

In the leadup to 1975, the Jehovah's Witness Watch Tower Society, had put out statements that this would be 6000 years from when they thought Adam was created, and thus would be entering into a sabbath for God.

And then, with lots of vague predictions (and some not so vague), many Jehovah Witnesses became convinced that the end of the world would come in 1975.

When we were in Dalby (years later), our minister at the time told us the story of what had happened locally:

As the due date approached, some of the local JW had a big spending spree, and booked all this stuff up to their accounts, and then they all went up to the Bunya Mountains to wait for Jesus to come...

And you may already know this, but the world didn't end in 1975... And so some of the locals had a great old belly laugh, when all these disappointed JW's descended the mountain, to try and work out how they were going to pay all their accounts...

That's just one of a long line of failed predictions, made by the JW...

But, what would you do, if you **knew that Jesus was going to return, and the Day of Judgment was going to come in 3 months from today?**

Or maybe I should back-it-up a bit: **Do you believe that the end of all things, is at hand? If you do, well, the world would categorise you as crazy. And yet this is what we must believe, because this is what the Scriptures consistently teach.**

Now, I reckon it's 'just-as-well' that God **didn't** tell us the day, or the hour of Jesus' return. If we knew when it would be, if it was a long way away, people wouldn't care, and they'd put it off – "There's no pressing need to turn to God right now – no pressing need for evangelism right now – the end isn't for another 1000 years."

And likewise, if we knew the date, and it was only a matter of months or days, everything would fall into rack and ruin, as daily responsibilities would be neglected, and the focus would all shift to the immediate self (self-gratification and self-preservation)...

And so I thank God, that we **don't** know the hour or the day (or the year/month/millennia).

God's intent, is that every man, woman and child, will be going about their normal, everyday business, when Jesus (all of a sudden), unexpectedly arrives... Although He **won't** be unexpected. We have been told to expect Him. We **know** that He's coming (We just don't know when)... And so the timing will be a surprise – not the arrival itself.

Jesus said:

Matthew 24:34-51 (ESV)

³⁶ "... concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking,

marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There's a lot in that, hey... And we're **not** going to study that passage today. But when we look at the letter that **Peter** wrote, to me, it's been so obvious, the way the teachings of Jesus, keep coming through in Peter's letter. And today's no different.

And Jesus told parable after parable, with the message "Be ready!","", **But** also, incorporated into most of these parables, is the concept that "He was a long time coming", and people stopped being ready....

How did they stop being ready? By sinful living, and by not continuing to serve and love...

And it's easy to lose our sense of vigilance – it's easy to lose our sense of readiness, because it's almost 2000 years now, that the church has been waiting for Jesus to return. And even in Peter's day, people were beginning to wonder, "Is it ever going to happen?" Which is why, in his 2nd letter, Peter says that in the last days, there'll be scoffers – "Where's this Jesus? Is he ever going to come??"

And in his 2nd letter, he reminds us, that **with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one dayⁱ...**" And so, to God, it's only a couple of days since Jesus told us to be ready...

Alright, so we know we need to be ready, but what does that look like?

If you **knew** that the end of the world, was 3 months from today, how would you spend this coming week? What would you do differently?

Or a similar question, and it should be the same answer: What if a doctor gave you the news that you had a disease/cancer, and you only had 3 months to live... How would you spend the time, that you still had health?

Well, when it comes to the end of the world/return of Jesus, in the church, we'll find 2 opposite extremes...

- Many people don't give the return of Jesus a 2nd thought. Oh, they know it's going to happen, and when it does: "That's OK, because I've got my insurance policy in place – I've said the sinner's prayer (in plenty of time); I'm forgiven, and I'm good to go.

But, the way they live, it's evident that they're not expecting Jesus any time soon. ... Their concerns are almost completely worldly. Their whole focus seems to be on:

- Self;
- their current life; and
- saving up for what's going to be a glorious retirement for themselves...

