

How to Live in Foreign Territory Til Jesus Comes Again

1 Peter 4:7-11

Introduction: Theology is often learned best by the hymns and the songs we sing. They aid in memorization and, if the content is biblically and theologically sound as it should be, they teach us how to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength (Mark 12:30). Christian truth is wonderfully conveyed through song.

I have especially found this to be the case when it comes to the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. Words of encouragement, expectancy, hope and wisdom are found, often, in every phrase and line.

Since I was a small boy I have loved the song “One Day.” The words filled my heart with wonder and worship. The melody, both old and new, causes my spirit to soar. The last stanza, in particular, pointing to the coming of our Savior, fills my soul with joy overflowing!

“One day the trumpet will sound for His coming;

“One day the skies with His glories will shine;

Wonderful day, my beloved One bringing;

Glorious Savior, this Jesus is mine!”

Peter knows “fiery trails” (*ESV*) are on the horizon (4:12) for God’s “strangers and exiles” in this world (2:11). He knows many will suffer and some will be martyred.

After all, the lunatic Nero is the emperor. Keeping the imminent return of Christ before their mind's eye will be an essential encouragement to sustain them in and through the “fiery ordeal” on the way. It is also the occasion to provide important instruction on how to think and act when we find ourselves in the midst of trials and tribulations in any and every age. These were critical words for the 1st century Church, and they are just as crucial for the 21st century Church as well. Peter has five specific words of counsel for our edification in 4:7-11.

I. Live wisely and pray 4:7

Peter teaches we will suffer just like Jesus did (3:18; 4:1, 4). He promises us trials are coming. However, don't get depressed and discouraged. “The end of all things is near.” Christ will return! The kingdom is coming. The 2nd coming of the Lord Jesus is an important biblical truth. It is repeated and affirmed again and again in the Bible, as is its imminency. Note:

—Matthew 24:42-44: “Therefore be alert, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming. But know this: If the homeowner had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into. This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

—Philippians 3:20: “Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

—1 Thess. 5:2: “For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.”

—James 5:9: “Brothers and sisters, do not complain about one another, so that you will not be judged. Look, the judge stands at the door!”

—2 Peter 3:10: “But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that [day] the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed.”

—Revelation 22:7, 12, 20: “Look, I am coming quickly! Blessed is the one who keeps the prophetic words of this book;” “Look! I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me to repay each person according to what he has done;” “He who testifies about these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.”
Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!”

However, there also is a complementary truth we must maintain to have a balanced and biblical eschatology. Peter says “The end of all things is near.” He wrote that in the A.D. 60’s. Two thousand years later Jesus hasn’t come. Was Peter mistaken? Not at all. Adrian Rogers puts it exactly right, “from the days of Pentecost right up until the present day, we live in an age called the *last days* or the *end times*.” (“A Lifestyle for the Last Days,” 4-17-83). Note the following Scriptures to support what Pastor Rogers’s said:

—Acts 2:17: “And it will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out My Spirit on all humanity; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.”

—1 Cor. 10:11: “These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.”

—Heb. 1:2: “In these last days, He has spoken to us by [His] Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things and through whom He made the universe.”

—1 John 2:18: “Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard, "Antichrist is coming," even now many antichrists have come. We know from this that it is the last hour.”

We have been in the last days since Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension.

Jesus can come at any time (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18). So then, what do we do? I

believe Peter had the words of Jesus, delivered in what we call the “Olivet

Discourse”, ringing in his ears. We find Mark’s account in Mark 13. Jesus will

return. So, what do we do until that glorious day? Do we set dates? Identify the

Antichrist? The false prophet? The mark of the beast? No, here is what we do.

—Mark 13:5 → “Watch out...”

—Mark 13:9 → “Be on your guard.”

—Mark 13:11 → “Don’t worry beforehand what you will say.”

—Mark 13:18 → “Pray.”

—Mark 13:23 → “You must watch!”

—Mark 13:33 → “Watch! Be alert!”

—Mark 13:34 → “Be alert.”

