

"Living a Gracious Life" – 1 Peter 4:7-11

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last. (C.T. Studd)

Have you heard that quote before? It is from a famous poem by C. T. Studd, an Englishman who was born in 1870 and lived exactly three score and seven years. He was a famous cricketer who became a missionary. Boy, does he ever capture a critically important truth:

**Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.**

Last week, I posed a question: Are you living your life for the lusts of men, for the lusts of the world, or are you living your life for the will of God? I'm sure you know the right answer, but in reality, we all struggle. Our flesh contends with our spirit. At least mine does. I wake up many mornings thinking about what I want to do. I have to force myself to ask "Lord, what do you want me to do today?" But with God's help, we can pull ourselves out of our temporal, fleshly perspective. We can understand that all of this has an expiration date.

For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16-17)

Don't you want to live forever? I mean really live, abundantly, joyously, peacefully, forever! Don't you want an eternity spent glorifying God and enjoying His presence? Don't you want to experience a forever where God has made all things new?

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

Well then, you really need to start right now. Yes, we have the promise of heavenly bliss, but we also have the responsibility to be Christ's hands and feet right now. As God has poured His grace out on all who have received His salvation, we have the responsibility of extending God's grace to others. Each of us needs to live a gracious life. It's not often easy. As Peter has been teaching us, we live in a culture that is hostile to Christianity. But we must strive to conduct our lives as Christ directs, because our time here is limited.

But the end of all things is at hand; (1 Peter 4:7a)

There are some commentators who believe Peter had the destruction of Jerusalem in mind and that he was talking about the end of the Jewish sacrificial system. It's possible, but I really don't think so. I believe Peter was speaking eschatologically. (Eschatology is the study of end things.) I know Peter had this in mind, because in his second letter he writes this:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (2 Peter 3:10)

Peter knew that the universe as we know it will cease to exist. Nobody knows the day and the hour ... Jesus said only the Father knows. But we know that the end of all things will take place and we are two thousand years closer to that date than when Peter wrote this letter.

It's not just the universe that has an expiration date. You have one too. The bodies you are carrying around will simply not last forever. It is appointed for a man once to die, and after that the judgement. Now, if you have placed your trust fully and exclusively in Jesus Christ, you don't have to fear punishment in hell. But even believers will be judged for rewards.

*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the **fire will test each one's work**, of what sort it is. **If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)*

Peter sets the context with this short phrase: *The end of all things is at hand.* We need to keep that in mind. Whether you go to be with the Lord through physical death, or the Lord returns at the end of the age, your time in this world is limited. That's not a bad thing because if you know Jesus Christ, the next life is going to be infinitely better.

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. (1 Peter 4:7)

Do you have an active prayer life? I sure hope you do! Prayer is the fundamental requirement for living a life that is pleasing to God. Jesus wants an active relationship with you and you cannot have a relationship without communication. God is communicating to you through His creation and His written word. You must communicate with Him through prayer.

Take your prayer life seriously. And be watchful. The word literally means to abstain from wine, but the idea is that we need to be alert. We need to be wide awake. Have you noticed what is happening in our culture today? Have you noticed what is happening in the world today? Jesus said:

Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near." (Luke 21:28)

Be watchful, my friends!

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "LOVE WILL COVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS." (1 Peter 4:8)

Jesus exhorted us to be obedient to the two greatest commandments. We are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. We do that by engaging in an active prayer life. We do that by becoming immersed in His Holy Word so we can prove what is that good, acceptable, perfect will of God. And we are exhorted to love our neighbors as ourselves. That's how we prove our love for God. Loving other's is the practical aspect of loving God. We endeavor to love them as Jesus loves us, not because they deserve it, but because they need it. It's all about extending grace.

Peter tells us that our love must be fervent, that is, intentionally intense. We're to give it our all. And then he supports it with this scriptural quote. It comes from Proverbs 10:12.

Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins. (Proverbs 10:12)

This doesn't mean that our love atones for our sins. Only Jesus could do that. It's God's love that covers all sins and God proves His love by sending Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners. But when we extend God's love toward others it does two things: 1) It makes it really hard to hate the object of our love and that keeps us from sinning. I've discovered that if I faithfully pray for someone who has treated me badly, pretty soon any animosity I had toward that person just melts away. That's a good thing! 2) When we love somebody unconditionally, providing what they need whether or not they deserve it, once in a while, they will want to know why. And then, Lord willing, you can share the great news of Jesus Christ with them.

Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. (1 Peter 4:9)

This was really important back in Peter's day when you didn't have motels in every town, but it's important for us, too. If a brother or sister has a need, and we have the means, we need to meet their needs. When we are hospitable, there is blessing returned to us.

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. (Hebrews 13:2)

And now, let's consider ministry. If you are truly a Christian, then you have a ministry. There are no exceptions. It's not just guys like me who are engaged in full-time ministry and receive a salary. This is for every Christian.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:10)

Every one of you has been gifted for ministry by the Holy Spirit. We are all members of the body of Christ ...

*... from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which **every part does its share**, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16)*

Can you hear what the word of the Lord is saying, people? Every part must do its share. The Church works effectively only when every member works effectively. Don't hoard your gift!

You are to be a good steward of the manifold grace of God. Remember the parable of the stewards? The master had given each of three servants stewardship over his money. One was given five talents, one was given two, and the other was given one.

*After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. **Enter into the joy of your lord.**' He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you*

have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. (Matthew 25:19-29)

You have been given a gift for ministry. You have not all been given the same gift. There is a diversity of gifts because there are many needs in the Church. Not everyone is an elder. Not everyone is a Sunday School teacher. Not everyone is a pastor. Not everyone has been called to clean the facilities. But everyone has a gift for some ministry. Every ministry is important to your Lord and you will be held accountable for your stewardship of that ministry.

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. (1 Peter 4:11a)

Now that sentence does drill down to those who have a preaching or teaching ministry. I really have to pay attention to this. As I stand in the pulpit before you, it is my duty to speak the oracles of God, not my own ideas. That's why I favor expository preaching. I do my best to read distinctly from the word, to give the sense of what is being said, to explain the meaning because this Book contains the oracles of God. If you lead a Bible study, if you teach a Sunday School class, if you teach Children's Church, if you are involved with discipling your children or other believers, this is for you too. Make sure that what you are teaching comes from the oracles of God. Make sure it comes from the Bible.

*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. **If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies** (1 Peter 4:11)*

Two things stand out here. First of all, it is God who supplies the ability for you to minister, whatever that ministry is. Are you on the prayer chain? God supplies the ability for you to be faithful to that ministry. Do you prepare food for potluck? God gives you the ability to cook and let me tell you, in this church, God has really poured out His grace on our cooks!

So God provides the ability to minister, but we need to engage in ministry with all the ability He supplies. We need to give Him our all. It's like the title of Oswald Chamber's great devotional book communicates: **Our Utmost for His Highest**. When we are faithful to the ministry for which God has gifted us, He will be glorified by our stewardship. We will live lives that extend His grace to others and we will be witnesses to the glory of Jesus Christ in this dark and darkening world.

Look at verse 11 one more time:

*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, **that in all things***

God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.