

STRETCH YOURSELF: YOUR SERVING
I Peter 4:7-11

INTRODUCTION:

I Peter 4:7 warns, "The end of all things is near." Do you know that? Do you realize that the end of all things is near? I am no doomsday messenger or prophet of doom. You have not heard me trying to predict the date of the Second Coming and I don't try to interpret the signs of the times to manipulate people through fear. But I am on firm footing to tell you that the end of all things is near because God's Word says so.

Some will rationalize that Simon Peter wrote that 2000 years ago so it wasn't true. My take on what Peter wrote is that we are 2000 years closer to the end of all things than we were when he wrote this. And we are a week closer to the end than we were last Sunday...and 24 hours closer than we were yesterday. The end of all things really is near. So what should we be doing? Peter tells us.

⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Peter says that as we await the end of all things and the coming of our Lord, we should be serving. This is no time for idleness, we should work. We should be stretching ourselves in our serving. We should be:

I. HAPPY IN THE SERVICE OF THE KING (I Pet. 4:9)

Do you remember seeing pictures of Jesus when you were growing up? If so, you are probably especially familiar with "The Head of Christ" by Warner Sallman. When I was a child, almost every church I ever attended had this classic picture hanging somewhere in the auditorium.

I never much liked that picture because the Jesus of Warner Sallman looked a little boring. And maybe sad. And almost effeminate. I could not square that image of Jesus with the robust carpenter of the Gospels. I could not reconcile that picture with the Jesus who drove the money-changers out of the temple as described by both Mark and Luke.

The Jesus of the Bible was a rugged, manly and physical guy with calloused hands and strong muscles. The Jesus of the Bible was also personable, friendly and funny.

- He told jokes (some of them are preserved in Scripture).
- Kids loved him and flocked to him (and they don't hang around with tiresome, grumpy adults).
- A young couple invited him to be their guest at their wedding – not something you would do with someone who was a wet-blanket.
- And he was popular - - so popular that thousands came out to hear him speak.

To me, the Jesus of Warner Sallman doesn't look like that kind of guy. No, I'll take the laughing Jesus. I'll take the happy Jesus. I'll take the working man. That's the one that Scripture reveals.

Jesus was a joyful person because he was happy to serve God. In fact, he said that serving God made him as happy as a shepherd who had found a lost sheep; as happy as a widow who had found some misplaced money; as happy as a father who was reunited with a wayward child. Jesus' description of how he felt about his work for God was that every day was a party.

I want you to think of the contrast. Did the Dutch reformer, John Calvin, experience joy in serving Jesus? Was the Scotsman, John Knox, happy in the service of the King? Were the Puritan reformers winsome, popular people who attracted people to them simply by the magnetism of their personalities? No! They were not.

Now that I am a very old preacher, I can use very old sermon illustrations. And the old sermon illustration told of a little boy visiting his grandfather's farm. He liked the sheep and goats. He liked the ducks and chickens. He liked the cows and horses. But he was especially taken with the mules. And, as he stood at the gate and rubbed one old mule's nose, he was heard to say, "Old mule, you must be an awfully good Christian because you've got such a long face."

You don't have to have a long face to be a Christian. You don't have to have a stone face to be a pillar in the church. And you don't have to be sad to be a servant of the King. In fact, Christians ought to be the happiest people around because they have every reason to be happy: their sins are forgiven and they are on their way to heaven.

Our happiness, our joy and our warmth ought to be evident to all people. We will draw people into the life of the church when we draw them with sincere hospitality. And let me remind you that hospitality doesn't just take place in the New Life Center, around tables and in the presence of food.

Hospitality also takes place in the auditorium before and after church as we welcome our guests and enfold them in our fellowship. Our guests should be able to tell that we are happy in the service of the King.

II. **FAITHFUL IN THE SERVICE OF THE KING (I Pet. 4:10)**

We should be happy in the service of the King and we should be faithful in the service of the King.

In all of the Bible, one of the best examples of faithfulness is Job but I'm not going to talk about him today. I want to talk about him next week and if I say much about him today, I won't have anything to say next week. So we will go a different direction this morning.

In I Corinthians 4:1-2, Paul wrote:

4 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. ² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

As servants of Christ, we are required to be faithful in our service. Faithful service recognizes:

- Gifts & giftedness

The New Testament teaches that every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ. Just as in our physical bodies, not all of our parts have the same function, likewise in the Body of Christ, we do not all have the same function. In our physical bodies, every part has a purpose and each part is expected to fulfill its purpose. Similarly, in the Body of Christ, every part has a purpose and we are to fulfill that purpose.

