

## The Tie That Binds

I Peter 4:7-9

When I was growing up at camp we had a camper by the name of Bobby. He had Down syndrome and attended the His Ability camp for special needs persons. He loved coming to camp every year. I was told that he would get home from camp, unpack his belongings to get washed and then pack his suitcase for camp in preparation for the next year. All year long he would pack and unpack, pack and unpack because he just couldn't wait to go back. He was preparing every week to go to Camp.

In the passage we are looking at today Peter helps the Christian prepare for persecution in three ways. We will find it in I Peter 4:7-9 and the first is this:

### I. IT'S A CALL TO URGENT PREPARATION – v. 7a

“The end of all things is near.”

It's in the perfect active tense and means to draw near. It was used by John the Baptist when he announced the Messiah's arrival (Matthew 3:2) and then used by James (5:8) to speak of the second coming.

Peter doesn't tell us just how near the end was only that it is near. There's no use speculating because Scripture is quite clear that only the Father knows the day and time.

Acts 1:7 “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority.”

When Peter was writing this letter, they were in the last days. So that must mean that we are really in the last days. In sports where there is a clock, the last minute of play can go on for a long time. Understand that when Christ implanted Himself through the incarnation into our world 2,000 years ago that began the last days. The countdown began.  
Acts 2:16-17

The disciples were told to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit. He would indwell and empower them. On the Day of Pentecost as they were gathered in a room praying it happened. The Spirit came on them they began to speak in tongues that could be understood by all the different languages of people worshipping at the Temple. They assumed that the disciples were drunk, but Peter, quoting Joel, stressed that God promised an outpouring of His Spirit on everyone in the last days. He would be given to anyone who believed regardless of gender or age or status. They were witnessing the fulfillment of that promise. It was now the last days.

Hebrews 1:1-2

In the past refers to the time before Christ came. It is in contrast to the last days which were ushered in when Christ came. In the past God spoke through prophets. He gave them different messages and different means to convey that message.

He spoke through Nathan to David about his murder and adultery.

He spoke through Elijah and the consuming fire on Mt. Carmel.

He spoke through Jonah and the great fish.

He spoke through Jeremiah lying on his side for a certain number of days.

He spoke through Hosea taking a prostitute as his wife.

He spoke through Daniel and his vision to Nebuchadnezzar about a great tree.

God spoke through all the prophets to His people in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken through His Son.

Hebrews 9:26

His coming has ushered in the end times. His coming ended the Old Testament era and brought with it the beginning of the end. It is a message of Christ's imminent return.

I John 2:18 “Children, it is the last hour.”

James 5:18 “The end of all things is at hand.”

I Peter 1:20 “He (speaking of Christ) was chosen before the foundation of the world, but was revealed in these last days for your sake.”

## II Peter 3:3-14

These “last days” refer to the whole period of time from Christ’s first appearing to when He returns. The Old Testament days prepared for Christ’s coming. But these “last days” seem to be lingering on so much so, that even as Peter was writing only about 4 decades after Christ’s ascension, there were scoffers mocking the belief of Jesus’s return. Everything is going on as normal – the sun sets and the sun rises the next day. They forget that with God a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. This isn’t talking about creation, but about God waiting for judgment, so from God’s perspective, God being outside time, since Jesus was on the earth it’s only been about two days.

So when we look at what Pete has to say in our passage, “the end of all things is near”. He’s not talking about the end of their suffering. He’s not talking about the end of a tyrannical government. He’s not talking about the end of his or their life. He’s talking about the immanency of Christ’s return. They were in the last days, we are in the last days – “the end of all things is near”.

From Peter’s perspective Christ’s return can come at any time. There is no other prophecy that must be fulfilled before that occurs. So how should we prepare?

Peter gives two truths to prepare for the end.

### A. Be Poised

We should be composed and steady pressing on, not panicked. Don’t get rattled. Peter is reminding them when persecution comes don’t let it shake you where you lose focus and even hope. Don’t become

hysterical and fearful. In such a state of mind you can become stressed out and make irrational decisions. We can become like chicken little running around in a panic screaming that the sky is falling. Don’t let the fact that the end is near take you by surprise or make you panic.