They like to feel that they're passionate about evangelism, but they're not:

- **personally** sharing their faith;
- weeping for the unsaved;

- praying “Lord, Your Kingdom Come – come as soon as you can – This world is so corrupt; Come; Come Lord Jesus”...; and
 - risking their comfort/safety, or the possibility of persecution for the sake of Jesus...
- But then the other extreme, are those Christians who, that’s all they want to talk about:
 - The world’s about to end;
 - It has to be any day now;
 - Oww, things are getting so bad;
 - Look at this virus – it’s a pestilence – it’s the end of the world;
 - Look at the worldwide political upheaval – any moment;

And they get so fixated on **the end**, that they don’t live **the today** that God has given them... At least, they don’t live it, how God intends us to live it.

Peter said, “**The end of all things is at hand**”. And I reckon the first question we need to ask, is “Who’s hand?” Well, God’s hand.

The end of all things is “near in time”, and it’s “near spatially/in locality” – But near to what? It’s near to God’s timeline, and it’s near to God Himself. The end of all things, is **not** out of God’s reach. If the end of all things was going to come with God pressing a button, His finger is resting on that button. The end of all things is at hand...

And, knowing our Heavenly Father, doesn't that give us great comfort, that the end of all things, is entirely in God's timing, and in His control?

When I was going to school, the scientists had us all worried and 'wound-up' – the climates cooling, and we're heading for an ice-age, and we're all going to be frozen, and our crops won't be able to grow, and humanity as we know it won't survive. (extinction level event)

Apparently we've fixed that problem, because now the scientists are telling us the world's getting hotter. *We are in a climate emergency, and the world's going to end, and we have to take action now, otherwise it's going to be too late...*

Once again, when I was a child, and more so, before I was born, *some children were terrified they would never get to be adults (a nuclear holocaust). The dreadful power of the splitting atom, had become a mere mechanism to set off an even **more** destructive force – the **fusing** of atoms, in a fusion hydrogen bomb.*

The bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima had the equivalent power of about 18000 tonnes of TNT. And its destruction was catastrophic. Nagasaki was worse.

But by modern terms, that's tiny.

The most powerful nuclear bomb ever tested, was detonated by the USSR in 1961. Its explosive force, was the equivalent of 50 000 000 tonnes of TNT. (2800 times the power of the Hiroshima bomb). The radius of total destruction, was 35km in every direction.

And people were terrified – they believed that the power to end the world, was now in the hands of man...

And many still hold that fear – I read an article the other day, of somebody who obviously hates Donald Trump, *and they were pressing the panic button – Now that he's lost the election, we've gotta get him away from the button – he's a spoilsport – he's going to blow the world up...*

Take a breath. Doesn't it give us great comfort, that the end of all things, isn't in the hands of:

- Kim Jong Un
- Vladimir Putin
- Donald Trump
- Boris Johnson
- Xi Jinping

- Joe Biden

The end of all things, is at God's hand...

It's near. It could be at any time, and we need to be ready.

I come back to that question, “What would you do, if you knew the world was going to end in 3 months (or if you only had 3 months to live)?” Well, Peter tells us the right way to be ready.

He gives us 4 instructions.

1.

The first, is to do with our mind, and the way we think.

At the prospect of the world ending, the human reaction of many, is to panic, and be filled with fear.

It's not the end of the world, but what a terrible indictment on our nation it was (and it still is), (with regards to the Covid pandemic) – the panic buying we saw – Some people were completely irrational... They filled their houses so full of toilet paper and flour & canned goods and bottled water & stuff, there was hardly room to move about...

*For some people, their **fear** was astonishing, and yet completely unfounded – Zero cases in a whole health district, and yet they cowered in their homes, and then there was the social media pile-ons if a family dared to visit the beach...*

We see the panic in the US at the moment (on both sides of politics, over the election and the result of the election) – completely irrational...

If it's like this now, what's it going to be like when the end of the world really does come???

