

Sermon File # 1266

Scripture Text: 1 Peter 4:1-11

Sermon Title: *The Time Is Now! Leaving the Old Life and Living the New*

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Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end of the document.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

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The Time Is Now! Leaving the Old Life and Living the New

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to our text as we resume our series, interrupted by Advent and my holiday in the US, from this first letter of Simon Peter, the Apostle of Hope. This letter is one of encouragement to the people of God scattered throughout Asia Minor and facing mounting opposition and even persecution at the hands of a hostile, unbelieving world. Peter has been giving admonition to God's people to live faithfully and counter-culturally as "scattered strangers" (1:1) and in community with one another as God's new chosen people (2:9).

Our text begins with a "therefore," and likely connects with the 18th verse of chapter 3, which is followed by a parenthetical statement in verses 19-22 (Michaels, 225). In Chapter 3 Peter has encouraged the church to faithfully follow Christ's example in suffering for doing good, and in Chapter 4 he gives further instructions in how to leave the old unconverted life behind and to live a new kind of life in Christ. In our text Peter is saying some important things about time; namely, that the time is now to leave the old life and begin

earnestly living the new life we have in Christ. Follow as I read 3:18 and transition to our text:

Read **1 Peter 3:18; 4:1-11**.

I believe in God's sovereignty in his timing that guides and at times overrules my planning. Although I had planned weeks ago, before the Advent Season, to preach this text on this date I hadn't particularly thought of it as a good text for the New Year. I knew Glen and Marc-Etienne would have a good, challenging message for the New Year, which indeed they did.

What could be more important for us, as we begin a New Year, than to reassess our use of time? The fallen world has its view of time, measured in human years, months, days and hours, and at best can only try to manage the time allotted to us in our usual 70 or 80 years on earth. But as the people of God we have a different take on time as a gift from God, who has called us to eternal life through Christ and in his kingdom. We thus can look at time from the perspective of eternity and we realize that we are stewards, called to use our earthly time wisely, as we continue our pilgrimage toward the consummation of the Kingdom when we enter the realm of everlasting life.

What Peter is saying in our text is the oft-quoted aphorism, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life" (Clowney, 171). As followers of Jesus we are to think and live differently. When we received our new birth (1:3), we made a new beginning in our life, and now we are called to live our allotted days wisely and faithfully.

It's interesting to me, in this day when businesses call for better time management skills and we have all of these electronic gadgets and communication tools that are supposed to be time savers, we struggle as never before with time wasting.

This text is calling us to be time managers and good users of time rather than time squanderers and wasters. "The time is now," Peter is saying. And in the first six verses of our text he says...

Time's up for the old life (verses 1-6)

Peter reminds us that we've spent enough time already living according to our old, unconverted sinful nature (3) and tells us how we are to live the rest of our earthly lives (2) with a...

New attitude

Connecting with 3:18, where Peter notes the supreme example of Christ, who died for us to make us right with God, he begins our text with a "therefore." Since Christ suffered for us, we who are his followers are to arm ourselves with his attitude. Christ suffered and died because of our sin and also died to defeat

the power of and liberate us from the bondage of sin. So we need to identify with Christ and take on his attitude, his way of thinking about sin.

Because we are given a new nature, we are to live by that nature, which is to please God through a holy life, counting ourselves dead to sin (Romans 6:11). By the power of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus we are set free from the domination of self and sin. Our attitude, mindset and new obligation is to identify with Christ and to “mortify” (put to death) the old nature by living for Christ in the power of the Spirit (Calvin, 298).

Our new attitude is shaped by the cruciform life we have in Christ. Because he suffered for sin we too are called to share his suffering at the hands of a sinful, fallen world (John 15:18-16:4). Suffering for Christ/persecution does have the effect of weaning us from sin. Anyone who is willing to suffer for Jesus has made a decisive break from habitual sin and disobedience. Living for Jesus in the context of suffering has a way of “straightening our priorities” (Burdick, 1893).