Jesus told a story found in Matthew 25:1-13 about 10 virgins who were waiting for the groom to arrive. In those days, when the groom went to get the bride on the wedding day, a big parade followed. They didn’t know when that would happen, so they were to be prepared. Five of them were poised and prepared for his arrival. The other five panicked and missed out because they weren’t prepared. Are you poised for the end?

### B. Be Purposeful

I think that everything we do should prepare us for the coming of Christ. What we do should have an eternal perspective or purpose to it.

How you do your work.

How you manage your home or finances.

How you interact with others.

How you conduct yourselves.

Titus 2:11-14

Persecution, trials, suffering – the New Testament writers encourage us to live intentionally, and purposefully as we wait for the Lord.

My Dad is borderline diabetic. Every day he makes choices in his eating habits that affect how he manages it. He is very careful about what he eats. He does have a container of Oreo cookies sitting on the counter, and occasionally will have one. If some special event is coming up he is very careful about what he eats days before so that he can enjoy a little dessert. He checks and tracks his sugar through daily testing. He is purposeful and intentional in order to live well.

That kind of intentionality is inferred by Peter

reminding us that “the end of all things is near.”  
The consummation of the age is at hand.

Are you prepared for Christ’s return? Jesus said in Matthew 24 that it would be like a thief in the night. In Revelation 22:20 He said He would return soon. Be poised and be purposeful as you prepare. We considered last week that God is ready to judge. That implies that the end is near and should motivate us to be prepared as we face trials. The other important motivator is that the end of ALL things is near, not just some, but all. A new heaven and a new earth is coming. All that we see and know will end and be replaced by something that is new. It’s a call to urgent preparation.

Next, we see it’s a call to earnest prayer.

## II. IT’S A CALL TO EARNEST PRAYER – v. 7b

“Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.”

As we said last week, whenever there is a “therefore” we look back to see what it’s there for. In this case it’s looking back at the previous sentence having to do with the end of all things. In light of the fact that the end is nearing, it’s an earnest call to prayer.

You would think that prayer would be a natural response for the Christian especially when facing tough times. I would suggest that unfortunately it’s not a priority. For many it’s not second nature. It’s a last resort.

Some people view prayer as a manager does the bullpen. When the pitcher gets into trouble rather than telling him how to get out of the jam, he immediately goes to the bullpen to get someone else to come to get out of the proverbial pickle. Prayer should be like the pitcher calling for the manager to give him advice on how to get out of his trouble.

Peter’s advice to these troubled believers experiencing hardship was to pray earnestly.

Paul told the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing. (I Thessalonians 5:17)

To Timothy he said to pray everywhere. (I Timothy 2:8)

Speaking of Elijah, James said that he prayed earnestly.

(James 5:16)

Jesus said we should pray for those who spitefully use us.

(Matthew 5:44)

To the disciples Jesus said that they should watch and pray so they wouldn’t enter into temptation.

(Matthew 26:41)

Prayer takes effort.

When my Great-grandma had to move into a senior living center Dad stopped to see her after she had been there a short time. Even in her early 90’s she had been very independent and very active in her church. She told my Dad that she just didn’t know what she was going to do now. Dad’s simple advice was in the form of a question? “You can pray can’t you?”

A week or so later he stopped in again to see how she was doing. She said “Prayer is hard work.”

But again, let’s be reminded that the earnest prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Peter provides two important principles that will guide our prayers. They imply that if we don’t practice these it will be difficult, even impossible for us to pray. The first is to be sober minded.

### A. Be Sober Minded

The word is used in Mark 5:15 to describe the man’s condition after Jesus had removed the legion of demons that had possessed him. Scripture says

he was in his right mind.