The fact that the end of all things is at hand, is a time for Christians to shine – what should we do with our minds?

Well, we should be the ones who are “**self-controlled, and sober-minded**”.

Have you noticed that in times of national disaster, they often bring the army in. Do you know why? Because they're

trained to be self-controlled, and sober-minded, and go about their business, despite the mayhem around them.

And with regard to the end of all things, it's the Disciples of Jesus, who should be demonstrating self-control and clear thinking.

Yes, with a full awareness, that the end is nigh, we need to know that this is **not** a time for:

- panic;
- losing control;
- losing our minds; or
- for losing our cool...

The thing that has astonished me most (in the last 12 months), is the way that a global pandemic seems to have been the catalyst for a flood of craziness (even in the church)...

When a nameless person claims to have evidence of a conspiracy, millions believe it, and they stop thinking straight.

- And the Scriptures tell us, "Do not gossip", but that's exactly what happens... Some people trawl the internet, looking for more secret information, naming certain people who have secret agendas... and then they email all their friends, and say, "Did you know this?" ... And we disobey God by gossiping.
- And the Scriptures tell us to honour the authorities, but we disobey God, because we know something secret;
- And the Scriptures tell us in Isaiah 8, not to call something "a conspiracy", that other people call "a

conspiracy” – do not fear; do not dread. Honour God, and fear God...

And yet, good Christian people (my brothers and sisters in Christ), get all up-in-arms that:

- we have to do something to stop the government from controlling us; or
- we have to know who’s really responsible for this virus; or
- we have to stand against ...(insert whatever concern you’ve heard here)...

You know what? When God **does** bring the end of the world, where in the bible does it tell us it’s our job to stop it??? It’s not our job to stop it. And in fact, quite the opposite: we are to pray for God’s kingdom to come. But until then, because the end of all things is at hand, “**Be self-controlled, and sober-minded**”.

Other people:

- they can have their panic;
- they can have their conspiracy theories;

Not us.

Do you know why?

1. Because we know who’s really in control. **God’s** in control.
2. Because when we pray, we are to pray with a mind that is clear-thinking. ...

2.

The 2nd instruction, is to do with relationships...

If the world was about to end, some might ‘write off’ all the people they don’t really like. After-all, only a few months to go, I don’t need them anyway...

But Peter tells us to, “**Keep loving one another earnestly**”.

Even Christians, can rub each other the wrong way. Sometimes, one Christian might do something that hurts or offends another. And the thing is, often, the one who takes offence, tends to wear that offence, as a badge of (not honour), but of self-righteousness – That other one has offended me, and I have a right to be offended. And they seem to think that the rest of the church should pamper them, because they’re the ones who have been offended...

And some people in the church, seem to very easily take offence... Do you know what that tells me??? If I am someone, who is very easily offended, and if I regularly get offended, that tells me, that I don’t know how to love.

You see, when we love one another earnestly, that love covers a multitude of sins...

When we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and when we love earnestly, that love **overlooks** the offences of others. What Peter’s saying, is “Rather than take offence, overlook the offence, and love.”...

There are so many people, who aren’t fellowshiping in a church today (even in this town), because they believe someone has sinned against them, or the church has sinned

against them, and they've taken offence, and they're holding onto that offence...

You know what's really lacking? “Keep loving one another earnestly”.

Many people have the attitude, “I don't have to go to church to be a Christian”... Yes you do, otherwise, how are you going to love the family of Jesus earnestly???

3.

The 3rd direction, is what we do with our homes.

If you knew the end of the world would be in 3 months' time (to live), what would you do with your home and your family?

For some, they might become very insular – this is about our family now (private time). The time is short – we've just got to look after ourselves..

But do you know what Peter says to do because the end of all things is near? Open your homes up, and invite others to come and share with you and your family. It's **not** a time for containing ourselves to our close-knit family units. This is a time to welcome strangers to our homes.

And as the end of the world does draw near, it's not a time for hoarding. It's a time for sharing...

