

TITLE: "Between a Hard Place and The Rock: Living in Light of Christ's Coming" (Part 1)

PASSAGE: 1 Peter 4:7

THEME: *A mind fused on Christ's coming is focused on persevering in prayer, practicing love, and pursuing God's glory.*

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{{Read Passage}}

[i] This passage is a bridge of sorts to the conclusion of 1 Peter

The things that Peter has to say here and how he says them indicates that he's in a winding down mode, he's bringing the letter toward a close.

In that regard you might note that the doxology in v. 11 ending with "amen" is repeated at the close of t/letter in 5:11. {cite}

From chapter 2:11 to 4:6 Peter has instructed us on how we are to relate to a hostile world.

Here in v. 7 he turns a corner to remind us again how we are to treat each other (3x in this passage the phrase "each" or "one another" occurs).

The shift goes from "loving your enemy" to "love one another."

We're going back in a sense to the thoughts of 1:22 {cite}

Here in 4:7-11 we find an appeal to prayer, love, and unity--an appeal that is illuminated by his statement in v. 7 ("the end of all things has

come near") as well as t/continued persecution and suffering that his readers were experiencing (he returns to that in v. 12).

[iii] First of all, I have to explain the title of this sermon series

It's a unique title // descriptive // telling. But also confusing.

"Between a Hard Place and The Rock: Living in Light of Christ's Return"

We could break it down into two parts: 1) "Between a Hard Place and The Rock:" 2) "Living in Light of Christ's Return"

Living in light of X's return doesn't need explanation. But t/first part probably does. What do I mean by {cite}?

We've all heard & prob. used the little phrase "between a rock and a hard place." When we use that, we mean, *"I'm stuck. I'm caught in a difficult situation with two options & neither of them are easy."*

I've turned that around to "Between a Hard Place and The Rock." You may have caught on, by "The Rock" I mean X. He is, as we saw in ch. 2, t/rock, t/cornerstone of all that we are as His spiritual temple.

The hard place is t/suffering that is life. The S. we've seen t/o 1 Peter - a letter written to and for those who are under persecution for their faith and who are subject to the manifold sufferings of life.

If we put it all together, we as believers exist between a hard place (sufferings of life) and The Rock (X), so we are live in the light of X's return.

"Between a Hard Place and The Rock: Living in Light of Christ's Return"

That little phrase aptly sums up what Peter is teaching us in these 5 vv.

[ii] Over the couple of weeks we will answer three questions in that regard

As those who live in a sin-cursed world, what is:

- 1) Our Motivation?
- 2) Our Mission?
- 3) Our Mandate?

We have a motivation; a mission; and a mandate.

A mind fixed on Christ's coming is focused on persevering in prayer, practicing love, and pursuing God's glory.

I. What is our Motivation? (7a)

A. To Live in Light of Christ's Coming

1. This point comes from the most difficult part of the passage - the very first words of verse 7 ==>

The end of all things has come near . . .

a. That's a literal translation

It's a Perfect Tense & t/PT is usually translated w/words, "has," or "have".

The end of all things has come near . . .

(1) Here's the problem . . .

But what does this mean? Is Peter saying that the return of X is about to happen any moment? Is he into date-setting?

Those who don't believe in Scripture's inspiration/inerrancy would claim that this is what Peter was saying and that he was mistaken. Many would say that t/first c. disciples taught that X was coming back during their life-times to set up his KD, but they taught in error.

For we who uphold t/absolute truth of God's Word, that's not an option. And I don't think it's a necessary inference. BTIM - there are other ways of looking at this that makes good sense & doesn't do violence to Scripture.

b. Peter wasn't saying that the end was going to be immediate

Immediate in the sense of the very next moment. Today, or tomorrow, or this month.

(1) There are several things at work here that we have to consider

(a) First - Remember that Peter was present when Jesus spoke his last words before his ascension in Acts chapter 1

The disciples asked Him a question: "Lord, is it at this time that you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

Peter heard Jesus say, "It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by his own authority"

Peter had been told that it was not his business to know when Jesus would come and establish his KD. That wasn't his business. His focus was to do the Master's bidding till he comes--to preach the Gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, & to the ends of the earth.

(b) Second - Remember that Peter was one of those to whom Jesus spoke in Matthew 24 about the destruction of Jerusalem

There we're told that t/disciples were marveling about t/magnificence of t/Temple. This was Herod's Temple in Jer. It was begun in 20 BC and wasn't completed until 64 AD. So at t/time of X's earthly ministry all of t/buildings had not been finished.

