Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

This section of Peter’s letter began back in chapter 2:11. The theme is Christian living in an unbelieving and hostile world. And we have learned what this looks like in terms of specific relationships and everyday living, and we have seen that the motivation for this lifestyle is the person and work of Christ, including, as we saw last week, that He will “*come back to judge the living and the dead*.”

And it is the reality of Jesus’ return that governs today’s passage also. And I wonder: Do you think much about the return of Jesus? Has something ever happened that led you to think that today might be the day, or to look up in the sky for a moment? And I ask you this, because one of the reasons that Peter wrote his *second* letter was the teaching of some that Jesus would not return. When Peter wrote that letter, it had been 30 long years since Jesus ascended, and the way they reasoned it, if He was not back yet, then He was surely never coming back. Well, here we are, *2000* years after His ascension. That’s around 730,000 times that the sun has risen and set and risen again. And so, it is easy to think that one day will follow the next, as they always do, and to not expect the return of Jesus at any moment. Could it be that that is how it is with you, perhaps? Or, let me ask the question a different way: If you knew for sure that Jesus was coming back tomorrow, would that change how you live today?

Well, what today’s passage of 1 Peter reveals is that another way to describe how to live in an unbelieving and hostile world is as **an End-times Lifestyle**. And we will unpack that together as we simply look at the two parts of that title – What does end-times *mean* and what does an end-times *lifestyle* look like?

1. So, let’s begin with **what end-times means**. Verse 7 begins: “*The end of all things is at hand.*” What does this mean?
	1. Well, broadly speaking, it refers to **the whole period between Jesus’ first and second comings**. Hebrews 1 speaks about the first coming of Jesus, as taking place “*in these last days*.” And the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Apostles is described in the Bible as happening in the “*last days*.” 2 Peter 3 says that scoffers will come “*in the last days*,” who will teach that Jesus is not coming back. And people were teaching this *in Peter’s day*, as we just heard. So, the whole period of time between Jesus’ first and second coming is described in Scripture as the last days.
	2. But there are also many references in Scripture to **a period that leads up to the Second Coming of Jesus as the *very last* days, if you like, or the end-times**.
		1. We often read about “*later times*” or “*the last days*,” which will be a time of “*great difficulty*” or tribulation.
		2. **2 Thessalonians 2** speaks about “*the man of lawlessness*,” who will rise up and persecute the church, immediately before the return of Jesus.
		3. In **Matthew 24**, Jesus said, “*You will hear of wars and rumours of wars … nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places … "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake … Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*.”
		4. So, at the very end of world history, there will be this end-times period that leads up to the Second Coming of Jesus.
	3. And Jesus, Himself, told us how to live in the expectation of His return. In **Luke 12:35-36**, He said, “*Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks*.”
		1. Perhaps this illustration will help: Boys and girls, if Mum and Dad go out at 7pm and they tell you that they will be home at 10pm. What do you do from 9:45-9:55? You turn off the computer game that you weren’t really supposed to be playing, you put away the chocolate chippie biscuit packet that you ate too many of, you tidy up, you tell your brothers and sisters to get back into bed and be quiet, even though they should have put the lights out at 8pm, and you get a homework book out and start reading it. Why? Because you expect your parents to arrive, any moment. And when you expect something to happen soon, it affects how you behave.
		2. Well, Peter knew all the things about the end-times that we know. And what did he say to the believers he originally wrote to? He said, “*The end of all things is at hand*.” He expected that Jesus could return at any moment, way back then! And since then, have there been wars? Yes. Have there been earthquakes? Yes. Have there been famines? Yes. **2 Timothy 3:1-5** says, “*But understand this, that in the last days … people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power*.” Are there people like that today? Yes. **1 Timothy 4:1** says that in “*later times*” there will be false teachers. Are there false teachers? Yes. And are there those that persecute Christians? Yes, there are.
		3. So, are you living like it is the end-times? Are you living like Jesus could come back today? And I ask you this because He could. To think that He could not come back today, because in your mind this or that has not yet happened, would be to make a huge mistake. You must live, expecting His return, any moment!

1. And that brings us, in the second place, to **what the End-times Lifestyle looks like**. And this is unfolded in verses 7b-11, and it has four parts that we will briefly consider:
	1. The first part of the end-times lifestyle is **Purposeful Prayer**; we read, “*Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers*.”
		1. I know that air-fryers are all the rage today, but there was a time when **pressure-cookers** were the new and best things for the kitchen. And the way that they work is that you put the food in the water in the pot, and you tighten down the lid and heat the water. And the boiling water creates steam that creates heat pressure, which cooks the food. Now, provided your pot and the release valve are working well, a little bit of steam is released throughout the cooking process. But there are many horror stories of cheap pots and valves that got clogged, which resulted in…? You guessed it – massive explosions! And pressure can have the same effect on us, can’t it. I am sure we can all remember a time when, because of pressure of one sort or another, we lost control and exploded or crumbled or froze or did the exact opposite of what we had planned to do.
		2. So, when the pressure cooker of persecution comes, how will you react? Will you remember the sorts of biblical principles we have been talking about in recent weeks, or will your mind be empty? Will you look to Christ for His power and be eager to follow His example? Will you have a meltdown and abandon right beliefs and right behaviours, or will you stand firm?
		3. Well, the answer to these questions really depends on one thing – are you self-controlled and sober-minded? You see, a self-controlled and sober-minded person recognizes their complete dependence on the Holy Spirit. They don’t want to do what everyone else does and to think what everyone else thinks. So, they pray, continually, for wisdom and courage and understanding. They ask for “*strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that [they] may be filled with all the fullness of God*.” Does this describe you, brothers and sisters?
	2. But the second part of the end-times lifestyle is **Mutual Love**; we read, “*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling*.”
		1. Now, love and hospitality could easily be a sermon mini-series, but we will have to be satisfied with a just a few comments today.
		2. And we must not ignore those first two words: “***Above all***.” Where does love rank in our duty towards one another? It is of supreme importance. It is to guide and govern everything else.
		3. And again, if we remember that the primary context in view here is persecution, we can see why our love for one another would be so important. But love is always important. And I really like this paragraph from one commentary (And these are the names he used):