It literally means to be of sound mind, to be sober. In today's vernacular we might say to keep your cool. The opposite of the word is frenzy, madness, insanity or drunkenness. A person who is drunk loses control of his faculties and wit. He doesn't think or act clearly. A person who is insane isn't in their right mind; they say and do bazaar things. But a clear minded person thinks straight and acts appropriately. A clear minded person reasons well and makes wise and mature decisions. They know their purpose in life. He understands that persecution is just temporary that better things are ahead, God is going to judge and he will be given an eternal reward. This is his motivation to keep plugging along and pursuing godly living in spite of the persecution. A clear minded person doesn't give in or give up at the first sign of trouble.

The clear minded person is sound in judgment especially during trials and persecutions. He doesn't lose his cool, but keeps his head and thinks clearly. He doesn't panic and is not easily frustrated. He's calm and collected. A clear minded person is alert to danger and focused in prayer. A clear minded person isn't easily swept up in crazy ideas or drift in doctrinal error.

A clear minded person is not double minded as James tells us that such a man is unstable in all his ways. Being clear minded keeps us from being double minded resulting in our prayers being effective, prayers that will help us through those times of stress, trial, and persecution. Be sober minded in order to pray.

## B. Be Self-Controlled

Self-control simply means to be in control of one's self - emotions, desires, actions and so on. It is part of God's character that we are to allow the Holy Spirit to develop in us as we yield to His control and work in our lives. In chapter 1, verse 13 Peter

tells us to prepare our minds for action by being self-controlled. In the end of this letter he concludes by telling us to be self-controlled and alert because our enemy the devil is out to devour.

The KJV translates the word "watch" while the NIV uses the word "self-controlled" and the NAS uses the word "sober". They all refer to being alert and in control of yourself for the purpose of prayer. It speaks again of sobriety and restraint. An athlete has to restrain himself from indulging in activities or unhealthy food choices if he is to compete well. An employee needs to be self-controlled and not get angry when he doesn't get that promotion. A motorist needs self-control when he gets cut off in traffic. The Christian must restrain himself from going after things that will make him spiritually sluggish or jeopardize his godly character. Be self-controlled in order to pray.

Matthew 26:40-41 – couldn't you watch and pray  
 Luke 18:1 – always pray and not give up  
 Ephesians 6:18 – pray in the Spirit at all times  
 Colossians 4:2 – devote yourselves to prayer

We can assume here that if prayer requires us to be self-controlled or watchful, then if we aren't self-controlled we can't effectively pray.

I am more vigilant or watchful while driving in a torrential down pour or a snow storm than I am when the sun is out and the roads are clear. But I should be just as watchful at all times. The same is true for the Christian. Being self-controlled and watchful in pleasant times is just as imperative as being self-controlled or watchful in times of trouble or persecution.

Walvoord and Zuch conclude that "Prayer, of high priority in persecution, is to be clear, reasonable, and sober communication with God."

Going through a time of persecution is a call to earnest prayer, prayer that is motivated by being sober minded and self-controlled.

There is one more important call that Peter points out in our passage for the Christian going through persecution. It's a call to specific practices.

### III. IT'S A CALL TO SPECIFIC PRACTICES – vs. 8-9

Our practice is as important as our prayer in times of trouble. The character on the inside should be evident in our conduct on the outside.

I was a bit puzzled over these two verses in light of the context on persecution. I can understand why being vigilant in prayer is important when going through persecution, but why would Peter talk about love and hospitality? As I thought about it the more I came back to the need of mutual support and encouragement from the body of believers in difficult times, otherwise it would be so easy to throw in the towel, to wonder if it's worth it. So the first thing Peter says is to be affectionate.

#### A. Be Affectionate – v. 8

He begins with an important note that is of primary importance – “above all”. Paul says something similar to the Corinthians. “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” This comes on the heels of telling us that love is patient and kind, it does not envy or boast, neither is it proud. It's not rude or self-seeking or easily angered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs nor does it delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth, protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres and never fails. (I Corinthians 13:4-7, 13)

Jesus told us that we are to love others as He loved us, which is a demonstration of discipleship (John 13:34-35).

