote this, it was almost 2,000 years ago and Peter said then that the end was at hand. He must have got confused because it didn’t come. It’s been 2000 years and Peter said, ‘it’s near,’ and it hasn’t come yet.***”

Was Peter wrong ? Absolutely not. When Peter said, “*the end of all things is at hand,*” he said exactly what he should have been saying, because you see from the day of Pentecost right up to this present day we live in an age called “*the last days.*” Let me give you some Scriptures. Peter saw Pentecost as a partial fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. He said, “*But this is that which was spoken by*

*the prophet Joel. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.*" ( Acts 2:16 ) The writer to the Hebrews begins his letter like this, " *God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.*" ( Heb 1:1-2 ) So the Bible writers speak of the times we're living in as the last days. Why ? Because ever since Pentecost until this present time, Jesus Christ could have come at moment. Every believer is therefore, living in the last days. If Christ can come at moment, then for every one of us in age the " *end of all things is at hand.*" Is this not what Paul meant when he said, " *The Lord is at hand.*" ( Phil 4:5 ) Is this not what James meant when he said, " *the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*" ( James 5:8 ) Now many Bible scholars believe we are living in the last hours, the last minutes of the last days. You see, what we need to get in our hearts is this, that the Second Coming of Christ is right around the corner.

Well, you say, " *I don't think Christ is going to come today.*" My .... that's the best sign I know He might. " *For in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.*" ( Matt 24:44 ) Now if Jesus Christ is coming, what ought we to be doing ? How should we act ? How should we conduct ourselves in the last days ? How should we get ready for His return ? Well, we are to,

## **(1) LIVE CONSISTENTLY**

Dr. Horatius Bonar as he drew the curtains at night, and retired to rest, used to repeat to himself the words, as if in

prayer and certainly with expectancy, " *perhaps tonight Lord.*" In the morning as he awoke and looked out on the dawn of a new day, he would say looking up into the sky, " *Perhaps to day Lord.*" He expected the Lord Jesus to return at any moment and he lived accordingly. Now if you know that you are living in the end times, in a day when evil gets bigger and goodness gets smaller, you'll want to be more godly in an increasingly ungodly world. In terms of this context, it means you'll be,

### **(a) MENTALLY BALANCED:**

" *But the end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober,*" or " *be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.*" Now the word " *sober,*" does not mean the opposite of intoxication. Of course you should not get drunk, but what this word means is " *serious minded.*" Do you recall the demoniac of Gadara ? That man has so many demons in him that his name was Legion. But then he met the Master and his life was changed. Mark tells us that the people saw him " *sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind.*" ( Mk 5:15 ) It's the same word. Peter is saying. Be of sound judgment. Be of sober spirit. Be calm. Today we might say. Stay cool. Don't be filled with anxiety. Don't panic. Realise God is in control. It means the opposite of living in a frenzy, in a maddening kind of extremism. For example, don't set dates for Christ's return. Don't panic as if things are out of control. Don't be filled with anxiety. Don't quit your job, put on a robe and sit on some rooftop waiting for the Lord to come back.

You see, if we are sober-minded we will be mentally balanced and not off on a tangent because of some “new,” interpretation of the Scriptures. How sad that there are people who set dates for Christ’s return contrary to His warning. ( Matt 25:13 Acts 1:6 ) We don’t need to set a date. We need to live right during the engagement period. I don’t know when the Lord is coming back. I personally believe His coming is very near. But when Christ comes back, I don’t want Him to find me with my head in the sand or my nose in the clouds. I want Him to find me with my hand on the plough and my heart in the fields that are white unto harvesting sowing the seed of the Word of God. For Christ said, “*Occupy or do business till I come.*” ( Lk 19:13 ) So Peter says “*be ye therefore sober,*” be serious. My .... we need to get serious about God. About His Will, His Work, His Word. We take the Lord so lightly. We treat the things of the Lord so frivolously. Listen. God’s work is about more than having a good time. We need to start taking it seriously.