Jesus said to them, "Not one stone here shall be left upon another which will not be torn down."

Jesus was predicting t/destruction of Jerusalem & t/Temple, something that would happen in 70 AD.

Jesus' words led t/disciples to ask 2 ?s: 1) When will these things be; 2) What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?

Jesus answers by saying that first, t/abomination of desolation will come & Jerusalem will fall; second; t/time of t/Gentiles will be fulfilled. Then He would come. So you have t/destruction of Jer. (1 time period); and then another time when t/Gospel would be preached.

Peter wrote his 1st letter in AD 63 or 64. At least 6 years before t/armies of Rome destroyed Jerusalem.

Knowing this, there's no way that Peter would teach his audience in 64 AD that Jesus could come at any moment.

(c) Third - Remember that Jesus told Peter that he would die in his old age

In John 21:18 Jesus said, "When you grow old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go."

So Peter wouldn't be teaching that Jesus would return at any minute during his middle aged years of ministry knowing that He had perhaps a dozen or more years to live.

(d) We could add that Paul warns against this view that Jesus might have returned in those days at any moment

Paul says, to the Thessalonians, "[The day of the Lord] will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed" (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

So he explicitly checks the spread of the view in his day that the Day of the Lord could have already come. He says there are things that yet have to happen before the day of the Lord can come.

To live in t/light of Christ's coming doesn't necessitate that it could happen immediately. To live in t/light of Christ's coming does necessitate that it may be near. Nearness and immediacy are different. I think Peter is talking about nearness. He knew it wasn't immediate. But he wanted to be ready. It could be near.

Remember, he didn't know when Jerusalem would be destroyed. Jesus didn't give out any dates. He knew that part would be in his lifetime, but he didn't know when.

He may have been anticipating Jerusalem's fall when he wrote this. That was certainly part of it. Just wasn't all of it.

c. But let's think about it from Peter's perspective

Let's go back in time to t/first century. As he penned the words

The end of all things has come near . . .

What might he have been thinking?

Perhaps he was thinking ==>

"Everywhere we look we see more and more persecution. Christians are hated, just as our Master said we would be. There are rumors of wars. There are false X's. Israel is under increasing pressure from Rome. It looks like the judgement on Jerusalem is near and maybe those things that Jesus taught us about t/temple being destroyed and all of the suffering that would happen.

But look at how the Gospel is spreading under the power of the H.S. The world is being evangelized just as Jesus said it would be.

The end is near. I don't know exactly when. I'm not setting any dates. But the things that our Lord said must happen before he comes are taking place all around us, and could be accomplished quickly-even in your lifetime."

c. From our perspective I believe we could say that X's coming is immanent

I believe that we are in t/beginning stages of the last day's apostasy & that falling away from t/truth will accompany t/end of all things.

How much longer? I don't know. Only God knows that. But we are to be ready. That's t/point.

It may be just around the corner. The end is near. To play games w/sin & harbor an attitude of apathy thinking, "I have lots of time," is to be a fool. The Judge is at the door. And the time remaining should be well spent to God's glory and not wasted w/the cares & pleasures of this world.

d. Let me give you a couple of other thoughts on this

The end of all things has come near . . .

(1) All eschatology begins at the cross

Coming of Christ, his life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. With Christ's establishing His church and the coming of the Holy Spirit has come an age of eschatology.

There is an undated period of time that the householder has gone and he will return - but we know not when. But we are warned to be ready.

(a) The perfect tense here pictures the event in view as having drawn near and now being in a position as near at hand

As one commentator writes, the return of X is "the next thing on the program."

To quote 1 of my fav. contemporary theologians, Wayne Grudem (who also wrote an excellent commentary on 1 Peter) ==>

"The end of all things is at hand means that all the major events in God's plan of redemption have occurred, and now all things are ready for Christ to return and rule. Rather than thinking of world history in terms of earthly kings and kingdoms, Peter thinks in terms of 'redemptive history.' From that perspective all the previous acts in the

drama of redemption have been completed - creation, fall, the calling of Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, the kingdom of Israel, the exile in Babylon and the return, the birth of Christ, his life, death and resurrection, his ascension into heaven, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit to establish the church. The great 'last act,' the church age, had been continuing for about 30 years by the time Peter wrote. Thus the curtain could fall at any time, ushering in the return of Christ and the end of the age. All things are ready: *the end of all things* (the 'goal' to which 'all' these events have been leading) *is at hand.*" [Grudem, 172-73]

While t/delay in t/expected return of Christ did create a problem for some in t/early CH (2 Pet 3:4–7) No dates for the return of Christ were revealed to the apostles (Matt 24:36); they did not know when their Lord would return; they were instructed to be expectant and ready (don't be caught sleeping).