*There in your local church is Ann, who doesn't know much about hygiene and is frankly "smelly." Bill wears you out with incessant talking. Cathy is unspiritual. Don doesn't get along with Evelyn. Fred treats his wife badly. Gene is [an awkward] teen-ager, never knowing how to act with courtesy and discretion. Hilary often grumbles. Irene has a different set of interests and values (she can't come to the Tuesday evening prayer meeting because it clashes with the local Amnesty International group). And so on it goes. There is Kevin, to be sure, who is really quite saintly but rather drab as a person. None of them is very easy to love at full stretch. (There is also, of course, myself, and I figure in other people's lists of difficult people for similar reasons.) And yet love is the answer to the problem. We find a whole host of offenses, real and imagined, in other people, and only love will overcome them and regard them as of no account because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

* + - 1. Now, do these words also have in view **actual sins** committed against us? Absolutely. Is it appropriate then for us to choose to let love for Christ and love for others ‘cover’ their sins, such that we overlook them and do not confront them about it? Yes. And if we do choose to confront them (following the principles laid out in Matthew 18, for example), and the sin has been dealt with through confession and forgiveness, then to cover sin is to choose not to remember it and hold it over them.
			2. So, we are to let love cover a multitude of actual sins and annoyances.
		1. But mutual love also includes “***show[ing] hospitality*** *to one another without grumbling*.”
			1. And perhaps you have heard before that the Greek word translated as hospitality literally means “love of strangers.” Again, the primary context here is times of persecution. And believers back then didn’t have church buildings as we do, they typically met in people’s houses. So, someone had to open their home to host church services. And church services usually meant sharing a meal together. And there might be strangers at worship who needed somewhere safe to stay because they were being hunted by the police or they were travelling evangelists. And all of this might be terribly inconvenient and encroaching on a person’s personal space, but it was most necessary for the sake of the gospel.
			2. So, we are having church in a tent today, but what if we needed to meet at your house, next week, with a meal afterwards, and a request that you host two ministers who the police are hunting for? Would you show hospitality without grumbling?
			3. And we might not be quite in that context just yet, but when you see those notices in the church bulletin about people seeking board, do you seriously consider showing them hospitality?

* 1. The end-times lifestyle involves purposeful prayer and mutual love, but also, thirdly, **Sacrificial Service**; we read, “*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. Have you noticed that there is a very **congregational flavour** to the instructions in this passage? Both Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 describe a local congregation as a body that has many parts – hands, feet, eyes and ears, etc. And for the body to function best, each part must do its part. So, whatever gifts God has given to you ought to be used to serve others. Skills, money, possessions, specific abilities, time; think about how these gifts can be used to serve others.
		2. But think again of the **primary context of persecution**. Putting your hand up to be a minister or an elder or a Bible-study teacher, or to host the worship services or travelling evangelists in your house, would have put you on the top of the list of likely targets of persecution. So, it would have been much easier to not want to put yourself or your family in harm’s way, and to leave it to someone else to do. And that is why Peter’s encouragement to those gifted to speak, is that they speak “*as one who speaks the oracles of God,*” and that those gifted to serve, do so “*by the strength that God supplies*.”
			1. At home, we have just finished reading through the Old Testament prophets. And many of those books begin with the prophet declaring that he is proclaiming the oracles or the very word of God. We read one example of this in Jeremiah, earlier. And the sense there is that they **had to do proclaim these words**, whatever it might cost them. And we know what it cost many of the prophets – they were killed because of what they said.
			2. So, when being a minister or a server is dangerous, the only thing that will motivate a person to put up their hand is the call of God and the equipping power of God and loving others. Their attitude will be, I must do this, whatever the cost.
	2. And that brings us to the fourth and final part of the End-times Lifestyle, which is its **Doxological Purpose**. And doxology simply means glory word. And having a doxological purpose is, as we read in verse 11, “*In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen*.”
		1. Brothers and sisters, I cannot, by persuasion or clever argument, convince any of you to pray, to love, or to serve in the ways we have described. It is only what Christ has done and what Christ is doing and what Christ will do that will persuade you to serve in these sacrificial and selfless and demanding ways.
		2. In **Matthew 6**, Jesus said, “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth … but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven*.” In **Colossians 3**, believers are called on to set their minds on things above, not on the things that are on earth. Why? How can we live like this? Well, Colossians 3 continues: “*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*.”
		3. And so, to have an end-times lifestyle is to believe everything in the Scriptures, it is to want with every fibre of your being to thank Christ for all that He has done and is doing for you in how you live, it is to want others to come to know Him as their Saviour and Lord, and it is to be found ready when He returns.

May His Spirit help us to live this way. May He use the words we have heard and the bread and wine that we are about to eat to strengthen our faith and our longing for His return. Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Let us pray: