

As The End Approaches, Part One

1 Peter 4:7-11

The year was 1938. A hurricane was gathering strength, whipping up heavy seas 350 miles northwest of Puerto Rico, and was expected to make landfall at Miami on Tuesday evening, September 20. But by the early morning hours of that day, the hurricane had veered north while still a long way from the coastline. It appeared that the storm had turned and was heading harmlessly back into the open waters of the Atlantic. Everyone, particularly those in Florida, breathed easier.

The best lessons are often those learned the hard way, and this was no exception. In those days, without the sophisticated equipment available today, the Weather Bureau, as it was called then, depended on reports from ships at sea. When it appeared that the hurricane had spiraled northeastward, the Weather Bureau relaxed its warnings and downgraded the storm to a tropical disturbance. What they did not know was that the storm center was moving directly north as a phenomenal speed of 70 miles per hour. By early Wednesday afternoon, the storm was bearing down on the middle of Long Island.

One man, watching the rapidly-changing elements, saw what at first looked like a “thick and high bank of fog rolling in fast from the ocean,” at least forty feet high. But the man recalled later, “When it came closer, we saw that it wasn’t fog. It was water.”

When the storm surge hit, many people who were caught out in the open were swept along by it. Many were beaten to death by the wreckage carried along by the waves. Hundreds of others were injured by broken glass, nails or splinters. When it was all over the beach had been swept clean of all structures. Damage was reported from New York City to Boston. More than 600 people lost their lives in the Hurricane of 1938, and more than 60,000 homes were destroyed (*Planet Earth: Storm*, A.B. C. Whipple and the Editors of Time-Life Books. Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1982, pp. 23-31).

In the last few weeks, we’ve heard the call to prepare ourselves for a storm of persecution which appears ready to break out upon the landscape of the church in America. Last week we turned to the fourth chapter of Peter’s first letter, in which he was giving his readers some instructions as to how they, as Christians, should conduct themselves as they waited for the return of Christ. We reminded ourselves that we are much closer to seeing the return of our Lord than were Peter’s original

readers, and for that reason, we should be much more careful to pay attention to these words.

According to 1 Peter 4:7, we should be **clear-minded and self-controlled** so that we can pray, and verse eight tells us that we are to **love each other deeply**, that our love for each other must be characterized by energy and fervency.

What are some other things we need to be doing as the end approaches? Today, let's look at a couple of other things:

3 Offer hospitality to each other without grumbling, v. 9

In the Hurricane of 1938, the owners of one house suddenly found themselves offering hospitality to a group of strangers. Nineteen people had crowded into a house which was still standing at the onset of the storm.

When a gigantic wave hit the beach and flooded the ground floor, the people, led by two police officers, ran up the stairs, climbed out a window and pulled themselves to the roof. The whole house lifted off its foundation and floated, swirling and twisting with all nineteen people hanging on for life, for two miles before it came to a halt. All nineteen survived (*Whipple, p. 24*).

That is one kind of hospitality, but in the middle of that storm, no one really cared whether or not the accommodations were perfect! Peter speaks of a hospitality of a different sort, one which is strictly voluntary, but which should characterize the people of God. When he told them to “*offer hospitality to one another,*” he was reminding them of how important hospitality was in that day.

The early church could not have survived if Christians had not opened their homes to each other. As itinerant preachers and teachers travelled about, there was no place for them to stay except in the homes of the Christians they taught. There were inns, of course, but in those days the few inns in existence were filthy cesspools of immorality—no place for a traveling preacher to stay if he was to keep his witness strong and vital.

That's the reason we read of Peter staying in the home of Simon the tanner in Acts 10, and of Paul accepting hospitality from a disciple named Mnason in Acts 21. And in those days before there were church buildings, the local congregations often depended upon the hospitality of Christians for a place to meet. Aquila and Priscilla were a couple who opened up their home for such a purpose (Romans

16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19). There was also a church which met in the home of Philemon (Philemon 2). Christians who were fleeing persecution would need places to stay, especially since they left everything behind them. So hospitality was an essential part of survival for the early church.

We might be inclined to tell ourselves that in our day, it isn't so important. After all, most motel rooms are clean, and there are several reputable places where a Christian can stay. Very few congregations don't own a building of some kind suitable for their needs. All those things may be true, but it's the underlying principle which deserves our attention.