—Mark 13:35 → “Be alert.”

—Mark 13:37 → “Be alert!”

Bottomline: Get your head on straight and think clearly and wisely. And, get on your knees before the Lord. “The end of all things is near;” therefore, be alert and soberminded as you pray. Again, the idea is think clearly and be wise. Both “alert” and “be soberminded” are imperatives. There is a sense of urgency that Peter ties to prayer. Vaughn and Lea point out the word alert can be rendered “be clear-minded.” And, the word was used in Mark 5:15 “where we are told of a demoniac whom Jesus restored to “his right mind” (p. 113). The second word “soberminded” speaks of being self-controlled and having a clear mind (Ibid). Both are tied to our prayer life. I think Peter’s point is this. The imminent coming of Christ should impact how we pray. We don’t get all caught up in an emotional frenzy. We don’t become discouraged and depressed because things are tough. Rather, as we pray, we pray with a clear mind and self-control. We do not allow persecution, trials and suffering to rob our minds of the precious truths of Scripture that will strengthen and sustain us. We see things in proper perspective, God’s perspective, because we know “the end of all things is near.”

So, be alert. Be sober-minded in all you do, but especially as you go to your knees to talk to your heavenly Father.

II. Love one another fervently 4:8

Peter challenges us to be alert and sober-minded. (v. 7) He wants us to have our spiritual act together. He also wants our hearts to be right too. In verse 8 he urges us, “Above all, maintain constant love for one another.” *The NASV* says, “keep fervent in your love for one another.” We might paraphrase Peter’s charge this way: “If you have to put anything first, be sure to passionately and continually love one another.” Peter has already addressed the essential nature of love in 1:22 and 2:8. The Church is to continually and fervently fan the flames of love for one another, recalling the words of our Lord in John 13:35, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for another.” Once more we remind ourselves, the gospel gives me the power to love people I don’t even like. But, it is better than that. The gospel gives me the power to even love my enemies (Matt. 5:43-44).

Peter makes a specific observation concerning our fervent and constant love for one another that is a bit tricky as to its exact meaning. He writes, “love covers a multitude of sins.” Peter again draws upon the OT, citing Proverbs 10:12, “Hatred stirs up conflicts, but love covers all offences.” James 5:20 says something similar in the context of evangelism (or restoration of a sinning

brother or sister). So, what does Peter mean? He certainly is not saying our love for others can in some way atone for sin. Nothing in Scripture teaches this.

Only the blood of Christ can atone for sin! I believe 1 Cor. 13:7 can provide light on what Peter is saying. There Paul writes, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Love does not shout the sins of others from the rooftop. Rather, as Schreiner writes, “love covers over the wrongs of others, while those who are full of hatred use the sins of others as a springboard to attack them (*1 Peter*, 213; see also Matt. 18:21-22). It has been well said bitter people do not live better lives. Hateful people do live happier lives. Peter says be a reconciler not a talebearer. Be a forgiver not a grumbler, which brings us to v. 9.

III. Practice grace-filled hospitality 4:9

Verse 9 naturally flows from verses 7-8, especially v. 8. You want to love others with passion and persistence, then be hospitable and stop complaining (*ESV*, *NIV*, “grumbling”). Just as you love “one another,” show hospitality to “one another.” Again, I believe there is a sense of urgency to these words as “the end of all things is near” and “fiery trials” are just around the corner. Pastor Warren Wiersbe is extremely helpful concerning hospitality when he writes, “Our Christian love should not only be fervent and forgiving, but it should also be practical. We should share our homes with others in generous (and

uncomplaining) hospitality... In New Testament times hospitality was an important thing because there were few inns and poor Christians could not afford to stay at them anyway. Persecuted saints in particular would need places to stay where they could be assisted and encouraged.