The Message paraphrases the first verses of our text this way:

“Think of your sufferings as a weaning from the old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you’ll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.”

Pain and suffering in general are useful in leading us to a greater sense of dependence on the grace of God and also solidarity with all the Body of Christ, which is called to share in Christ’s sufferings (Cairns, 25ff). Paul tells us that suffering is a given for those who live a godly life (2 Timothy 3:12; Acts 14:22).

When we contemplate what Christ suffered to do away with sin’s dominion in our lives, we should also feel aversion to our sinful rebellion and self-indulgence. Our desire to live a holy, Spirit-controlled and God-honoring life should be motivated by gratitude for the price Christ paid to break sin’s dominion over us (Wiersbe, 100). Sin is fundamentally action that springs from a self-centered will, and Peter tells us it’s time to give up this self-serving and self-destructive attitude and begin living for the will of God, which is the fulfilling, useful and joyful life (2).

Peter also says (3) that time’s up for...

Old actions

Peter gives a list of sordid behavior that generally characterized the former way of life of God’s people scattered throughout Asia Minor: “their immorality and lust...feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols” (*New Living Translation*).

Upon their conversion to Christ, this former wasteful behavior became suddenly unattractive and even foolish to these people who had become God’s new creation and his holy nation (2:9). When they stopped this former behavior

their old, pagan friends were not only bewildered but were also bothered by this strange new behavior.

“Of course, your old friends don’t understand why you don’t join in with the old gang anymore” (*The Message*).

This is one of the toughest challenges facing a new follower of Jesus, the severing of old ties with and the suffering of criticism and ridicule from former friends who not only don’t understand it but also don’t like their old friends’ new allegiance to Jesus. Some of you here today are paying the price of following Jesus in terms of the “sword” which Jesus said would alienate us from family and friends (Matthew 10:34).

The old *Authorized Version* translates 2:9 as God’s “peculiar people.” Of course, that intended meaning is “a distinctly different people.” But we understand peculiar as meaning also “oddly different,” and to the world we are an odd sort of folk who have distanced ourselves from the world’s “cool” people. And if we truly live for God in the center of his will we can expect family members, fellow students and work colleagues to “heap abuse” (4) on us. Our different kind of behavior “heaps conviction” on them and so, in self-defense, they heap abuse on us.

Time’s up for these old actions because of...

Final accountability

This is what Peter’s referring to in verse 5, which is paraphrased:

“But you don’t have to give an account to them (the old gang). They’re the ones who will be called on the carpet—and before God himself” (*The Message*).

As one commentator says, “Those who condemn the righteous, past or present, should not be surprised if they face condemnation at the hands of the God whom the righteous worshiped” (Michaels, 242). This is important for us to remember regarding what we might suffer and also what the persecuted church is suffering. We may be tempted to feel self pity and even pity those who suffer intensely for their faith. But in actuality we should pity the persecutors and the mockers, because apart from God’s intervening mercy and grace, they will face eternal condemnation. God will not be mocked and we can trust he will vindicate his people and will fully mete out his justice.

I’m always impressed, when I read reports of the suffering church in the Web sites of Open Doors, Voice of the Martyrs and Barnabas Fund, how we are exhorted to pray, not just for the suffering but also for the persecutors of God’s people, that they might be saved and spared God’s judgment. That all might be saved is the reason the good news of Christ is preached and even the reason we are called upon to suffer for his name (6). Knowing the fear of the Lord, we seek to persuade others to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:11).

Beginning with verse 7, Peter is saying...

Time's short for the new life (verses 7-11)

Peter continues the time theme by reminding us that the end of all things is near. Ever since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus we have been living in the Last Days, and we are moving toward the glorious and awful return of our Lord Jesus (Moo, 2129). The church has always been commanded to live expectantly and watchfully, making each day count as though it were our last.

