

**From This Point On**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Congregational Church—Winsted**  
**Scripture Reading Proverbs 10:6-12**  
**Sermon Text: 1 Peter 4:1-11**

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Do you really believe in eternity? Do you really believe that you will spend eternity in heaven? If so, you will live like you truly believe, and you will wisely use your time to serve God and do His work on this Earth. Do you remember when you were a student in a class you did not like? Time seemed to move at a glacial pace as you watched the seconds tick off on the classroom clock. But as we age, time seems to accelerate, and we find ourselves saying that we don't know where the time has gone or that time flies. Remember, as a child, when you wanted to buy something out of a catalog, you would fill out the order form, which said at the bottom, allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. Now, you can order something on Amazon and have it in two days; in some cases, you can get it delivered the same day. Life is moving fast, sometimes faster than we think.

Dr. Richard Carlson was an author, psychotherapist, and motivational speaker who became famous with the success of his book *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff... and It's All Small Stuff* (1997). The book became one of the fastest-selling books of all time. It is divided into 100 brief chapters. The last chapter is titled "Live This Day as if It Were Your Last. It May Be."

Carlson said that he ended his book with this chapter as a reminder of how precious life and loved ones are. He wrote: "I often wonder, when listening to the news, did the person who died in the auto accident on his way home from work remember to tell his family how much he loved them?" Carlson started the 100th chapter by asking, "When are you going to die? In fifty years, twenty, ten, five, today? Last time I checked, no one had told me," Carlson wrote. He died suddenly and unexpectedly nine years later, at the age of 45, from a pulmonary embolism during a flight from San Francisco to New York, leaving his wife and two teenage daughters.<sup>i</sup>

The point that Carlson made in his book is of special significance to Christians. Our time is limited, and none of us has a guarantee that we will be here tomorrow. I am not trying to be morbid, but we must be realistic as Christians. Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses. In verse 12, Moses writes. "Teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12). Moses reminds us of the brevity of life and prays that his people's decisions will reflect wisdom. Wisdom in using our time is a theme we find in our Sermon text, and I want to turn to that now.

Peter begins our text by referring back to Christ's suffering. Jesus was courageous in His suffering, but He was unjustly punished. Peter encourages those who read this letter to be patient as Jesus patiently endured unjust suffering. So when Peter tells his readers to "arm yourselves with the same purpose" as we read in our text, he calls his readers to be patiently prepared to endure unjust suffering just as Jesus did.

Peter is saying that we need to arm ourselves and take strength from the example of Jesus. When we suffer for Him, we identify with Him, and we are in Him as He is in us. The Apostle Paul says something very similar in Romans 8:10. He says if Christ is in you, the Spirit is alive in you, and your body is dead to sin, meaning that you have the means to resist sin. So, when we identify with the suffering and death of Jesus, we should be able to make a break from the sinful life that we lived before we were believers. If you are a believer and follower of Jesus, there will be times that you will suffer as you faithfully follow Him. Perhaps you have been marginalized, ridiculed, or shunned by family and friends because of your Christian views.

We are fortunate in our country that we can worship freely, but to some extent, we are likely to suffer as Christians.

You might remember hearing about Coach Joe Kennedy a couple of years ago. Kennedy is a marine veteran. He was also an assistant high school football coach in Bremerton, Washington, until he was fired for praying on the field. For seven years, after each game, the coach would take a knee, quietly praying and thanking God for his players. Over time, students began asking if they could join him. The coach would reply, “[t]his is a free country” and “[y]ou can do what you want.”<sup>ii</sup> Soon, coaches and members of the opposing team, and even members of the public began joining the coach in prayer. The school district reacted against the coach and prohibited the coach from engaging in any religious activity on the field, but Coach Kennedy continued to pray until 2015 when the school district fired Coach Kennedy. The coach suffered for his sincerely held religious beliefs.

When we suffer as Christians, we identify, in a small way, with Jesus's suffering. When we suffer with Jesus, we grow as disciples, and it emboldens us to remove sin from our lives. As Christians, we must put sin to death in our lives and be done with it. That is a tall order, but as I noted, Paul says the Holy Spirit is alive in us, which helps us put sin to death so we can be more like Christ.

Peter says something very thought-provoking in verse 2 of our text. He tells us that for the rest of our time, we should live to serve God, not for our human lusts, but for the will of God. From the point that you were converted, you must live according to the will of God, engaging in service to our Lord. Increasingly, and in greater measure, day by day, it must be our goal to terminate sin in our lives and live according to God's moral code and the example of Jesus.

