

How Do I Prepare For The End Of The World?

February 8, 2015

Does anyone remember what was supposed to happen May 21, 2011?



Maybe this billboard, that was on the road between Arnolds Park and Milford, will jog your memory. May 21, 2011 was the day Harold Camping predicted as the return of Christ and the end of the world as we know it. This was one of Camping's numerous failed predictions for the date of Christ's return. The Bible has two words for these kinds of people. They are called false prophets.

As a result of Camping's predictions he temporarily gained a global following and millions of dollars in donations. People committed themselves, and their money, to bold acts of evangelism as they tried to live for the end of the world.¹

While Camping was dead wrong when it came to predicting the date of Christ's return, the reality of Christ's return and the end of the world as we know it was not wrong. The Bible is abundantly clear. Christ will return. He will judge the earth and draw history, as we know it, to a close. Camping's problem was not the fact of Christ's return. The problem was trying to predict the date of Christ's return. Matthew 24:36 tells us no one knows the date of Christ's return except for God himself. If God is not sharing that date with the angels in heaven, he certainly is not sharing the date with Harold.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Camping

While we don't know the date of Christ's return, since Christ is returning, how should we live until he returns? Should we donate millions to post billboards around the country? Should we get on the radio and proclaim a turn-or-burn message? How should we live to get ready for Christ's return? That is the question we will answer this morning.

If you are new my name is Kurt. As a church we are studying the book of 1 Peter. This morning we are in 1 Peter 4:7-11. I ask that you take your Bibles and turn to that passage.

Let's read the text.

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. 1 Peter 4:7–11 (ESV)

What did Peter mean when he said “The end of all things is at hand?”

What did Peter mean when he said, “The end of all things is at hand”? Did Peter expect Jesus to return a few months or years after he penned this letter? Was Peter loosely predicting a date for the end of the world, like Harold Camping? If Peter was predicting a date for the end of the world, he was wrong, or at least off by 2,000 years, which seems like a significant error.

Unlike Harold Camping, Peter was not predicting a date for the end of the world. When Peter said, “the end of all things is at hand” Peter was not speaking chronologically. He was speaking theologically. In the grand story of God's redemptive work, the next big event on the redemptive timeline after Christ's

return to heaven is Christ's return from heaven. The Bible describes all the days after the ascension of Christ as the last days.

While Peter was not giving us a date for Christ's return, he told us we need to be confident of Christ's return. Don't be fooled into thinking it won't happen. In 2 Peter, Peter told us it will seem like we are waiting a long time for Christ to return.

They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 2 Peter 3:4–7 (ESV)

Just as the world had a beginning, it will have an ending. Just as the world was once destroyed by the flood with water, it will be finally destroyed by fire. It is not a matter of if it will happen, it is only a matter of when it will happen.

In 2 Peter we also learn we are waiting a long time for Christ to return. It is not because God forgot to send him back but it is because of God's patience.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

The reason Christ hasn't returned is because God is patient and is providing more opportunity for people to repent. Rest assured, Christ will return. Everyone will be judged by Jesus. It doesn't matter what we think about ourselves. It doesn't matter what others think about us. All that matters is what Jesus thinks about us. Everyone's life will be evaluated by Jesus.

If you are not a Christian, I plead with you to take this seriously. The only thing that matters in this life is what God thinks about you. Christ will either return or you will die. Either way, you meet Jesus. The only way to be accepted by God and to have your sins forgiven is to trust in Jesus Christ's death for your sins. His death in our places for our sins is the only way to be cleansed. Call out to Jesus, asking for his mercy today.

For those of us who are Christians, the return of Christ and the time we stand before him to be judged is a time to be rewarded for how we lived. Since Christians will be judged and rewarded, we should think carefully about how we live. We should live wisely. Peter said this very thing in 2 Peter.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness... 2 Peter 3:11 (ESV)

Christians need to live wisely now to prepare for the time we are judged and rewarded by Christ. In the passage we are studying in 1 Peter, Peter told us how Christians should live to prepare for Christ's return.