But the "end" (Greek "telos") refers to more than the termination of earthly time at the return of Christ. It also refers to the culmination of a process, which includes God's working in our lives in preparation for eternity (Jobes, 275f). We are to live the rest of our time on earth with an eternal perspective, realizing that the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus said, is at hand (Mark 1:15; Michaels, 245). As James says, "The Judge is standing at the door!" (5:9b).

Our text gives us another "therefore" (7). Because the time is short, we are to live in Year 2011 in...

Watchful prayer

Peter says we are to be clear-minded and self-controlled so we can pray as we should. *The NLT* says, "Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers." *The Message* reads: "Stay wide awake in prayer." In order to live wisely, effectively and joyfully in this fallen world where Satan is always seeking to destroy or defeat us, we must learn to live in the spirit of prayer, seeking to make our lives an act of prayer.

Recently world evangelist Billy Graham was interviewed by news reporter Greta Van Susteren, who asked him what he would do differently if he had the opportunity to live his life over again. He answered, "If I had it to do over again, I'd spend more time in meditation and prayer and just telling the Lord how much I love Him and [am] looking forward to the time we're going to spend together for eternity." It's remarkable that this man, who preached to more people than anyone in history and is one of the world's most influential men, says that he would to prayer and simply to fellowship with Christ (Roach).

We don't know what kind of challenges we'll face in 2011, but we know we'll not be prepared to pass the tests of faith and faithfulness unless we live in the spirit of watchful prayer. Jesus warned his disciples of their need to watch and pray in order to avoid falling into temptation. We know how Peter failed to heed this warning and denied Jesus, just as Jesus had predicted (Matthew 26:31-35, 40f). After he describes the all-important armor of God, the Apostle Paul says we are to appropriate the pieces of the armor through prayer (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Time's too short for us not to pray and also time's short for...

Love and hospitality

Love is dependent on a life of prayer and is paramount in both Peter's and Paul's lists of virtues (8 and 2 Peter 1:5-7; 1 Corinthians 13; Romans 13:10); and Jesus tells us that loving God and others is the most important commandment of all (Matthew 22:37ff; Mark 12:30ff). This agape love is not an emotion but is decisive action—practical and sometimes sacrificial activity in behalf of others, whether they deserve our love or not and whether we feel loving or not (Blum, 246).

In saying our love “covers a multitude of sins,” Peter is calling for a love that “overlooks sins committed against us by others;” and because it “displays our relationship with Christ, love covers our own sins and causes them to be forgiven” (Moo, 2129). Our fellow believers may not agree with us all of the time or even find our actions acceptable, but they should never have occasion to doubt our unconditional love for them.

No doubt also this kind of Christ-like love covers over the sins of others, enabling us to be forgiving, patient and forbearing with one another. It's loving and forgiving as Christ has forgiven us (Colossians 3:13). This kind of forgiving, sin-forgiving and offense-forgetting love is the kind that holds the church together in unity and wards off factions and divisions in the fellowship (Jobes, 278ff). Time's short for us to love, and we must love each other as if our lives depended on it (*The Message*).

In the culture of 1st Century Asia Minor, safe and adequate housing for visitors was difficult to come by. And because the churches were facing mounting persecution and few of the believers had abundant wealth, it could be risky or even costly for a believer to host a visiting evangelist or other guests from distant cities (Jobes, 280). No wonder Peter said they should provide it “without grumbling”!

Hospitality is more than simply entertaining visitors in our homes, but is rather the spirit and attitude of welcoming others, particularly strangers and newcomers, into our fellowship. This spirit is certainly one of the strengths of IBC Brussels. The churches in Asia Minor were made up of “scattered strangers” (1:1), and were colonies of the welcoming holy nation (2:9), made of or peoples from around the world (Jobes, 281). So we at IBC are to be such a colony of hospitality, where newcomers find a loving and warm reception and offer a place of refuge and fellowship of encouragement.

And time's short for...