We expect that, before Jesus returns, Christians are going to be persecuted even more severely. It will come to the stage where, because we won't worship the image of the beast, we won't even be allowed to buy or sell anything... But you know what – even then, it won't be a time for hoarding – it's a time for sharing, and opening up our homes to visitors and for meals, to share what we **do** have (even if it's only a morsal).

Genuine hospitality, is something beautiful to see in a church. My hope is that whenever we have a visitor come to this church, that they would be invited to so many homes to share lunch, they'll know, "Wow, that's a church who truly love God, because they love His family, and want to get to know His family (even though they're strangers)." That's what hospitality's about.

Some people have a spiritual gift of hospitality, but we should all be hospitable, even if we don't have that gift.

I've said to you before, "I do hope, that when you go on holidays, that you don't take a holiday from church." It's the most wonderful thing, that when you're away, (do your research & find a good church), and visit that church, and don't leave straight afterwards. Stick around, and fellowship with strangers who are your family.

You know, when we find a good church, that usually ends up being the highlight of our holiday. And the best part is when another family invites you home for lunch. It doesn't always happen, and don't be offended if it doesn't, but give others the opportunity to share you hospitality.

4.

And, the 4th instruction, is what we do with our gifts.

We all have at least one Spiritual gift. Or at least, I'm confident that you can have a spiritual gift if you are willing to pray and ask God for one.

What are Spiritual gifts? A Spiritual gift, is being able to serve God, and to serve others, in ways that we can't do in our own strength. Now, we can't control what gift we are given, but we can control how to use the gift.

And because the end of all things is at hand, we are to use the gift that God has given us, **to serve one another.**

The spiritual gift that God has given you, isn't for your own service/fulfillment/ not even for your own Spiritual growth... The Spiritual gifts are given, to serve others.

And we don't all have the same gift – we have varied gifts. God has **designed** the church this way. I am deficient without you, because I don't have the spiritual gifts that you have. And **you** are deficient without me, because **you** don't have the spiritual gifts that **I** have.

Some gifts are to do with “speaking”...

- Prophecy;
- Preaching;
- I'm using a gift of “teaching” at the moment.

And when I speak, it's not about 'glorifying me with my oratory skills', because I don't have any. I'm only able to do what I'm doing now, as God gives me strength to do it. As I speak, I'm not to be speaking:

- my own words;
- my own pet theories;
- the latest sociological/psychological teachings;

We use the speech gifts, to share the word of God.

And then there's other gifts of service (practical gifts):

- giving
- healing
- caring for the sick;
- hospitality;
- administration

And all these things, we don't do in our own strength – we do it in God's strength, in order that in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Now, if you knew the world was going to end in 3 months' time, would you keep working, or would you take a holiday? What would you do???

If you have a job, that work is your calling. What about ministry in the church? Would you be ringing Robyn up, and saying, "Don't put me on the roster this month (there's only 3 months to go, you know)".

Do you remember what Jesus said: Blessed is the servant, who, when his master returns, is serving in the way that he was directed... (at least, words to that effect).

Because the end is near, it's not a time to stop serving – it's a time to **be** serving – that's what glorifies God... And a word to the elderly – and the retirees... I've noticed there's 2 different types of retirees – For some, it's a time for travel and holidays, and their ministry all but stops... But for others, all of a sudden, they've got even more time to serve Jesus...

What do you think glorifies God the most???

The end is near. Every one of us has a spiritual gift, and we should be using them to the glory of God.

And if you're just waiting to be asked, stop waiting to ask, and you do the asking: I believe God has given me a gift. How can I use it to glorify God?

I think we might leave it at that. How to live, with the short time that we have, we could talk about that for hours. (And some of you might say, "You have been".)

The end of all things is nigh.

Therefore, this is how we should live. that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Sentence: Living in the end times, in readiness, for the glory of God.

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:1-11 Part B (7-11)

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Bush Disciples

ⁱ 2 Peter 3:1-13