We discover Peter didn't propose we act like lunatics plastering the sides of the highway with billboards proclaiming the end of the world. Instead we should commit ourselves to three simple things — praying, loving and serving. If we are praying, loving and serving, we will be prepared for the end of the world when we stand before Jesus.

Pray

...therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 1 Peter 4:7 (ESV)

People who know the end of all things is near are concerned with keeping a clear line of communication with God. As we look at this verse, I have three observations about the kind of prayer we should have in our lives as we prepare for the end of the world.

Pray Consistently

The general sense of Peter's words are that prayer is not something reserved for Sunday. It is not something reserved for times of desperation. Peter pictured prayer as something Christians do throughout the day. I want you to notice that prayers is plural. The idea is we are praying consistently throughout the day.

Since Christian prayer is heart-felt and self-controlled it also pictures our mind engaged in conversation with God. This rules out those repetitious prayers like saying 50 "Hail Marys." It moves prayer beyond simple repetitious meal-time prayers and bedtime prayers. It puts conversational prayer time in our drive to work, in our coffee break at the office and even during the day when we take a break and go for a walk. We prepare for the return of Christ by having a consistent prayer life where our minds are engaged in conversation with God consistently throughout the day.

If you find yourself infrequent in prayer or praying only on a surface level with mindless prayers or you find yourself only praying on Sundays or times of desperation, this is an opportunity to change. Prepare for the end of the world by having regular conversations with God.

Pray Seriously

In addition to consistent prayer, we prepare for the return of Christ by thinking about prayer soberly. This means taking prayer seriously. One of our great temptations is to think of prayer as a nice gesture toward people in need. We don't expect anything to happen in response to our prayers. As a result, we don't take prayer seriously. We figure that after we have tried everything and failed, then we pray. Peter told us to take prayer seriously. God does respond to prayer by either changing us or changing our circumstances.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. James 5:16 (ESV)

We live a life that is prepared for the end of the world by taking prayer seriously, knowing it is powerful and does make a difference.

Peter used this same phrase *sober-minded* later in his letter when he talked about how we are to think about the devil.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)

We are not just floating through life. We are in a spiritual battle. Satan and his demonic forces are committed to our destruction. Satan will do whatever he can to render our lives ineffective. He will try to tempt us away from our spouse. He will try to get us too busy to pray. He will try to mold us to follow the pressures of the world. We take Satan seriously. This is why we don't attend seances. This is why we don't play with Ouija Boards.

Peter told us that we need to take the power of prayer as seriously as we take the power of Satan. If you take Satan seriously, take prayer seriously. It makes a difference.

Exercise self-control or you won't have time for prayer.

If we are to take prayer seriously, we need to find time to pray consistently. In our busy world, it is easy to be drawn away from prayer. Peter told us that unless we learn to exercise self-control, we will never find time for prayer. Unless we learn to say, "No" to good things, and control our own desires, prayer will always be pushed out of our lives. Peter was not telling us that all we should do is pray. He was telling us that unless we learn to exercise self-control, we will never pray. Think about this. Which one would you like to do right now? Eat ice cream or pray? If given the option, would you rather watch a movie or pray? Would you rather flip through Facebook or pray? If we don't exercise self-control we will pick ice cream, a movie or Facebook every time.

We need to exercise self-control and say, "I need prayer more than I need ice cream. I will have ice cream later but only after I pray because I know I need God more than I need ice cream." Only God is the one who can heal my marriage, not prayer. Only God is the one who will break me free from sin, not Facebook. Only God is the one who can change my heart, not watching movies."

Peter said that because the end is near, we want to be people of impact that honor Christ with our lives, so we take prayer seriously. We exercise self-control to discipline ourselves to pray consistently. How do we do this?

How do we find time for prayer in our busy schedules? Here is a suggestion. Charles Spurgeon, a pastor who lived in the 1800s, was like many of us today. He was completely ADD. He had a hard time maintaining focus in prayer. He decided to only pray for 10 minutes at a time, or he would lose focus. He prayed for multiple 10 minute slots throughout the day but he learned that was the only way for him to pray. My challenge to us as a congregation is to find at least one 10-minute slot every day and give our focused attention to prayer in that time. Pray for your spouse, your children, your church family, the mission of the church as we try to reach our region, repent of sin, ask God help you make right choices for your future. Take this time of prayer as seriously as you take the existence of Satan. After that, have ice cream, scan Facebook or watch a movie.