The word translated "hospitality" is composed of two words, one meaning "love," and the other meaning "stranger." When we understand that, we see that there are myriads of ways in which we can demonstrate our love for people we do not know, who are not just like us. Romans 12:13 expands the idea of what hospitality includes: "*Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*" And, Peter adds, it should be done "*without grumbling,*" or complaining.

As the end approaches, and the storm of anti-Christian sentiment gathers and builds strength, it is all the more important—even urgent—that those of us who name the Name of Christ should be careful to offer hospitality to one another. Christian hospitality in our day might take the form of inviting a new family in your church over for supper, or providing lodging for a traveling youth choir, or offering your home for a Bible study or revival prayer meeting, or joining with other Christian families to provide funds for a family in need. Hospitality might include your home, but it could also include your automobile, your money, your food, your friendship or your time. It definitely includes your heart.

4 Use your gift, v. 10

As the end approaches, Peter points out something else which needs urgent attention. He wrote in verse ten, "*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*" There is an important assumption in verse ten, one which is repeated throughout the New Testament: every born-again child of God has been given at least one spiritual gift, which is to be used to build up the church.

Much of what we know about spiritual gifts comes from 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, where we read that Paul wrote, "*Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want*

you to be ignorant” (12:1). Why did he say that? Because few things are more detrimental to the cause of Christ than the Christian who has not discovered or is not using his or her spiritual gift.

For too long we Baptists have been afraid we would be labeled charismatic if we talked about our spiritual gifts, but in so doing we have also fallen into a trap set by Satan. He figures that if he can convince us either that we don't have a gift, or that it sounds egotistical to speak of it, that the Body of Christ will be hindered in its work. And he's right.

Who knows how the work of churches through the ages—and even our own church—has been slowed, stopped or otherwise harmed in some way because someone's spiritual gift was not or has not been utilized? You might say, “I may have a spiritual gift, but I don't know what it is,” when in fact you may have been using it for years without realizing it. Though all Christians are commanded to offer hospitality to each other, you may have the gift of hospitality, demonstrating a special ability in that area. That's only one example.

Now this is a very important point to make: if in actuality you do not have a spiritual gift, it is because you are not born-again. The Bible makes it very clear that every believer has been given a gift of the Spirit in order to serve others in the Body of Christ.

Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 12:7, “*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*” Paul then names several of the gifts, before saying in verse eleven, “*All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*” In 1 Corinthians 14:26, Paul speaks of several gifts, and then says, “*all these must be done for the strengthening of the church.*”

God dispenses His gifts to His people in such a way that the Body of Christ might be strengthened, and without those gifts, the Body of Christ is weakened. We are stewards, not only of the material blessings given to us by God, but also of the gifts God has given us through His Spirit.

If you are a Christian, your spiritual gift has already been given to you in order that we might all benefit. If God has given you a gift, and if you are a member of this church by the will of God, then God's intention is that you use that gift in this

Body. And if you are a Christian without a church family, then your spiritual gifts are not being used as God intended. If you are not utilizing your gifts in God's service, you are living in disobedience to the Spirit of God.

Today's church needs those gifts more than ever, and our church is no exception. The more dangerous the storm of anti-Christian sentiment (and even anti-Christian legislation!) grows, the more urgent it is that Christians discover, develop, and utilize the spiritual gifts God has distributed to the members of His family.

Read 1 Peter 4:10 once more: "***Each one*** should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." As the end approaches, it is more and more necessary that we give priority to this.

The U. S. Weather Bureau was not prepared for the Hurricane of 1938 which struck Long Island. They assumed the problem was not really all that bad, and as a result, 600 people died. There are those who today might say that your pastor is being an alarmist, that things are not nearly as bad as all that. Believe them if you like, but all the while the storm surge is approaching.

The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ must become focused on our main task, allowing nothing and no one to stand in the way or to distract us from the Commission given us by our Lord. Will you be prepared for the storm surge? Through the proper stewardship of the spiritual gifts given to us by God, will our church be ready for what will be demanded of it?

Today, I'm asking that you join me making a commitment to serve the Lord wholeheartedly, that we allow nothing and no one to stand in the way of a deep commitment to Him and Him alone. There are some here today who need to surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. There are others here who are content to play around the edges of Christianity, pulling Jesus out whenever they need Him but not willing to step forward and be counted for Christ. But we all know that's not the kind of faith that saves anyone. We all know that's not the kind of faith that will sustain you and carry you through when the storms break out.

So today I'm asking you to change that. No one can change it except you. Today, I'm asking that you surrender everything you are and have to Him.

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