How serious are you about the things of God ? Are you serious about God’s work ? Are you serious about doing God’s will in your life ? Are you serious about obeying His Word ? Jesus is Coming, is it not time you got serious ? (a)

**(b) SPIRITUALLY BURDENED:**

“*Be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer.*” ( 4:7 ) Dr. Kenneth Wuest the Greek scholar shows the important relationship between the two. “*Be calm and collected in*

*spirit with a view to giving yourself to prayer.*” The word “watch,” suggest exercising oneself in prayer and guarding against drowsiness and slackness. Do you recall that dark night in the garden near Jerusalem ? Peter was one of the disciples who was told by the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane “*to sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.*” ( Matt 26:36 ) But when the Lord returned to them, he found Peter asleep. And He said to Peter and the others, “*What could ye not watch with me one hour.*” ( Matt 26:40 ) My .... this was the disciple who a few hours earlier had bragged about his commitment and loyalty. You think that Peter doesn’t write with a sense of urgency and understanding here ? You think he doesn’t remember that rebuke ? “*I left you to pray and you fell asleep.*” Now listen, the test of our commitment to the truth of Christ’s return is not our ability to draw charts and discern signs, and I like doing both, but its our thinking and praying, and if these are right our living will be right also. “*Be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer.*”

Probably prayerlessness has maimed the power of the church more than any other sin. Yet we call ourselves New Testament churches. Are we abiding by the New Testament when it comes to prayer ? When you think of the people at prayer, the principles of prayer, and the power from prayer that marked the early church do we hang our heads in shame ? Does Christ’s return motivate you to pray ? I tell you if we were living in tiptoe expectancy of His return, there would be no empty places, and no long pauses, when we come to pray. (1)

**(2) LOVE CONTINUALLY**

Do you remember that song that came out a few years ago ? “ *What the world needs now is love, sweet love.* ” Well, I want to change that to this. “ *What the church needs now is love, God’s love.* ” Indeed Peter says, “ *Above all things,* ” or as the Greek has it “ *before anything else.* ” Now why is love so important ? Why did Peter say “ *above all things.* ” I’ll tell you why. Because love is the ***greatest virtue*** you can have. “ *And now abideth faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.* ” ( 1 Cor 13:13 ) But then love is ***the greatest commandment.*** Do you recall someone asked the Saviour, “ *Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law ? thou shalt love ....,* ” ( Matt 22:37 ) Love is also the ***greatest testimony.*** What do you think is really going to make this town believe that Lurgan Baptist is truly a church of the Lord Jesus Christ ? Well. Christ said “ *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another.* ” ( Jn 13:34 )

My .... if your heart is a headquarters for hate, you need to be saved, for love is the mark of a child of God. Indeed John says “ *we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.* ” ( 1 Jn 3:14 ) Now what kind of love is Peter talking about ? He’s talking about,

#### **(a) LOVE THAT COSTS:**

The word “ *charity,* ” in ( 4:8 ) of course means “ *love,* ” and the word “ *fervent,* ” ( ektene ) means “ *stretched out, intent, earnest.* ” Its used to describe athletes straining to reach the tape at the finish line or stretching high enough to clear the bar. It speaks of eagerness and intensity. You

see, real love is costly. You have to work at it. You have to give it everything you have for there is no such thing as cheap love. There is a price to pay when you love. Paul commanding the Colossian Christians says, “ *we give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints.* ” ( Col 1:3-4 )

***To dwell above with those we love, well that will be glory  
To dwell below with those we know well, that’s another story***

Do you still love in spite of the injury, insult, and misunderstanding you have received from others ? ( Matt 5:44 Rom 12:14 Eph 5:2 ) If there was a time when we needed to stay close, its today. Don’t play into the hands of the enemy. Don’t waste time criticizing other believers. Don’t spend your time castigating another church or pastor. But rather stretch your love for one another to the limit. (a)