Hospitality is a virtue that is commanded and commended throughout the Scriptures. Moses included it in the law (Ex. 22:21; Deut. 14:28-29). Jesus enjoyed hospitality when He was on earth, and so did the apostles in their ministry (Acts 28:7; Philem. 22). Human hospitality is a reflection of God's hospitality to us (Luke 14:26ff.). Christian leaders in particular should be "given to hospitality" (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Abraham was hospitable to three strangers and discovered that he had entertained the Lord and two angels (Gen. 18; Heb. 13:2). We help to promote the truth when we open our homes to God's servants (3 John 5-8). In fact, when we share with others, we share with Christ (Matt. 25:35, 43)." (*Be Hopeful*, 123-24)

IV. Use your Spiritual gifts to serve one another 4:10-11

Spiritual gifts are a very important subject in the NT. They appear in four books and chapters of the Bible as the following chart reveals:

1 COR. 12:8-11	1 COR. 12:28	ROM. 12:6-8	EPH. 4:11	1 PET. 4:11
word of wisdom	apostles	prophecy	apostles	speaking
word of knowledge	prophets	service	prophets	service
faith	teachers	teaching	evangelists	
gifts of healings	workers of miracles	exhortation	pastors	
working of miracles	helps	giving	teachers	
prophecy	administration	leadership		
distinguishing of spirits	kinds of tongues	showing of mercy		
interpretation of tongues				

As is clear, Peter provides the most concise list. He basically groups all the gifts under two categories: 1) speaking and 2) service.

Verses 10-11 naturally follow verses 7-9. As we love one another and show hospitality to one another, we also use our spiritual gifts to serve one another.

When God saved us, he also gifted us. (“Just as each one has received a gift”).

And, why did he give us spiritual gifts? Answer: to “use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied gifts of God” (v. 10). Peter’s words are so critical

in our self-centered and narcissistic culture. Our spiritual gifts are not for us, they are for others! They are not for show, they are for service! We are to be good stewards not pompous superstars! Further, our gifts ultimately are to be exercised for the glory of God. If we are gifted to speak, make sure what you say is grounded in and faithful to the Word of God (v. 11). If you are gifted to serve, do it “from the strength God provides.” Spiritual gifts are not natural abilities. They are grace gifts that need God’s enablement and strength. When you exercise your gift God is to receive the glory not you. Karen Jobes provides helpful insight, showing us how verses 7-11 beautifully fit together. “There seems to be somewhat of a sequence to Peter’s logic in 4:7-11. First, Christians must have a perspective on life that is informed by the understanding that they live in the final stage of God’s redemptive work. That realization must be met with a mental state that rightly apprehends this situation so that prayers can take their proper place in the Christian’s life. Thinking rightly and praying in a manner consistent with God’s redemptive work enables a love for one another that persists even when one is hurt by wrongs within the community. When one has correctly apprehended reality, is centered on prayer, and is able to break the cycle of wrongs, one can also speak words that are consistent with God’s revelation and serve others with a strength that he supplies.” (*1 Peter*, BECNT, 279).

Jobes is on target. When the body functions as God intended we pray wisely, love one another passionately, care for one another joyfully, speak faithfully, and serve humbly. And, God get all the glory as Peter powerfully declares at the end of verse 11.

V. Glorify God in everything you do 4:11

One of my life verses is 1 Cor. 10:31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” The verse is located in a series of commands on how we are to use our bodies for the glory of God. Here in 1 Peter 4:11, Peter uses similar words as a glorious doxology to conclude 4:7-11. How we pray, love and serve one another has one goal in mind: “that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything.” We should never forget that it is God “who has provided the wisdom and strength for ministry. The provider is always the one who is praised” (Schreiner, 215). Whatever good we do in the Church and in this world, never forget the power and strength came from Jesus. He deserves the glory, not us. Basking in that truth, Peter can only worship by writing, “To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.” I would simply add, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow!”

Conclusion: The end is near. It could come any day, including today! We began our study with a song verse on the 2nd coming of King Jesus. Let us conclude the same. The final verse of “It Is Well with My Soul” by Horatio Spafford serves us well.

“And, Lord haste the day when the faith shall be sight, The clouds be rolled back
as a scroll; The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend, “It is well, it is
well with my soul.””