Peter was writing to an audience that included many formerly pagan Gentiles who had converted to Christianity and were perhaps like many of us. He says in verse 3 that the time is past for converts to Christianity to engage in all the worldly behaviors he describes. So, too, as believers in Jesus, the time is past for us to be engaging in course talk, filthy language, lusts of various kinds, drunkenness, carousing, and wanton behavior.

But when we reject a worldly lifestyle, we should not be surprised that those who do not know Christ find it strange that we do not want to jump in and live that same worldly lifestyle. When I was in college, I confess that I thought that born-again Christians were simple folks who were stuck in the past. As I came to faith and a knowledge of the truth, I was reminded of the Christ-like example of followers of Jesus that I encountered in my 20s, which stirred me to repentance. I recognized that the professing Christians around me were living better lives and more productive lives, and over time, I came to recognize that the Christian life is better because it is rooted in the truth of the gospel message. My conversion process was a slow one, but when I finally came to Christ in 1996, I repented of the time I had spent ridiculing believers.

Verse 5 is a wake-up call, and Peter gets to the crux of the matter. We will all give an account of what we believed and how we lived when we stand before Jesus. That day is coming because none of us will live forever.

Internet tracking is a common practice where websites and third parties collect and share information about users' online activity. According to Norton [the internet security provider], 79% of websites track users, and it's not illegal. Websites say that the more they know about users, the better they can serve them, which can lead to a more convenient browsing experience.<sup>iii</sup>

But we all know that internet tracking is about making money. While we worry about hacking and stealing of our private information, there is One from whom nothing we do is a secret. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:10,

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds *done* through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad.

We will all one day stand before the judgement seat of Jesus to give an accounting of what we have done in our time on Earth, and there will be nothing that has escaped the Master. Jesus is God, who is all-knowing. Can you imagine if every deed of your life flashed up on a giant screen like a movie for all the world to see? It is somewhat terrifying to think about, but Jesus has already seen the movie. Apart from Christ, there is no hope, but in Christ there is complete hope.

Those who remain in their sins are dead because of their sins, but those who believe the gospel, that Jesus died as payment for sin, face an altogether different future. In fact, you might remember that song from 1986, *The Future's So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades*. Believers in Jesus will physically die the first death. However, they will escape the second death and eternity in a very unpleasant place. When we identify with Christ and place our faith in Him, we will live forever in the presence of God and His Son.

So, get your shades on because, when you repent of your sins, as a disciple of Christ, your future is bright. That is the point of verse 6. On our own merit, our sins condemn us. However, rather than facing judgment for our sins, we who have believed in Jesus face a totally different future that is so bright that shades will be necessary because, in heaven, we will experience something that is beyond our comprehension. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:9 “...Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And *which* have not entered the human heart, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.”

Continuing on, our passage is full of sobering thoughts. Peter writes in verse 7, “The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.” Here are three observations from Peter’s words. First, the return of Jesus at His second glorious coming could happen at any time. It was true when Peter wrote this, and it is true for us today. The bottom line is, how do you want Jesus to find you when He returns? Do you want Him to find you dabbling or wallowing in sin, or do you want Him to find you fully engaged in serving Him?

I believe that we all want Jesus, upon His return, to find us fully committed to serving Him and fully obeying God’s commands. I know what I want Jesus to say to me when He returns. It is what He says to the faithful servants in the parable of the talents recorded in Matthew 25. When Jesus returns, I long to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master.” What could be better than that? That is a guarantee of a bright, eternal future.

The second observation about verse 7 has to do with time. Time is short! We don’t have many years to serve God. At one point in my youth, I desired to be an author. I soon realized that that would not happen if I were not regularly writing and engaging in the act of writing books. Life is short, and if you want to serve God and receive the blessings he promises to those who serve Him, you need to get on with it! You do not want to enter your fading days, realizing you never fully committed to the service of the Master and King.

Third, we want to be sober of spirit so that we can pray. If we are double-minded, with one foot in the world and one foot in the kingdom of God, we cannot pray effectively. As we read in Proverbs 15:29, The Lord is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous. In times of persecution and trial, we can be assured that we have the ear of the Lord when we obey His commands and walk in His ways. That is the place that Peter says we need to be.