John Calvin ==>

"But it may be objected and said, that a long series of ages has passed away since Peter wrote this, and yet that the end is not come. My reply to this is, that the time seems long to us, because we measure its length by the spaces of this fleeting life; but if we could understand the perpetuity of future life, many ages would appear to us like a moment, as Peter will also tell us in his second epistle. Besides, we must remember this principle, that from the time when Christ once appeared, there is nothing left for the faithful, but with suspended minds ever to look forward to his second coming."

That's what we see in 2 Peter (turn there). Cf. 2 Peter 3:1-18

(1) All eschatology begins at the cross

(2) Prophetic Events Have Height and Breadth, but not Depth

What I mean by that is from the perspective of t/prophet (common in t/OT) - events were described as to their nature (what would happen), but not so much as to their chronology (time).

It's like looking at a series of mountain ranges from a distance. You can see the various heights, breadth of the ranges. You can see different rock formations / colors / shapes. But try to tell how much distance there is between them. They look like they're all bunched up together, like you go over one and there's the next one. But what happens: you get to that first range and that second one is still a long ways out in front of you.

(3) There is always the tension of the "already and not yet"

We live in an age where the KD of God has come, and where we yet await it's finality. Where salvation is come, but we await it's finality. Are we saved? Yes! Are we secure? Yes! Must we persevere? Yes! It's the already and not yet.

Evident in Matt. 24 - Much of what Jesus alludes to there relates to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The city fell after months of attack, the temple was destroyed. It was an horrific event. That was a preview of the coming tribulation of the end and the return of Christ. Something yet future to us.

(4) The Bible Gives us a Theology of Watchfulness

Matthew 24

Note verse 1-3; sum up vv.4-28; vv. 29-31. Watchfulness in vv. 32-39. Verse 42-44.

Three Parables ==> Wise Servant; The Ten Virgins; The Talents.

Luke 21:34-36

1 Thess. 5:1-11.

2 Thess. 2:1-3.

There has to be a balanced expectancy. If we knew the exact time, we would become complacent. Or if the exact time was near, we would rush around like we were meeting some sort of deadline.

HEB 10:25 **not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging {one another}; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.**

(5) The other side of this is the fact that our death is always immanent

Christ's return may be impending; our death is immanent. No one guarantees no matter how healthy, how young. While I don't think that this is what Peter is referring to, I do think it's a consideration.

17th c. Scottish Presbyterian Robert Leighton ==>

"We need to be reminded about this often, for even believers are all too ready to forget it. The general goal of everything 'is near', even though many generations have passed since the apostle wrote this. We must note first, that the apostles usually speak about the whole time after the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh as the last time. Among the Jews there is an ancient tradition that the duration of the world would correspond with the six days of creation, a day being with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. They divided the

whole into three periods--2,000 years before the Law, 2,000 years under the Law, and 2,000 years under the Gospel. The seventh period was to be the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the blessed rest of eternity. It seems from various expressions that the apostles thought 'the end' was not far off. Thus St. Paul says, 'After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Thess. 4:17). He speaks as if it was not impossible that might come about in their time.

Second, we note that this might always have been said. In comparison with eternity, the whole duration of the world is not considerable. And to the eternal Lord who made it, and has appointed its period, a thousand years are but as a day. We think 1,000 years a great matter when compared with our short life. But what is the greatest length of time when compared with eternity?

Third, we see that for each person 'the end of things is near.' When we die, the world ends for us. This consideration fits the subject and helps the argument. Seeing all things will quickly come to an end, even the frame of heaven and earth, why should we, knowing this and having higher hopes, spend so much of our energies on those things that are passing away? It is not difficult to understand that we should be sober and watchful and prayerful, since we exist for such a short time. Why should our hearts cling to those things from which we will soon be separated? 'The end of all things is near.' An end of a few poor delights and the many vexations of this wretched life will soon come. Then temptations and sin and the worst of all evils will be at an end as well. Even prayer petitions themselves will end and will be replaced with a new song of endless praise."

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Return"

A mind fused on Christ's coming is focused on persevering in prayer, practicing love, and pursuing God's glory.

As those who live in a sin-cursed world, We have a motivation; a mission; and a mandate.

Our motivation is to live in the light of Christ's Coming . . . That he say of us on that day, **"Well done good and faithful slave. Enter into the joy of your Master."**