In the Body of Christ, we know what part we are to play and we know what purpose we are to fulfill when we discover the gifts God has given us. You see, the Bible teaches that when God established the church, He gave spiritual gifts to the members of the church that they are to use for the good of the whole church.

One of the tasks of the leadership of any church is to help people discover, develop and use their spiritual gifts for the sake of the church.

- Serving OTHERS (not self)

Another truth we need to grasp is that we are to stretch ourselves in serving others. Serving our selves is not service: it is opportunism. God requires that we serve others.

Within the church there are myriad opportunities to serve. This evening, at our annual meeting, we will be confirming men to serve as elders, deacons, trustees and Bible School Superintendents. Each of these is an opportunity to serve others and not merely advance our

own agenda. Did you know that for many years, Cecil Wilkins served as an elder and as Sunday School superintendent at Sailor Springs Christian Church? He did. And we have people who serve in that way in this church. But where will we get our next elders, deacons and Sunday School superintendents? Some of our younger people need to stretch themselves to serve in these roles.

We rely on servants who play our musical instruments, who lead our worship, who direct our choir, who operate our sound-system, who serve communion and who receive the offerings.

We depend on our Sunday School teachers and youth workers, too.

But you may protest that you are not a public speaker or a singer. You may be shy in front of people. That does not mean that there are no places where you can serve. Consider the ministry that was performed this week when our church served meals to two grieving families in two days. Setting up tables and chairs, baking a pie or cake, fixing a covered dish, washing silverware, carrying out the trash – all of these are areas of ministry by which the servants of the King serve other people in His name.

In this area of service, a big hole has been left because of Marilyn Patridge's passing. Marilyn prepared food, helped to serve it and helped to clean up after the funeral meals. In fact, as Marilyn lay on her back in the Emergency Room at St. Anthony's Hospital a week ago today, she was thinking about the pies that she had intended to bake for Cecil Wilkin's funeral meal. She wanted to figure out a way that she could get back home in time to finish those pies before they were needed. She said that Catherine Cockerel always had trouble getting enough pies so she need to get home and bake hers. People, that is the heart of a servant who was focused on serving others. And now her place of service will need to be filled by another. Maybe God will ask you to stretch yourself to fill that role.

Marilyn also helped deliver meals on wheels during our assigned week. Who is going to step in to serve others the way she did? Maybe you?

III. STRONG IN THE SERVICE OF THE KING (I Pet. 4:11)

Peter wrote:

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

Our strength in the service of the King does not come from our own power. Our strength in the service of the King comes from the strength God provides.

In Philippians 4:13, Paul wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength. In Ephesians 6:10, Paul told the Christians in Ephesus to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

Consistently, the Bible teaches that the strength for our service is God's strength working within us and through us.

Just think of all the examples in the Bible where God used seemingly weak instruments as tools for His service. Moses was shy and had a speech impediment but God used him to lead a nation. The apostle Paul had some physical affliction that he called his thorn in the flesh but God used Paul as the greatest missionary in the history of the church. In fact, Paul said about this:

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

When we lived in Britain, there was a Sunday School song the children sang. It was called "Things for God."

THINGS FOR GOD

Shamgar had an ox goad;
Rahab had a string.
Gideon had a trumpet;
David had a sling.
Samson had a jawbone;
Moses had a rod.
Dorcas had a needle;
All were used for God.

What do you have that God could use if you would give it to Him. What could God do with you if you would give yourself to Him? You may feel like you have little to offer Him but that is perfectly alright...because the power to be an effective servant comes from the strength of the Lord and not your own might, your own talent and your own cleverness. Paul says that God's strength working through our weakness is the Master's plan because that way God gets the credit and the glory for what is accomplished.

CONCLUSION:

Peter wrote, "*The end of all things is near.*" And then, in verse 12, he added, "*Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you*" (I Peter 4:7, 12).

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People, the end of all things is near. We never know when our last day of service will come. Both Cecil Wilkins and Marilyn Patridge attended last week's Fall Festival. Neither one knew that the end was as near as it turned out to be. And you do not know how near your end is. I do not know, either. But I know this: when I walk the last mile of my way, I want to walk it in the service of the King.

INVITATION: # 254 (Old Hymnal) – The Last Mile of the Way
CLOSING SONG: #753 (chorus only) – Jesus is Coming Again