And then Paul told the Romans (12:9) that love should be sincere or genuine. Don't pretend to love someone and then stab them in the back. Jesus also said that loving God first and then loving

others is the greatest commandment.

Warren Wiersbe suggests that if we are rightly thinking about Christ's return we will have a right relationship with others.

From Galatians 5:22, love is the fruit of a Spirit led Christian.

Peter tells us how we are to love each other, and I believe he is specifically talking about Christians loving other Christians. He says we are to love “deeply”. The KJV uses the word “fervently”. It's a word that literally means to be stretched out, or to be sustained. The Greeks used it to speak of an athlete who was straining every muscle to reach the finish line. They also used it to describe a horse that was running at full speed. Every muscle was stretched out to the full.

That's how we are to love each other. Let's just come out and admit it, we all know someone we have a little more difficulty loving than others. They test us at every turn sometimes intentionally just to see how we'll respond.

During a work week following the end of summer camp a teenager stayed to help with cleaning up the kitchen. She was assigned to my Mom and she gave Mom nothing but grief. She was at times defiant and belligerent and lazy. Mom would tell her to do something and she'd do something else. She made the week challenging for Mom, but at every difficult time Mom chose instead to love her. At the end of the week she told Mom that she intentionally gave her trouble just to see if she was as nice as everyone said she was.

That's love stretched out.

Peter tells us the result of such love – “it covers a multitude of sins.” If we don't love in that way it will be easy to be resentful, revengeful, bitter, angry, filled with hatred.

Peter has already talked about all those who aren't Christians who want to slander you and insult you and blaspheme you and mock you and injure you. We hope that other Christians wouldn't do the same, but unfortunately, even in the body of Christ that happens. Stretch yourself out and love them no matter how they treat you.

Peter quotes here from Proverbs 10:12.

Think for a moment about the kind of love Christ displayed in taking your sins to the cross.

Think for a moment about the kind of love God had for you in sending His Son to die for you so that you could have eternal life.

Think about that love that covers our sins.

This love doesn't overlook sin. It doesn't condone sin. It is not blind to sin, but accepts the faults of others and prays for them. In essence this kind of love forgives again and again.

Peter once asked how many times he should forgive someone who sinned against him. Is seven enough? That was five more than the Rabbis taught. Jesus told a story illustrating that as many times as someone sins against you, lovingly forgive them.

To both the Ephesians and Colossians Paul said that we are to forgive just as God has forgiven us (4:32; 3:13).

But we should be reminded from Galatians 6:1 that we are to deal with that person gently.

Intended in Peter's admonition is that this action is to be continuous. Keep on loving deeply so that you will continue to forgive the sins of others.

Be affectionate.

Finally we see that love extends to hospitality.

#### B. Be Accepting – v. 9

The dictionary definition does not convey the intent of the biblical word for hospitality. The dictionary says it is being friendly and kind toward guests. It

is that and so much more.

According to the Holman Bible dictionary hospitality means "To entertain or receive a stranger into one's home as an honored guest and to provide the guest with food, shelter, and protection. This was not merely an oriental custom or good manners but a sacred duty that everyone was expected to observe."

Inns did not have good reputations and during times of increased persecution, it would be all the more important for one Christian family to take in other Christian families who were fleeing because of persecution.

III John 5 "Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you."

Jesus said that hospitality glorifies God when we do it to the least of these. (Matthew 25:40)

Peter then reminds us that one attitude should be absent when we show hospitality. Do it without grumbling or complaining.

In the Hobbit, Bilbo Baggins has some unexpected guests who pop in and ravage the place. He isn't at all happy that dwarves have invaded his home. The whole time he grumbles about the mess.

Remember, we are doing it for the Lord. Hospitality is just as much an attitude as it is an act. It imparts the presence of Christ to our guests.

There are three specific actions to practice in times of persecution.

As the end draws near and persecution increases we will need each other more and more. This is all the more reason to urgently prepare, earnestly pray, and specifically practice godly character. Persecution should be the tie that binds us together, not the wedge that divides us apart.