If you can't find 10 minutes a day for concentrated prayer, you have a serious problem with self-control.

Prayer is one of the most important things we can do to prepare for the end of the world.

Love

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:8–9 (ESV)

Some of you are tempted to think that the best Christian life is one of solitude for prayer. Thankfully that is not the picture Peter gave. The Christian life is a life lived in community and in relationships with other Christians. God wants us to give ourselves in love to one another as we live together in the local church.

My love should be genuine.

...keep loving one another earnestly...

In the church, we don't just attend a service, we are to love each other earnestly. Earnestly means we are sincere about our love. That means we actually love people. We don't just fake it. In the church, people genuinely care. The love we have for one another is not to be that surface kind of love where you never open yourself up to others. It is to be real.

I am not asking you if you feel genuinely loved by other people in the church. When we stand before Christ at his return, Jesus will not ask us if we felt genuinely loved by others in the church; what will be evaluated is if we genuinely loved others in the church. Don't blame shift this. Ask yourself, "Do I genuinely love my brothers and sisters in the church?" I will give an answer to Jesus for how I love others in this body.

Be hard to offend.

When we open ourselves up to one another, it doesn't take long for people to learn we are pretty messed up. When we get close to people in the church they will hurt you. People in the church will disappoint you. The people who have caused the deepest wounds in my life are all church people. I also have a long list of people I have hurt inadvertently or sinned against, and they are church people. The only way to avoid this is to either keep all your church relationships on a plastic surface level or you have to be a person that is hard to offend.

...love covers a multitude of sins...

In the world, when people hurt us, we write them off. We avoid them. In the church we love others by being hard to offend. We have love for people that is strong enough to keep forgiving people. We are willing to cover over many sins.

Aren't those the kind of people you love to be around? I have a gift. It is called, "Foot-In-Mouth Disease." I can say the dumbest things. I feel terrible about it. When I go to people and ask their forgiveness for something dumb I said, I love it when they look at me and say, "No worries." They don't hold it over my head. I love those kind of people. You love those kind of people. God calls us to be those kind of people. Peter was just quoting a verse from Proverbs.

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. Proverbs 10:12 (ESV)

As Christians be hard to offend. Treat people the same way Jesus treats you. Forgive them and refuse to shut them out of your life. When we fail Jesus again and again, he doesn't write us off. He refuses to let our sin stand in the way of the relationship he wants with us. In the same way, when people fail us at church, and they will, love them like Jesus and be really hard to offend.

Just a word of advice. If you are a person who has a list of people you have written off because they failed you, part of the reason you have a list is because they failed you. The other reason you have a list is probably because you are unloving and unforgiving. You are too easily offended. You won't forgive. If you find yourself bitter toward people the problem might be in your own heart. Be hard to offend and quick to forgive. Just like Jesus forgives you.

Love others with my home.

It is tempting to think this earnest heart-felt love is to stay in the church. It sounds like we are to save it for Sundays at the coffee bar. That isn't the way Peter pictured it. This genuine love for our church family goes home with us. Genuine love is seen through hospitality. Christians are to have members of their church family over their homes. We are to literally have church members over to our homes for meals. That is one of the ways we show others in the body genuine love. When we eat together, we bond together.

Let's be candid about this. Hospitality can be a real inconvenience. It costs extra money for food. You have to clean the house. By the way, I have learned nobody really cleans the house. All you do is take the piles out of the living room and hide them in the bedroom. When your company leaves, you take them out of the bedroom and put them back in the living room. True cleaning never happens. You have to make time in your schedule. If you have people stay at your house overnight you have sheets and laundry to clean. The kids need to give up their beds and use sleeping bags to stay on the floor.

Ladies, it is tempting to grumble over hospitality and to avoid it. Peter said, "Don't grumble. Genuine love is practicing hospitality." If you don't have anyone from the church over to your home, the question can be asked, "Is your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ genuine?"