#### **(b) LOVE THAT COVERS:**

“ *For love shall cover the multitude of sins,* ” ( 4:8 ) Peter is quoting here from ( Prov 10:12 ) which says, “ *hatred stirreth up strifes but love covereth all sins.* ” You see, what Peter is doing is contrasting hatred and love. Why do people defame, ridicule and oppose others ? Its because they hate. Why do others readily forgive ? Its because they love. You see, hatred takes joy in exposing the weaknesses of others. You know, there are some people in

every church that just seem to have the ability to find something bad about someone. They have ears like rubbish bins. They just gather all up all the bad. They just go around picking up all the rubbish and finding fault. And when they find it, they expose it. Now, that's not love. Love does not rejoice in iniquity. ( 1 Cor 13:5 ) Love wishes it never happened. Love tries to cover it up. That doesn't mean that we condone sin, we just cover it. There is a difference. Do you recall when Noah came out of the Ark and got drunk ? Well, you don't remember you weren't there. A little boy asked his Granny. "**Granny, were you on the Ark ?**" And she said, "**Of course not.**" Well he said, "**Why didn't you drown ?**" Now Noah was a good man. So good that God chose him out of all those on the face of the earth. But this was horrible, hurtful, heinous sin, for he when he got drunk he had disrobed and was lying naked before his family. There were three sons there. Ham, Shem, and Japheth. When Ham saw his father he came out and told his brothers and made fun of his father. He was so quick to stir up something. To let it be known.

But Shem and Japheth took a covering and just sort of backed up and covered their father, so as to help him over this period of shame. Wouldn't the church be a lot better if we had that spirit ? That forgiving love ? Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian nationalist leader once said, "*I like your Christ, but I don't like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ.*" And what is Christ like ? He is characterized by love and forgiveness. Someone once said, "**we are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we**

**forgive.**" Do you recall that it was Peter who said, "*Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him ? Till seven times. Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven.*" ( Matt 18:21 ) Do you show unlimited, unending forgiveness ?

### **(c) LOVE THAT CARES:**

For look if you will at ( 4:9 ) The Greek word means "*love of strangers.*" In Peter's day, traveling preachers and needy saints needed a place to stay. The Inns were few and often immoral and so homes were opened up for the servants of God. You see, hospitality is a virtue that is commanded and commended in the Scriptures. Moses included it in the Law. ( Ex 22:21 Deut 14:28 ) The Lord Jesus and the apostles enjoyed hospitality during their ministry. ( Acts 28:7 Philemon 22 ) And human hospitality is a reflection of God's hospitality to us. ( Lk 14:16 ) Time and again this duty of hospitality is pressed upon us. The pastor is to be given to it. ( 1 Tim 3:2 ) The elders are to have open homes. ( Titus 1:8 ) You as a believer are to be given to it. ( Rom 12:13 ) What do you complain about when it comes to hospitality ? About the time and trouble it takes ? The expense ? The mess ? The clean up ? Listen, to the words of the Lord Jesus, "*Insomuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*" ( Matt 25:40 )

When Christ comes is He going to find your heart filled with love ? My desire for this church is that it be

doctrinally pure. But I don't want it be one of those cantankerous churches that finds fault with every body and everything. You there are two dangerous that we face. ***One is truthless love, the other is loveless truth.*** God help us in this place to "speak the truth in love," ( Eph 4:15 ) and that when people think about this church, they will say, "*behold how they love one another.*" (1) (2)

### **(3) LABOUR CONSCIENTIOUSLY**

The great preacher F. B. Meyer once asked D. L. Moody, "*what is the secret of your success ?*" Moody replied, "*for many years I have never gave an address without the consciousness that the Lord may come before I have finished.*" This may well explain the intensity of Moody's service, and the zeal of his ministry for Christ. Do you know, that you have at least one, perhaps more than one spiritual gift ? ( Eph 4:7 ) A special ability that you must use to the glory of God and the good of others. ( Rom 12:1-13 ) Peter is talking here about ministry and he says,

#### **(a) OUR MINISTRY OUGHT TO BE EXERCISED:**

##### **1. Think of the word Necessity in relation to Ministry:**

"*even so minister the same one to another,*" what does that mean ? It means that I need your gifts and that you need mine. You see, non-one is sufficient with his own gifts. Rather the exercise of my gift complements you and the exercise of your gift complements me, thus the body of Christ is built up. Now are you exercising the gift that

God has given to you ? Are you using it to build up the body of Christ ?

