

## “Encouragement to do more” (20)

We’re continuing our sermon series of **1+2 Peter** and time and time again Peter has been warning the saints that trouble and persecution is on its way and the saints need to suffer just like Christ did. And the last time we were together he reminded us that we shouldn’t be living our lives like we did before we were Christians. But now we should be living for the will of God.

Before we get into the text today let me share with you a story about two neighbours who met after not having seen one another for some months. One of the women asked the other, "And how are things with you?" "Oh," said the other, "I'm managing all right, although I lost my husband several months back." "What happened?" asked the friend. "Well," explained the widow, "I was making dinner and asked him to go out to the garden and pick some corn. After he had been gone a long time, I went to see what the trouble was. There he was, dead, he had a heart attack." "How awful! What did you do?" "Oh," said the widow, "I had a can of corn in the house, so I just used that."

Now death can come upon us at any moment of any day and sometimes without any warning. And some things can come along and affect us without any warning; it could be a loss of job, a health problem, a divorce. But like I said earlier Peter warned these Christians that trouble is coming and he’s telling them so that they will have prior warning to get themselves ready.

**1 Peter 4:7 “But the end of all things is near.”** Now there are a few theories about what Peter has in mind here. Some believe that he is speaking about the end of the world but I’m not convinced by the arguments. Some believe that’s he’s talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and although this is a strong possibility, I’m still not convinced.

Now remember who Peter is writing to, he writes back in **1 Peter 1:1 “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen ones who are living as foreigners in the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”** And remember that sometimes in the Bible, letters are written to specific congregations but here he’s writing to the dispersion. He’s writing to those who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire. And so this is a general letter which was intended to be passed around from church to church.

And the point I’m trying to make is this, if Peter were writing about the destruction of Jerusalem that would bring some comfort to the saints in Judea **but what about the rest of the saints living in other areas of the Roman Empire?** I believe that Peter is saying to all the saints living throughout the Roman Empire that the destruction of the **Roman Empire** as a whole is at hand. And he is reminding them that when this happens it is going to cause great trouble and suffering for many Christians.

Now please remember this is not a salvation issue we’re talking about here concerning this verse. If Peter is talking about the end of the world or the destruction of Jerusalem or even the end of the Roman Empire, we need to make sure we don’t miss the main thrust of the text. Which is quite simply, make sure your living a holy life even when this terrible time comes.

**1 Peter 4:7 “But the end of all things is near. Therefore be of sound mind, self-controlled, and sober in prayer.”** In the Bible there are many ways we see as examples for praying, some people lay flat down, some people pray on their knees, some people stand and look up to the heavens etc. Today when most people pray, they pray either with their eyes closed or eyes open. So we can pray in many different ways, but Peter reminds us that when we were praying it’s not so much what we do with our bodies which is important but what we do in our minds.

He says because of the suffering which is going to come, I want you to be sound in mind; I want you to be self-controlled and I want you to be sober in prayer. The **King James Version** says **1 Peter 4:7 “Now the end of all things is near; therefore, be serious and disciplined for prayer.”**

And loved ones, if we were serious about our Christian lives then we need to stay serious in our prayer lives too. We need to pray when our minds are clear and we need to discipline ourselves to pray regularly.

One of the strangest fish in the world is **Anableps anableps**, commonly called the ‘**four-eyed fish**’ because of the unique configuration of its eyes. These are large and bulging, like those of a frog, and are located on the top of its head so that it swims with its eyes half in and half out of the water. Now I love that little fish which lives in **South**

America in a place called Suriname because whilst it's looking out for food under the water, he is also watching out for predators coming from above the water.

And loved ones our prayers should be like that. Whiles we're praying and making our requests known to God we should also be watching around to see what's happening. Paul says in **Ephesians 6:18** "With all prayer and requests, praying at all times in the Spirit, and being watchful to this end in all perseverance and requests for all the saints."

Jesus Himself said in **Luke 21:34-36** "So be careful, or your hearts will be loaded down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day will come on you suddenly. For it will come like a snare on all those who dwell on the surface of all the earth. Therefore be watchful all the time, praying that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."

And what Peter is telling us loved ones is that we need to be serious about the way we live our Christian lives and we need to watch what is happening around us as we pray. And if we don't discipline ourselves in this way then we won't be ready for any suffering which may come our way.

But not only are we to be serious and disciplined for prayer we also need to have the right attitude towards one another. **1 Peter 4:8** "And above all things be earnest in your love among yourselves, for love covers a multitude of sins." Now we already looked at what it means to love one another earnestly or fervently as some translations have it a few weeks ago. Back in **1 Peter 1** where Peter says in, **1 Peter 1:22** "Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth through the Spirit in sincere brotherly affection, love one another from the heart fervently."

But I want you to notice that Peter here in **1 Peter 4:8** says, above everything else I want you to love one another sincerely. He says I want you to love one another from the heart and I want you to make that your number one priority. Paul says the same thing back in **Colossians 3:14** "Above all these things, walk in love, which is the bond of perfection."

I wonder how many church fights would actually happen if people loved one another as they should? I wonder how many Christians wouldn't leave a congregation and go to another if people truly, deeply loved one another as they should? I wonder how many brothers or sisters would quarrel if they loved one another as they should? I wonder if Christians would still hold on to grudges about something which happened years ago if they loved one another as they should?

You see the reason I asked those questions is because if we can't love one another like we should then how on earth are we going to be able to forgive each other? Peter says in **1 Peter 4:8** "And above all things be earnest in your love among yourselves, for love covers a multitude of sins."

Do you understand what he's saying? He's saying when we finally love each other sincerely, not just lip service, but real love, real concern, real wanting nothing but the best for each other. He says when we really love each other like we should, then that love will give us the power to forgive. Peter is referring to **Proverbs 10:12** where the writer says, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all wrongs".

And please don't misunderstand what I'm saying here. I'm not saying that when we love each other we ignore sin, I'm not saying that. I'm saying what James says in **James 5:19+20** "Brothers, if any among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins". I'm saying that real love for each other will do what ever is necessary to restore and forgive the sinner.

And I don't know about you but it's discouraging when people write articles about some brother in the Lord they have a grievance with and they go out and tell the whole brotherhood about their grievances. It's discouraging when you receive emails about certain brethren calling them a false teacher over something which happened 10, 20, 30 years ago and they have the audacity to sign it in Christian love, if your lucky as some don't even have the courage to sign it.

It's discouraging when people go out behind your back and put down certain congregations of the Lord's church just because they don't believe everything they believe. It's discouraging loved ones because this is not fervent love for one another; all this does is create division amongst the brethren and exalts some people whom in their minds are better Christians than you are.

And the list could go on and on, but there are ways to deal with all of these things but whatever it is, it needs to be dealt with in love. And so again what Peter is reminding us is that if we love one another as we should, this will encourage us to live right for God and get rid of any sin which may be in our lives.

So praying right, loving right and living right for God will also help us in our hospitality towards each other. **1 Peter 4:9** “**Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.**” The apostle Paul also reminds us in **Galatians 6:10** “**As we have opportunity, let’s do what is good toward all men, and especially toward those who are of the household of the faith**”.

A young lady asked her Auntie one time, “why you are putting some of your choicest rose bushes away in the backyard!” to which her Auntie replied, “ I am going to put some geraniums and pinks and other lovely flowers which will bloom all summer out there, too. I know they seem to be out of sight, but there is a woman who sits and sews day after day, week in and week out, at the upstairs windows in the dingy house opposite, and I’m fixing that corner for her.”

Here is a woman who is thinking about someone else and trying to do good towards her. Now think about this, if we are to do good to those who aren’t Christians, **how much more good should we be doing for our brethren?** Now you might be thinking **well what need is there for hospitality?**

Well loved ones there is always a need, Jesus says in **John 13:34+35** “**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just like I have loved you; that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**” Jesus says the non-Christian will know that we truly belong to Him through our love for one another.

And loved ones if we can’t rely on one another to help each other out during difficult times then, **who are we going to turn too?** If a brother or sister loses their job **how are they going to feed their families?** If a hard working couple are struggling to make ends meet, **is the church just going to sit back and watch them fall into deep debt?** If someone’s home gets flooded and they have nowhere to live until the damage gets repaired, **is the church going to say, don’t worry were praying for you?** What about if you’re living in another part of the world and people come along and wreck your home because you’re a Christian, **is the church going to do anything to help?**

**Matthew 25:35-40** “**For I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.**” “**Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?’** “**The King will answer them, ‘Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’**”

A preacher asked a certain man why he had just ceased to attend the services of the church. The man replied, “**They haven’t treated me right over there.**” The preacher asked, “**Then why don’t you go home and beat your wife?**” The startled backslider gave the preacher a look which questioned his sanity. “**My wife hasn’t done anything against me,**” he said. “**Well,**” the preacher said, “**has the Lord Jesus done anything against you?**”

Now some people get angry with church members because they feel their needs haven’t been met. But being angry at the brethren and forsaking the Lord is about as logical as being angry with the dog and kicking the cat. And I believe that if the church just sits back and doesn’t help a brother or sister in need, they would have every right to be angry with the church.

So hospitality is very important but so is our attitude whilst we’re doing it. Because Peter says in **1 Peter 4:9** “**Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.**” If our hospitality is real hospitality, then it needs to be shown without grumbling. If we give and help each other out whilst grumbling about it at the same time, that’s not real love for one another, loved ones. If we take up a special offering to help someone in need, don’t go grumbling about your giving, that’s not real love for one another.

