

Love One Another

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Date: 06 October 2019

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[0 : 01] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Shine Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you on this snowy day. Special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus, we become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we turn every week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

We've been studying the book of 1 Peter, and the book of 1 Peter, as I've been telling you, is a letter. It's a letter written by a man named Peter to churches in the first century A.D. in Asia Minor, what's now modern-day Western Turkey, and these churches are struggling.

They're struggling because they feel out of place in the world as Christians, and they're struggling because they're facing opposition in the world for being Christians. And so Peter writes to encourage and instruct them.

He writes to encourage them that Jesus is worth it. He's worth living and loving for, and he's worth serving and dying for. And he also writes to instruct them.

He writes to instruct them how to live as Christians in the world and also how to respond when they face opposition for being Christians. Now, the last several weeks, we've been in a section on suffering, so we've been on the instruction side.

[1 : 22] We've been on the side of how to respond when you face opposition for being a Christian. We're going to turn this week back to the other portion of the instruction, how to live as a Christian in this world. We'll be back to suffering next week.

In this section, we're going to look primarily about how it is that we interact as a church together, as one community. We've got a lot to cover today, so I'm just going to jump right in. And I'll say this as we start.

Many people, in fact, we might even say most people, long for thick and rich community. You probably long for thick and rich community.

Few people are willing to do the work that it takes to get there. Many people long for thick and rich community. Few people are willing to do the work that it takes to get there.

Peter, in this passage, is going to give us some very practical advice about how to live together in the church. How can we actually have the type of community that we long for?

[2 : 26] We're in 1 Peter 4, starting at verse 7. And as we come to this, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 7. 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.

Verse 9. 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.

Verse 11. 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.

[3 : 28] To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Father in heaven, we come asking for your help, as we always do.

By ourselves, we will destroy this community. And so we ask that you would speak to us by your word, and you'd move in our hearts by your spirit.

That you would change us into the type of people who build up rather than tear down. Most of all, we ask that you would soften our hearts, and you'd open our ears and our eyes, and that you'd clear our minds.

That we would be able to hear and see and understand and believe everything that it's written about Jesus in your word. And so we ask these things in his name.

Amen. The last several weeks, we've had a variety of challenging theological statements to sort out. We had the section about Jesus proclaiming to the spirits who were in prison.

[4 : 35] That was somewhat challenging. Last week, we had to deal with what in the world does Peter mean when he says those who are suffered have done with sin. And we're not over yet.

So we're starting this passage again with another challenging phrase. In verse 7, we find out the end of all things is at hand. This has been something that's been erased as an objection to Christian faith for many years.

It's based on not just this passage, but other passages. You may have noticed in our preparation for worship, Mark chapter 1, Jesus says the kingdom of God is at hand or is near. Many people have claimed, well, that's great.

Jesus and Paul and Peter all believed that the kingdom of God was near. And guess what? We're here 2,000 years later. Obviously, they were wrong. Clearly, they were mistaken.

They thought the end of the world was coming. It hasn't come. The fact that we're still here disproves Christianity. It proves that it's not true. And so what do we as Christians make of that?

[5 : 32] What is Peter saying here? Excuse me. To understand, I want you to imagine this for a second with me. Let's say, and this is not just hypothetical, a report has reached my ears that this has actually occurred in the city of Colorado Springs.

You and a group of your friends decide in one day you are going to watch all three of the Lord of the Rings movies. Wait.

It's not just the regular Lord of the Rings movies. You're watching the extended version. So every single movie is over three or four hours long. Now, the report I heard about this happening in Colorado Springs, they also made the recipes from the movie that went along with it, so they had breaks in between where they could eat.

All I can say is amen. And let's imagine you're at this event, and you have finished the first two movies. You finished The Fellowship of the Ring, three plus hours. You finished The Two Towers, three plus hours.

And you're about to start The Return of the King. Can you say, the end of all things is at hand? Well, in the sense of time, no, you're wrong.

[6 : 43] The end of all things is not at hand. The last movie is four plus hours long. That is the length of two or three movies. Calm down.

The end of all things is not at hand, as our human perception of movie time goes. However, in terms of stage, the end of all things is at hand.

You have made it to the last movie. Peter here is not speaking in the sense of human time. He is speaking in the terms of stages when it comes to the way that God has been working in the world.

Think about this for a second. There are lots of stages in the Bible. First of all, we had creation. Creation was followed by Abraham. Abraham was followed by the patriarchs. Patriarchs were followed by the nation of Israel and Egypt.

Then they were leaving Egypt. They left Egypt. They came. They had to conquest the Promised Land. That was the stage. Then they had a stage in the Promised Land where they were ruled by judges. After they were ruled by judges, they were ruled by kings. When they had the kings, it was a united kingdom, then a divided kingdom.

[7 : 44] After it was a divided kingdom, there was before the exile, and after the exile, and then finally they were looking during the time when there was no word from God, and finally Jesus came. There's a lot of stages.

The last stage is here. That is the sense in which the end of all things is at hand. If you remember from 1 Peter 1, and I'm going to turn back there, we had verse 21, which told us, maybe it's verse 20, he was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in what?

In the last times, for the sake of you. Both the recipients and the reader, and us today, so the recipients of this letter in the 60s AD, and us in 2020, are living in the last times, in the sense that we are in the last stage of God's plan of redemption.

Both of us look back, all those other stages are done. There's no new stage that's happened. We're in the age of the church, as some people might call it. We're in the age after Jesus has come.

So all of us, in that sense, are in the last times. But we do know, wherever we are, in that last movie, we haven't gotten to the battle of the Black Gates. But all of us are in the last times.

[9 : 04] So in that sense, Peter is telling them, the end of all things is at hand. It's the same sense in which Jesus means it. The same sense he tells them, in our preparation for worship, repent and believe the gospel, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

With that being said, everything that follows here is going to be in light of that. How do we live, knowing that we're in the last stage of God's plan of redemption? The first thing he tells them is that they need to be in prayer.

Again, verse seven, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. This would be the opposite, self-controlled of what we've seen before. And there's a focus and a certain way of thinking. They need to remember and know that they're in the last stage of God's redemption.

Knowing and remembering that's going to focus them. It's going to remind them that they need to pray. And then it's going to help them understand how to pray. Perhaps they're praying that they would be faithful to 1 Peter 3.15, that they'd be able to give an answer for the hope that's within them.

Maybe they're praying for their friends who don't know Jesus, knowing that the end is near, that they also would repent of their sins and believe. Maybe they're in the midst of suffering for righteousness' sake and they need to pray that God would give them the strength to continue.

[10 : 14] No matter what it is, they're praying with an understanding of what's going on right now. We could tie this back to last week as well and say, if they don't believe the end is at hand, why would they not engage in the sorts of things we discussed?

If there's no future, why would you not seek as much pleasure as possible? Well, because the end of all things is at hand. So, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

There's an expectation that if we understand the reality of where we're at in God's plan for the world, that we will not become complacent, but instead we'll be faithful in praying to him for the help that we need and what we hope to see happen before his return.

And so, how do we live in light of the fact that the end of all things is at hand? First of all, we are praying with that in mind. Having covered prayer, Peter moves on for the rest of this passage to how it is that we exist together as a community.

If we're going to be experiencing the kind of suffering that's come in the previous passages and that we'll discuss in next week's passage, we're not going to make it alone. If the end of all things is at hand, we're not going to be able to do it by ourselves.

[11 : 33] And so, this is where Peter begins to give us incredibly practical advice for how we can have a rich and thick and strong community. first, verse 8.

He says, above all, so apparently this is more important than anything else, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. Now, in what sense does love cover a multitude of sins?

It's probably here in the sense that Proverbs chapter 19, verse 11 talks about. In the book of Proverbs, it says in that verse, it is a man's glory to overlook an offense.

