

LIVING NEAR THE END OF TIME

I Peter 4:7-11 (NIV)

INTRODUCTION

Many times in history different preachers have announced that they knew the exact date of Christ's second coming. In 1831 William Miller, a New York state farmer, after studying the Bible all by himself, began to make predictions from Daniel and the Revelation. He said Christ would return in 1843. Thousands of his followers from Maine to Ohio were confused and disappointed. Miller went over his data and announced that he had made a small mistake in his figures, and that 1844 was the year Christ would return, specifically on October 22nd of that year. He wrote, "There is no possibility of a mistake this time. All who reject the light will be lost." The people sold their property, left their farms unattended, and climbed on tops of roofs dressed in their "ascension robes" to await the coming of the Lord. When Christ did not come then, many with unstable convictions abandoned all churches and religion of any kind. To his credit and honor William Miller withdrew from the field of religious leadership, and his movement might have died a natural death but for the appearance of Mrs. Ellen G. Harmon White, who claimed to receive religious revelations, which doctors called hysterical trances. She, with some others, began to write and build on Miller's doctrines and develop the Seventh Day Adventist movement.

Some years ago a Dallas radio preacher, Willie Day Smith, made a startling announcement that the rapture was to occur on April 1, 1980, around two o'clock in the afternoon. He was quoted as saying, "Things are coming to an end; time is very short. We're in the final countown." The newspaper reported that Smith was unavailable for comment on April 2nd!

There are still those today who interpret some present political and social events as an indication that the end of the world is just around the corner.

One point is clear from reading the NT; we should live AS IF Christ's return could happen at any time, even though we do not know exactly when he will come.

Our scripture tells us how you should live as a Christian, since we may be living near the end of time, and Christ may return at any time.

1. If we are living the end of time you should pray earnestly with a disciplined heart and mind (vs. 7). "The end of all things is near" (NIV).

A. The idea of the end of the world may be terrifying to some, but to Christians it is also an exciting hope and a challenge.

B. The text tells us to "be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (NIV).

We need to live a disciplined life with all of our faculties under control.

1. One aspect of this discipline is prayer. Like insurance, it is to be developed before it is needed. If you are going to pray successfully during persecution and catastrophe, you must have already developed the habit, discipline, and art of prayer. Prayer must be both private and public; at home, in the church, and wherever you are; both spoken and quietly unuttered but from the heart; regular and often; planned and spontaneous.

Study and learn about the needs of missionaries, other Christians, fellow church members, the needy everywhere, so you can pray intelligently for them.

2. Prayer is not merely wishful thinking; it is a means for finding and following the will of God in your life. Prayer not only changes things; it changes YOU! "Pray without ceasing," 1 Thes. 5:16. Luke 11:1, "Lord, teach us to pray."

3. If trouble is upon you, the first reaction should be, not panic, but quiet, disciplined, confident prayer. Wouldn't it be great to be found in prayer at the moment when Jesus comes! In any event, prayer should be such a regular part of your life that you will be ready for Christ's return at any time.

4. Prayer should never be aimed to impress other people; it should always be directed to your Heavenly Father, but it should spill over into your earthly relationships through your loving actions. "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight," 1 Jn. 3:22.

Prayer and obedience go together.

II. If we are living near the end of time, then you should put your love into action (vs. 8-10).

A. Prayer has a way of generating real Christian love.

B. When we pray for people we tend to forgive their faults; then we look for opportunities to help them and serve them; we also tend to promote the unity of the body of Christ, rather than promote strife and divisions.

C. Prayer helps Christians to discover their gifts and to utilize them for the good of the body and to bless others in a spirit of true Christian love.

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms," vs. 10 (NIV).

"Gift" = "Charisma" = lit. "grace-gift," a gift originating in God's grace.

The individual is a steward of his "grace-gift." Stewardship implies not only a trust, but trustworthiness.

There is infinite variety in God's gifts, just as there is infinite variety in personality; ("God's grace in its various forms"; see also Romans 12 and I Cor. 12).

D. In many ways a church is like a hospital. It is a place for spiritually sick and emotionally injured people to be helped.

It has an Emergency Room for urgent, special cases. It has an Operating Room for major and minor spiritual surgery, and it also has a Recovery Room.

It has its Intensive Care program for other special cases where there are critical spiritual needs.

It offers spiritual convalescence to those that are making progress to spiritual wholeness and health, but are not there yet.

It has Biblical spiritual prescriptions for all sorts of conditions of broken lives.

It should monitor the patients' progress and take appropriate action all along the way.

The church of Jesus Christ should be a twenty-four hour a day haven for those who are hurting.

From every loudspeaker comes the constant voice of Jesus saying, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

The church should administer God's love to those in need as a hospital administers medicine and medical care.

III. If we are living near the end of time, you should try to honor God in everything you say and do (v. 11).

A. Whatever you say, whatever you do, say it and do it in a way that brings praise to God.

B. We should understand that ministers do not simply preach their own message; God speaks through them. Servants of God serve only through "the strength God provides" (NIV).

God is glorified directly through Jesus Christ and indirectly through the servants of Christ and the church.

C. God should get the glory when blessings come through the ministry of the church or its spokesmen. In Acts 3, when Peter was used of God to heal a crippled beggar, the verdict of the Sanhedrin acknowledged that "the people were praising God for what had happened" (Acts. 4:21, NIV).

Peter and John said nothing and did nothing which would draw attention to themselves.

This should always be the norm for Christian ministry.

The goal of all Christian activity is the glory of God through Jesus Christ.

The more we consciously give God the glory, the more he can trust us with more spiritual power and success.

V. As we search for meaningful Christian service in the chaotic years near the end of time, we as Christians need to strike a balance between a heavenly and an earthly orientation.

We should not always endorse the status quo, by urging everyone to accept their unfortunate lot in life and be content with "pie in the sky by and bye."

We should never be "so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use."

We also have a mission on earth, while we are citizens of heaven, and it is not wrong to pray for God's kingdom to come and for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But prayer, and the power of the Spirit, and Christian love, not political or military power, are the means to the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus returns at the end of earthly time, he expects to find his children faithfully working for Him, preaching and teaching his word, making and training disciples, and actively loving in his Name and spirit.

CONCLUSION:

If we are indeed living near the end of time, and I am not saying we are, but we may very well be, then your personal task is to lead the type of life that will find you ready when He does return, doing nothing you would not want to be found doing when he returns,

saying nothing you would not want to be found saying when he returns,

Looking at nothing you would not want to be found looking at when he returns,

listening to nothing you would not want to be found listening to when he returns.

The news of his return should not find you scurrying to adopt a new life style, for then it will be too late.