Continuing on in verses 8 and 9. Peter says that we must be fervent in love, meaning that we must love each other deeply. Jesus says in John 13:35 that the world will know that we are His disciples by our love for one another. That kind of love covers a multitude of sins. The

love of God for the world caused Him to send Jesus to cover the sins of the world. That is the most obvious example of love covering a multitude of sins. If we want to be like Jesus, we will not be blind to the sins of others, but we will be able to accept the faults of others, extending grace, recognizing that we have our own faults and that Jesus has loved us in spite of those faults. Our love for others can be displayed by offering hospitality and the friendly reception of guests, visitors, and strangers.

Peter also says in verse 9 that we should be good stewards of the gifts that God has given us. I am impressed with the special gifts that God has given each of you. Each of you is unique, a special creation of God, for a time such as this. Your talents and gifts are needed to accomplish the work that God will do through this church. God calls you to use your talents to do His kingdom work. I am sure you all do lots of work, but the work you do serving God has eternal value and impact.

Paul tells us in Colossians 3:23–24, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord and not for people, <sup>24</sup> knowing that *it is* from the Lord *that* you will receive the reward of the inheritance. *It is* the Lord Christ *whom* you serve.” Paul says, do all your work as if you are doing it for God because that is exactly what you are doing. Your work must always be done in a manner that would be pleasing to God, and when you do your work that way, God will reward you. If you sell cars, be honest. If you are a plumber, be fair to your customers. If you build houses, build them to bless those who will inhabit them. Be kind and hospitable to your customers if you work in fast food.

Finally, Peter turns in verse 11 to the two ministry functions, speaking and serving. Those who speak as part of their ministry, like John and me, should do so as if we are speaking the actual words of God. That is a tall order. Those who serve, like our board and committee members, must do so in the strength of God so that whether church people are speaking or serving, they do so fully relying on God. In that way, all ministry is done through the power of God and glorifies God.

None of us knows how far into the future we will live, but however long that is, we must not waste it. The world tells us to invest in our future. It will help us when we get old. When we serve God with our time and efforts, we are investing in God’s eternal kingdom, which is forever.

CS Lewis wrote:

"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark on earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one. Aim at heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in.' Aim at earth and you will get neither."

Would you rather be well-positioned for your earthly future or for eternity? The two are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to be wise in preparing for your earthly future while preparing for your eternal future, but the first priority we must each have is preparing for our eternal future in the presence of God. In this life, He would have us use our time and talents to serve Him, building His church, making disciples, and showing our mercy and compassion for others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Pastor Preston Thompson notes that:

Any of us with children know the experience of our little ones wanting to "help" when we are in the middle of some grown-up activity or project. Picture yourself in the middle of some home repair when your 5-year-old comes out of

the house with their toy tools and tool belt, saying, "I want to help you, Dad." Our initial reaction may be to shoo them aside and tell them that we will play with their toys later, knowing that they would be more in the way than anything."

That's when we realize that, in their minds, their tools (although made of plastic) were real tools and that their abilities (as limited as they are) were useful for the job. You can see in their little eyes a true desire to help, a true desire to make their mom or dad proud.

We know that if we allow them to "help" it will likely make the job less efficient and more cumbersome. But in that moment we realize that the efficiency of the job is so much less important than the joy (and experience!) our child would get from helping us.

Pastor Thompson continues saying,

As we consider such a scenario, we cannot help but see the Word of God in plain sight. God desires for us to follow Him and serve Him. He desires us to join him in the work of the ministry and in reaching the lost with the Gospel. But we're like clumsy, ill-equipped children in His service. Truly, God does not "need" our help. He can accomplish [all things] with or without us. Yet, over time, [like growing children] he will provide us increasingly more sophisticated tools as he hones our gifts and abilities, and we will become increasingly more useful co-laborers in the work of His ministry.<sup>iv</sup>

Dear friends, God has work for you to do, and our time is short. When we say yes to doing God's work, we will grow in our abilities to serve Him, engaging in work that has eternal importance and significance.

So, whatever happened to Coach Joe Kennedy? After a seven-year legal battle, in 2022, the Supreme Court took up his case and ruled 6-3 in favor of the coach, opining that the government, while following the Establishment Clause, may not suppress an individual from engaging in personal religious observance, as doing so would violate the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment.<sup>v</sup>

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we must love and serve God and all we encounter, keeping fervent in our love. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://illustrationexchange.com/illustrations?category=494>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://firstliberty.org/cases/coachkennedy/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://us.norton.com/blog/privacy/internet-tracking>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://illustrationexchange.com/illustrations?category=191&search=>

<sup>v</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kennedy\\_v.\\_Bremerton\\_School\\_District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kennedy_v._Bremerton_School_District)