It's to a man's glory to overlook an offense. Some translations say honor. There's a variety of different strategies that we have for dealing with conflict. One of them is overlooking.

Now, if you never have conflict, you're not overlooking. You're just very passive aggressive. But, in the variety of conflicts that happen, sometimes the option is to know, you know what, I'm just going to take this one on the chin.

[12 : 36] Not every conflict is worth pursuing. Not every way that someone else hurts you is worth pursuing. There's a lot of things that all of us do in the church that hurt each other.

I've done things that have hurt some of you. Some of you have done things that have hurt me. Some of you have done things that hurt each other. And at some point, we decide what is worth fighting over and what isn't.

We're going to be sinful people in this world. We're going to hurt each other. And there's certain things that are at such a small level, we've just got to let it go. That's love.

That's what it looks like to love one another earnestly from the heart. We love someone else so much that we're just sometimes willing to say, you know what, that person, they really get on my nerves.

I don't like the way that they articulated that or said that. But I also love them. And I'm not going to call a foul every time there's a foul. I'm not a referee. A mentor of mine explains it this way, living in life is sort of like being in an airport.

[13 : 40] And there's all kinds of people with backpacks that they have on. And often, they move around and they just whack you right in the face with their backpack. They have no idea, right?

All of us have baggage. And all of us have more baggage than we realize. I have another mentor who says that many of us think that we have carry-on baggage in our lives when really we all have checked baggage.

That causes us to hurt each other a lot, sometimes unintentionally. Living in the church means as we love each other, sometimes we make the choice to overlook that.

And that's the godly thing to do. Some of us are real strong personalities. And the way we say things just grates on other people. Sometimes we just overlook that.

We hear the heart behind what someone's saying. Some people have been really hurt in the past by people that resemble us. And they're going to take that out on us even though it's not our fault.

[14 : 47] We'll pay other people's debts for them. Sometimes we overlook that. recognizing that sometimes we whack people in the face too.

With our backpack that's larger than we realize it is. If we want to have rich and thick community, we keep loving one another earnestly, letting love cover a multitude of sins.

Next, verse 9. This is a list, by the way. It's just a list of practical instruction for the church. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. Now, it'd be quick to think in our Western American context, it'd be easy for us to think this is primarily about having people over to your house and maybe you would grumble because you'd have to clean up the house and that would create some work and you're the one hosting the main dish so you're spending money you wouldn't otherwise be spending.

And there's all kinds of ways in which you're put out by showing this hospitality. And so don't grumble. Now, it's certainly not less than that in this passage but it's probably much, much more.

If you think about this church for a second, if they're suffering for the name of Jesus Christ and they're living in this culture that's hostile, there's probably all sorts of needs that they have that involve hospitality that are not just having someone over to their house for dinner.

[16 : 07] They probably need a worship space. Well, who has the biggest house in the church? There might be needs for gatherings of groups.

Maybe someone needs shelter. Maybe, and this really gets to the heart of it, this is after a section about suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. Maybe someone needs hospitality because they've chosen to do what's right.

Think about this for a second. We have someone, let's say, in our congregation they choose that they're going to do what's right and therefore they lose their job and they're no longer able to pay their rent.

Who are they going to stay with? Us. They're staying with us. They're staying with one of you. Imagine another situation.

Someone is in a sinful relationship and they're living with someone else in that relationship. They convert to Christianity and they realize we can't be under the same roof anymore. However, we signed a lease together and I'm legally obligated to continue paying this lease with this other person for the next three months.

[17 : 22] I can't get out of it but I also have to leave this house for the sake of righteousness. Where are they going to live? They're living with you. Let's say someone's a 1 Peter 4, 1 through 6 sort of person.

They're celebrating the passions of the Gentiles and they've come to realize that Jesus calls them to something different so they repent of their sins except they no longer have anywhere to go on Friday night because they used to be what did it say verse 3?

They used to be at orgies and drinking parties. Now they're not there anymore. Where are they going on Friday night? Your house. They're coming to your house to play Bananagrams with you because otherwise they don't have community.