Most of us do not realize the power of our homes to disciple other believers and encourage them. All Christians are to be engaged in the building up of the body of Christ. An extremely powerful way we do this is simply opening

up our homes and inviting people from church over for a meal. It is telling stories together and laughing together. It is talking about your faith in Christ together. It is watching a football game together. It is playing monopoly together. Your home is a powerful discipleship tool. Eating together in your home with people from the church builds relationships. When people start to genuinely know you, they start to genuinely listen to what you have to say about Jesus.

Let me be very straight on this. There are a lot of people in this church that need friends. There are single mothers. There are widows. There are divorcees. There are unwed young adults. There are lots of people that are desperate for somebody to care about them. Many of us leave on Sunday and go home to eat luscious meals with our biological families while numerous singles in our church family go home to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at the kitchen table by themselves. I want this to change, beginning today. I want us to begin the practice that after church we intentionally meet new people and invite them either out for a meal or over to our homes for a meal. Open up your home and your life.

I am keeping the bar low. I would love to see more than this. If you are part of the CrossWinds family, as your pastor I am asking you to have one new family or individual over a month. If you can do this more than once a month, great! Go home and put at least one open dinner date a month on your calendar. Meet people that are new to you and start inviting them over to your home. Enjoy yourself and love people.

Building relationships is one of the best things we can do to open the door for the gospel. Your home is a powerful discipleship tool. Use it wisely.

Serve

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... 1 Peter 4:10–11 (ESV)

Just as we are to take prayer seriously and loving people seriously to prepare for the return of Christ, we are to be serious about serving others in the church. Peter started out by saying, “as each has received a gift”.

Everyone is gifted by God to serve others in the church.

Peter implied that everyone received a spiritual gift from God when he or she became a Christian. The Bible tells us all Christians have at least one gift. Paul taught this explicitly in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Some Christians have more than one gift. Christians are given different strengths of their gifts. When Christians use their gifts they develop and get stronger.

I am gifted by God to serve others, not myself.

A spiritual gift is a way the Holy Spirit empowers us to serve others in the church and to build up the church. This is important. Spiritual gifts are never given to us to serve ourselves. Spiritual gifts are given to us to serve others. God wants everyone in the church not just attending church but serving others in the body. If you are part of CrossWinds, you are gifted by God and people in the church need you using your gift.

I am accountable for how I use my gift.

Since every one of us is gifted by God to serve others, we are to be a good steward of those gifts. We are accountable to God for how we use the gifts he entrusted into our lives.

Remember that our gifts are not ours. They are given to us by God. We are only a steward of God's gifts. We will answer to God for how we used our gifts.

The gift lists in the Bible are representative, not exhaustive.

It says we are to be good stewards of God's *varied* grace. There are various gift lists in the Bible. Some of the gifts mentioned in those lists include teaching, administration, mercy and many others. Some of you are wondering if you need a special gift test to figure out your gift. Some of you are not sure if your gift is one of those mentioned in the Bible. The gift lists in the New Testament are representative, not exhaustive. While God still gifts people with the spiritual gifts described in the New Testament, that doesn't mean God never gifts people in new and creative ways not directly mentioned in the New Testament. I know of people who are great web designers for church. You don't find the gift of web design in the Bible but God is gifting them in that area.

I discover my gifts by sensing needs and feeling joy.

How do we discover my spiritual gifts and learn the way wants me to fit into the church body? It is not through an extensive test. It is simple. Just look at the church and find a place you sense a need and a place you feel joy.

1. **Look for a place I sense need, then get involved.** What in the church do you think could be done better? Where in the church do you think you can help? If you sense a need, that probably means you are gifted in that area. If you think greeters should be friendlier, become a greeter and be friendlier. If you wish there was better outreach, get involved in outreach. Do you think you could improve the computer and tech? Jump in because we need your help. One time a lady told me she didn't like the store-bought cookies at the coffee bar. Since it is church, she thought the cookies should all be home-baked. Do you know what I told her? Start baking cookies! Apparently you are gifted in that area. You see a need, now meet the need. That is your gift. Do you like kids? Maybe God gifted you to help with CrossWinds Academy on Sunday morning or AWANA on Wednesday evening.
2. **Look for a place where you find joy.** Get involved meeting various needs in the church and discover what places you find the most joy. Some people love to cook. I don't like cooking. I like eating. I get no joy when it comes to making a meal. Cindy, my wife, loves to make meals for people in need. She gets real joy from dropping off a meal to encourage people. That is her gift. I know that because she gets joy from it.

Don't just attend church, serve others in church.

Let me share one of my concerns for CrossWinds. As we get larger it gets easier for us to be a church of people who attend rather than people who serve others. If you are just attending and have not found a way to serve, I want you to change. It is unhealthy for you spiritually to just attend. You will stifle your

spiritual growth if you just attend. If you don't get involved serving others, you will deny yourself joy. There is great joy that comes when we serve others with our gifts and we know the church is built up and people are embracing Christ because God used us in a small way. Don't be satisfied with just attendance. Keep pursuing finding a place to serve by sensing needs and finding joy.

Now Peter lumps the different spiritual gifts into two classes, speaking gifts and serving gifts. He told us how we are to use them.

If you have a speaking gift, take preparation seriously.

Whoever speaks is to speak as if they are speaking the very oracles of God. That means if God has you gifted in preaching or teaching, either adults or children, do a good job. Take it seriously. Don't do Saturday night specials when it comes to preparation. A Saturday night special is waiting until Saturday night to try and figure out what to say on Sunday morning. If you teach a class, work at the class throughout the week. Write out what you need to say. Pray over it. Saturday night should be a time to refresh your memory not to begin forming your thoughts. Remember we are giving God's Word to God's people. Take it seriously. How we used our teaching gift will be judged and rewarded by God when we stand before him.

If you have a serving gift, look for the strength God promises to supply.

Those with serving gifts will occasionally find themselves tapped out. Perhaps it is Sunday morning and your job is to run the sound board. Instead of running the sound board, you want to sleep. How do you handle this? Talk to God in prayer and ask him to supply the strength you need.

Experience has taught me that when you press into fatigue and ask the Holy Spirit to supply the strength you need to use God's gift to serve God's people, he always comes through. At the end of the day God supplies the strength and joy we need to make it through.

When it comes to using your gifts to serve in the church, consciously ask Jesus to give you the energy and to empower you to serve others. That may be asking Jesus to give you the energy needed to make a meal you want to deliver to someone in the church in need. It may be asking God to give you the energy you need to put a smile on your face as you greet others at the door because you are tired. Lean on the Holy Spirit. He will get you through in a way you won't expect.

Conclusion

This morning, we started with an audacious question. How should we live to prepare for the end of the world? The Bible doesn't tell us to give away all our money for billboard advertisements about judgment. We don't join a commune or become long-haired hippies. We prepare for the end of the world by following a basic list — pray, love and serve.

Pray throughout the day. Take prayer seriously, remembering that it makes a difference. Exercise self-control by actually planning times of prayer in our lives. If we don't have that self-control, we will do everything else besides pray. We are going to apply that by everyone making at least 10 minutes in our daily schedules for concentrated prayer. We need prayer more than ice cream or Facebook.

Love others in the church. Don't be satisfied to just know people on a surface level that only involves shaking hands. Open our lives up to others. When they hurt us, which they will, be quick to forgive and hard to offend. Love in the church doesn't stay in the church. We are to be people known for our hospitality. We should be inviting people into our homes. Our home is a power tool for discipling others in the church. My challenge was meet new people in the foyer and invite one new family a month over to your home for dinner.

Serve others in the church. Every one of us is gifted to serve others in this body. The only question is, "Are we using our gifts?" When we use our gifts to bless others, God blesses us. If you have a teaching gift, take it seriously. You are handling the very words of God. If you have a serving gift, don't try to rely on your own strength. Ask the Holy Spirit for the energy you need to use God's gift to serve God's people with God's strength. God promises he will carry you though.

Let's pray.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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