

1 Peter 4:7-19: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Peter 4, verses 7-19 The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

[1 : 0 3] But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. In the second half of 1 Peter chapter 4, we see the way that life must be lived in the shadow of the day of the Lord to come.

The end of all things is at hand. The last times are introduced by the death and the resurrection of Christ. And Peter is here writing just a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem, which would radically transform the world.

The nearness of the day of the Lord is a common theme throughout the New Testament writings. James chapter 5 verse 8, You also be patient, establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

[2 : 1 2] Romans chapter 13 verses 11 to 12, Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

The night is far gone, the day is at hand. 1 John chapter 2 verse 18, Children, it is the last hour. Revelation chapter 22 verse 12, Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.

Philippians chapter 4 verse 5, Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Almost two thousand years later, what are we to make of this sense of the imminence of the day of the Lord?

It may be of some help to draw a distinction between a theology of eschatological imminence and a chronology of eschatological imminence. The New Testament has some sense of chronological imminence.

The day of the Lord is near at hand because the destruction of Jerusalem is near at hand, and the destruction of Jerusalem is the initiation of many of the last day processes. However, a theology of eschatological imminence is something more.

[3 : 19] It's a recognition of the penultimacy of the present age. The fact that the reality of the last things is already being worked out in our midst, and the present age is transitory and passing away.

The judgment that we await in the future is already in the process of arriving, and the destruction of Jerusalem would be a key inauguration event of the last day judgment.

The future that we await at the end is already incipiently operative in the present. We're already seeing its effects. Christian theologians have talked about the already-not-yet pattern of the New Testament.

We already have a reality-filled promise and down payment of what awaits us at the end. In Christ, the future has already arrived, it just has not yet been widely or evenly distributed.

In the life of the body of Christ, we are participating in the powers of the age to come. As we experience the work of the Spirit in our midst, we are having an anticipatory foretaste of the future in the present.

[4 : 17] And recognising all of this, we must be sober, alert, we must stay awake and be vigilant. This is a common message in the New Testament, perhaps most notably in Jesus' Olivet Discourse.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 verses 4-8 we read, But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day.

We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. We must keep our wits about us, be alert.

We must recognise the transitory character of our current activities, and not be overly invested in this present age. It is passing away, and this sobriety is in part for the purpose of prayer.

[5 : 14] We must watch and pray as Jesus encouraged his disciples, bracing ourselves for the coming of the time of testing. We must keep ourselves prepared for prayer. This involves keeping short accounts with God, and being at peace with our neighbours.

Knowing how essential they can be, we do not want anything to hinder our prayers. We are marked out as children of God by our love, and a commitment to each other will be immensely important when the times of testing come.

Love covers a multitude of sins. A similar statement is found in James chapter 5, verses 19 to 20. My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

Love is needed for solidarity and mutual support, especially in persecution. Love forgives. It is that that enables us to cover those sins that have been committed against us, and to enable relationships to be healed and restored.

Peter charges his hearers to show hospitality. Hospitality would have been very important for the early church, as people were travelling from place to place. The importance of hospitality is also seen in Jesus' teaching concerning the sheep and the goats.

[6 : 29] The sheep are recognised in part by the hospitality that they show to the unknown strangers, who are the brothers of Christ. Likewise, when Jesus sends his disciples through the towns and the cities of Israel, the places where they go are faced with a test of hospitality.

How will they receive the messengers that have been sent to them? And Peter wants the people to whom he is writing to show that pattern of hospitality to each other, without grumbling. He talks about the exercise of spiritual gifts, and his teaching here is similar to that which we find in Paul, in Romans chapter 12 and 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

The very grace of God that he talks about here is similar to the one gift of the Spirit that is manifested in numerous different gifts of the Spirit. God's grace has a beautiful diversity and variety to it.

It accentuates difference, but in a beautiful unity. The distinctiveness of each is discovered in the mutuality of all. In Romans chapter 12 verses 4 to 6, In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 7, He gives two examples, speaking and serving.

The speaker must speak as one bearing the oracles of God, as one who is handling the word of God. This is not just human speech. It is speech that has weight and must be delivered as such.

[8 : 07] The other example he gives is that of service, practical service that must be ministered in the strength that the Lord supplies. And all of this is for the purpose of God's glory in Christ.

And he ends this section with a doxology. The time of testing is about to come. And it will test them and prove them. It will show the actual metal of their faith. And they should not be surprised that this is coming upon them.

It has been announced beforehand. But when it comes, they will be sharing Christ's suffering, recognising that they were told this ahead of time, and recognising God's hand in the events, they will be able to see the purpose of this, testing and proving them so that they might share in Christ's glory, going through the sort of suffering that he underwent in order to enter into the glory that he has entered.

And this leads to a different approach to sufferings. Sufferings are no longer the worst thing that can befall us. In fact, we can find much cause for rejoicing in them. We are blessed if we are insulted for the name of Christ.

This is a sign that the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. We have been marked out by his name, and in the eyes of those around us we are identified with him.

[9 : 16] This is teaching that is found on various occasions within the New Testament. Philippians chapter 1 verse 29 Matthew chapter 5 verses 11 to 12 Acts chapter 5 verse 41 For the third time in the letter, he distinguishes suffering for that which is good, and for the name of Christ, from suffering for wrongdoing.

And he gives a list of the different ways in which people could suffer for wrongdoing. As a murderer, as a thief, as an evildoer, presumably comprehending the various ways, for instance, someone might be seen as a lawbreaker, or as a meddler.

Various other translations have been suggested for the word translated meddler, but meddler does seem to be the right interpretation here. Why might it be mentioned? One of the important themes of Peter's letter to this point is the way that Christians should live among the Gentiles as aliens and strangers, and as those who live respectable and quiet lives.

As such, Christians should mostly be those who keep themselves to themselves. While they witness to others, they will not meddle in others' affairs or make a nuisance of themselves. They live peaceably with those around them, and quietly with relationship to wider society.

If they suffer as a Christian, they should not be ashamed. They should glorify God in that name. Suffering as a Christian, it suggests that that term had a particular sting to it. It was a term that was used by outsiders of believers.

[11 : 04] The earliest Christian movement did not call itself Christianity. It called itself the way and other such things. The term Christian was first used of believers in the city of Antioch in Acts chapter 11 verse 26.

The term is also used by King Agrippa in chapter 26 verse 28 of Acts. It seems to be a term that's meant to shame, but there is no shame in being associated with Christ and his name.

Rather, that name ought to be born with pride. When judgment comes, it begins at the household of God. It's a dangerous place to be near to God. If you are near to God, you more immediately face judgment.

However, within the household of God, you are prepared for judgment. Every single time we come before God, for instance, we're having a sort of rehearsal of the final judgment that we await. However, those who have rejected the gospel, who are outside, do not have such preparation, and will face far more severe consequences.

He quotes Proverbs chapter 11 verse 31. If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? In light of all of this, we should entrust our lives to our faithful creator, while we seek to do good.

[12 : 13] We will suffer, but we will be suffering according to his will, the will of our loving Father who created and saved us. A question to consider.

Throughout the New Testament, the one thing that Christians are taught to expect in this life is suffering. Yet suffering is almost always framed by the purpose and loving will of God, and by the fact of Christ's return in judgment.

We see the reality of what our sufferings here and now are, in the light of the transitory and passing character of this present age. What practices could we develop in our personal lives to make us more prepared for suffering when it comes?