Faithful service that glorifies God

Peter assumes that everyone in the church has at least one spiritual gift, and divides them into the broad categories of speaking and serving gifts (Blum, 246f). Time's short for us to get involved in using our talents and opportunities to become involved in building up the Body of Christ. For those who feel inadequate, Peter reminds us that we are to serve with the strength that God

provides. It's his work we are doing with him, and through the power of the Spirit. Christ will not ask you to do what he does not enable.

Time's up for giving excuses and letting others carry the load of the ministries of God through this church. One of our real challenges here at IBC is to involve more of our people in sharing the work of our various ministries. 2011 is the year to serve and also the year for me to continue to speak "the very words of God" (11). I must as never before seek to hear from God (Jobes, 282) and preach his word faithfully, clearly and powerfully.

Our text closes with the reminder that our speaking, teaching, preaching and serving God through his church is to be done in his strength, "so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (11). If we serve, teach and preach in our strength and in a way that ostentatiously displays a particular talent, we will not glorify God. If we have a measure of success in the eyes of the world, because you and I may be particularly talented or gifted in a human way, God will not get the glory; rather, we will. What God likes to do is take a weak but willing instrument and do some great things through us so that he will get the credit. People won't say after a great witness through music, an exceptional work in teaching, preaching or doing ministry, that we did a great job or have outstanding ability. Instead they will say, "Look what God did!"

Peter ends this section of his letter with a great benediction. Our desire, like his, should be that God will be praised through Jesus Christ, on earth as he is in heaven (Matthew 6:9f). The most significant thing we can do and the best use of our time in Year 2011 is to give God the glory now as we shall do forever in the consummated Kingdom of Heaven.

Conclusion:

Today is the first day of the rest of your life. The time is now to leave the old life of time wasting and live the new life of investing your time in the eternal Kingdom of God.

We need this eternal perspective, on life's opportunities as well as life's problems, trials and sorrows. When we keep our eyes of faith on Jesus, we will have the perspective we need to have on present trials, disappointments and even present suffering (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17).

In our mortal and frail lives during our brief time on earth, we are never certain of tomorrow. Our lives on earth are simply "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). We must seize the day that God has given to us. This is the first day of the rest of our lives, which may be short indeed. God calls us and will enable us to leave behind the old, wasteful, foolish and disappointing way of living. And he calls us to live a new life of prayerful watching, love, hospitality and faithful service that pleases and glorifies him.

This is a good day to turn your life over to him and begin following him as Lord in the new life he will give you (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:7, 13). This is a

good day for others of us to leave behind the things, attitudes and actions that are more like the old way of living than the new life to which Christ has called us.

I have heard that most people at the end of their time on earth don't express regrets that they didn't earn enough money or fame or even success as the world sees it. Most regret that they didn't live better, more loving lives. Of course, we're not as well known as Billy Graham and likely we won't be interviewed by a news reporter. But we will have to give an account of our lives some day. Now's the time to prepare for that final assessment. What would we do differently? What can and should we do differently, now that we have a little more time? Join me in the new way of seeking to live and to invest our time in a life that glorifies God.

Thoughts and Questions for Personal Reflection and/or Group Discussion:

1. What does this statement mean to you: "Today is the first day of the rest of your life?"
2. Do you agree that some devices that have been invented and marketed to save time have become time wasters?" Why or why not?
3. What is your understanding of Peter's statement in verse 1 that "he who has suffered in his body is done with sin"? How does this verse apply to you?
4. Peter says that the pagans in Asia Minor thought the behavior of followers of Christ, who refused to join in their immoral behavior, was strange. Have you found this to be true in your experience, that your former friends, colleagues or fellow students think your behavior as a follower of Christ is strange?
5. Have unbelievers who reject or resent your Christian morals ever "heaped abuse" (verse 4) on you? Why do you think this is so?
6. What is the believer's hope expressed in verse 7 and what does this say about the need to make good use of our time and opportunities?
7. From the admonitions Peter gives in verses 8-11, which one speaks the most to you? That is, which one of these needs your most attention and resolve for Year 2011?

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