##### **2. Think of the word Accountability in relation to Ministry:**

For what is a steward ? A steward is one who manages the affairs and possessions of another. Do you know what the word "*manifold,*" means ? It means "*multi-coloured.*" Peter is saying that God has entrusted gifts to His church and these gifts like the grace of God are manifold and varied. My .... God has given to us the manifold, the multi-coloured gifts of God and we are going to give an account.

##### **3. Think of the word Diversity in relation to Ministry:**

###### **• Peter speaks here about Speaking Gifts:**

Look if you will at ( 4:11 ) The utterances of God as revealed only in Scripture. ( Rom 3:2 ) How we need men today who speak to God and speak with God and then come to the pulpit and speak for God. Preachers who preach the blood of Christ. Preachers who stand up and say, "*Thus saith the Lord.*" Old Vance Havner said, "*You can't preach it like it is, if you don't believe like it was.*" We need preachers who call right, right and wrong, wrong. Joseph Parker said of Mr. Spurgeon, "*the only colours Mr. Spurgeon knew were black and white. In all things he was definite. You were in or out, up or down alive or dead, saved or lost.*" Has God given you a preaching gift ? Are you exercising it ?

- **Peter speaks about Serving Gifts:**

*“If any man minister, or serves ....,”* these are the behind the scenes gifts. Thank God for those in the studio upstairs. Those on in the internet ministry. Those of you who visit the sick, minister to the needy, teach the Sunday School, sweep the floor. Serving gifts. We need you all, for there is diversity in the body of Christ.

**4. Think of the word Sufficiency in relation to Ministry:**

Not our sufficiency but His. *“As of the ability which God giveth.”* ( 4:11 ) You see, when you minister, minister in His strength, not your own. That way He gets the glory. Indeed Peter says not only (a) but,

***(b) OUR MOTIVE OUGHT TO BE RECOGNISED:***

*“That God in all things may be glorified ....,”* ( 4:11 ) As I exercise my speaking gift is this my motive ? As you exercise your serving gift is this your motive ? Someone has said, *“A new grace and glory would enter the church if all church people ceased doing things for themselves and did them for God.”* *“That God in all things ....,”*

**Ready for His Return.** Are you ? Are you living consistently, loving continually, labouring conscientiously ? Occupying, doing His work until He comes. Are you determined you are not going to slack up, back up, shut up, until you are taken up ? In her book *“Today’s Good Word,”* Ethel B. Sutton tells the story of a young British soldier who was blinded in battle. A

trained musician he was sent to a London hospital where he spent most of his time playing the piano to the wounded soldiers there. Although he often heard the tramping of feet through the corridors as visitors came and went, he never let this distract him. He always gave his best hoping his music would lift the spirits of those scarred by battle. One day when he paused for a moment to rest he heard someone clapping his hands loudly. Turning his sightless eyes in that direction he asked with a smile, *“Who are you ?”* The astonishing reply was, **“I am your King.”** Without realizing it this young blind pianist had been using his gift to entertain royalty. And he had received the Kings approval.

Is this not all that will matter when we are raptured to meet the Lord in the air ? When we stand before Him at bema judgment seat ? Just to hear His **“Well done,”** ( Matt 25:21 )

**What would He find should He come just now  
A faded leaf or a fruitless bough  
A servant sleeping, an idle plow**  
**What would He find should He come just now  
What would He find should He come tonight  
Your garment soiled or spotless white  
Your lamps all burning or with no light  
What would He find should He come tonight ?**