It’s only by placing a higher value on our brethren than we do on our possessions can we really show true hospitality towards each other without grumbling. So our service to each other should be done with the proper attitude and who knows, none of us know what will happen tomorrow and it may well be that it’s you who is the one in need.

So not only have we to show the proper service to each other but we also need to show the proper service which glorifies God. **1 Peter 4:10** “As each has received a gift, employ it in serving one another, as good managers of the grace of God in its various forms”.

Did you know that every single member of this congregation can contribute to the Lord’s work here at Great Barr? Peter says every single member of this congregation can serve God in various ways. By God’s grace he says each of us are to be good managers of whatever gifts or abilities we may have. **What’s your gift church?** And more importantly **are you using it?**

**Is it giving money to those in need?** Good but we all need to remember that sometimes the giver needs help too at times. **Is it encouraging the saints?** Good but remember even the encourager needs encouraging too at times. **Is it visiting?** Good but remember even the visitor needs a visit too at times. **Is it feeding the flock?** Good but remember those who feed the flock need fed too. **Is it counselling?** Good but remember the councillor needs counselling too at times. **Is it serving?** Good but remember the servants need serving too sometimes. **Is it calling the brethren to ask how they are doing?** Good but remember the caller sometimes needs a call to ask how they are doing too at times. **Is it looking out for the needs of your brethren?** Good but remember to ask whose looking out for their needs.

Yes we may all have different abilities and gifts within our number but they need to be used. So let me encourage you to recognise your gift and use it in service to the Lord. And if you find that it’s everyone else who are doing all these things then let me encourage you to start doing the same. In other words, if at some time you’ve been given a gift of money to help you out, **why don’t you look for a brother or sister who have a financial need and help them out?**

If at some time someone has taken the time to help you understand the Bible **why don’t you go and help someone else who needs help in understanding it?** If at some time someone has taken the time to listen to your troubles **why don’t you go and take the time to listen to someone who wants to share their troubles with you?** If at sometime someone has come and served you in some way **why don’t you look for someone who could do with a helping hand and serve them in some way?**

If at sometime someone has called you up to ask how your doing **why don’t you go and call someone else up to ask how they are doing?** If at sometime someone has asked you if you have a need you need help with **why don’t you go and ask if someone else has a need you can help with.** You see loved ones, we don’t do anything to receive anything back but it is really encouraging when it happens **isn’t it?**

As someone once said, **SERVE, even when we are not being served. LOVE, even when we may not be loved. HELP, even when we have not been helped. GIVE, even when we have not received. PLEASE, even if others do not please us.**

And so we all have different abilities to serve the Lord and each other and they are all designed to bring glory to God. Peter gives us two examples to think about which will bring glory to God. **1 Peter 4:11** “If anyone speaks, let it be as it were the very words of God. If anyone serves, let it be as of the strength which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen”.

You know sometimes we can read this and think those words only apply to preachers and teachers. But even if Peter did have preachers and teachers in mind, everyone who is sharing the Bible with anyone should understand they are speaking for God. And when they do and this is important they should only speak that which God Himself has revealed.

It needs to be **‘thus said the Lord’** and not **‘thus says the preacher’** or **‘thus says my opinion’**. In other words, people need to stand by that statement which we so loosely use sometimes, **‘we speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent’**. And when we truly do that then no-one can come along and condemn what we say.

As Paul tells us in **Titus 2:7+8** “In all things showing yourself an example of good works; in your teaching showing integrity, seriousness, incorruptibility, and soundness of speech that can’t be condemned; that he who opposes you may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say about us.”

So **No 1** we need to speak for God only speaking where God speaks and **No 2**, we all need to serve. And again notice how this ties in with what we’ve just said about service to the Lord and each other.

Peter says, 1 Peter 4:11 “If anyone speaks, let it be as it were the very words of God. If anyone serves, let it be as of the strength which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen”.

We all have different abilities loved ones but those abilities come from God Himself. And so if they come from God is there any room for bragging about how great my gift is? Is there any room to say to people look at everything I’m doing for the Lord? No there isn’t and do you know why? There’s no room for bragging because it is God who has given us the ability to do what we’re doing. He is the one who gives us the ability to do what were doing; He is the one who gives us the strength to serve. And according to Peter He does it so “that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen”

And so to finish with I’m not going to encourage you to continue praying; I’m encouraging you to pray more seriously whilst watching. I’m not going to encourage you to continue to love each other; I’m encouraging you to really love each other more with the love which is forgiving. I’m not going to encourage you to continue to show hospitably to each other; I’m encouraging you to show hospitality more graciously. I’m not going to encourage you to continue to serve the Lord and each other; I’m encouraging you to serve the Lord and each other more in a way which brings glory to God.