Let's think about one more. Someone converts to Christianity and they're kicked out of their house. I had a friend this happened to by the way here in the United States. Parents disown them so you cannot live here anymore as a Christian.

Happens at 10 p.m. by the way. Whose door are they knocking on? Our door. They're knocking on our door. And what would be tempting in that situation?

[18 : 38] Maybe you're sharing a bathroom with someone you don't want to be sharing a bathroom with. Maybe it's just less space for a limited amount of time. What does Peter tell us to do? Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

In fact, this will probably be something that's more and more relevant for the American church. Now I do say this sometimes. Don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying you as a Christian are obligated to provide housing for anyone who needs housing and hospitality for anyone who needs housing.

I'm not saying there are not boundaries. I'm not saying any Christian who makes that demand on you. What I am saying is that if we call people to suffer for righteousness sake, we need to be prepared to give them the resources necessary for that obedience as a community.

If we call someone to righteousness sake, we can't say, hey, you've got to leave that relationship and you can't live there anymore. Good luck finding a place. No, we say, you have to leave that relationship and you can't live there anymore and so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so all have rooms.

And while you figure things out or while that lease ends, they are going to back you up on that as you follow Jesus Christ in faith. Many people want thick and rich community.

[20 : 02] Few people are willing to do what it takes. Okay, verse 8, we're covering over sins. Verse 9, we're showing hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Verse 10 now, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's buried grace. There's a couple things going on here.

First, God gives people gifts. He gives them abilities to serve one another and the church. Second, those gifts are buried.

God's buried grace. Not everyone has the same gift. Whatever your gift is, use it to serve the body.

Another angle on that might be, if you're serving, the body in a way that's not your gift, you've got to be open to someone saying, hey, this is not your area of strength.

[21 : 01] Maybe you'd be better serving over in this area. If you're not a friendly person, you probably shouldn't be on the greeter team. Use your varied gifts.

Maybe you're good at administration, you need to be in a different area. If you're a really friendly person, but you're terrible at administration, you probably need to be on the greeter team. Just not running it. Serve God according to your gifts, your varied gifts.

Second, make it about God. Verse 11, whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.

So we're serving the church with our gifts, the actual gifts that we have. We're open to being redirected to the place where we're actually strong rather than serving in an area that we're weak, and then we do it in a way that's actually about God.

So there's two kinds of gifts that are here. We're talking about people that are speaking and people that are serving. People that are speaking speak as oracles of God. In other words, if you're a preacher or a teacher, you're not called to be a life coach.

[22 : 11] You're not called to preach your personal opinions about things. You are called to teach the word of God. That's part of the reason that we have sequential expositional preaching at this church.

We can't avoid passages of scripture. We're sticking with the text and the verses that God has given us so that those who speak would speak oracles of God rather than speaking about themselves. We could expand this.

Maybe it's not just preachers and teachers, but speaking in general. Maybe you're in a small group. Maybe you're in a one-on-one relationship with another person, and they're discipling you and helping you. The person who's doing the discipling needs to be speaking God's truth, not their own opinions.

Speaking about God rather than themselves. Whatever we're doing, however we're serving, we're serving in a way that brings honor and glory to God. The one who serves by the strength that God supplies, and here we have the purpose, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

So no matter what we're doing, whether we're speaking or we're serving, we're doing it so that God would have honor and glory, which means we have to separate our ego from our service.

[23 : 29] We have to separate our ego from our service. We have to question our motivations. Am I doing this for the glory and honor of God? If we're doing it for the glory and honor of God, we won't have self-congratulation.

We won't say things like, man, even just to ourselves, man, I'm so glad I'm the one doing that and so-and-so's not doing it anymore because they did a terrible job, but I'm really good at this. That's not bringing honor and glory to God.

That's bringing honor and glory to you. We know we're not bringing glory to God when we say things like, man, church is just so lucky to have me. Or we decide what our gifts are, right, and there's no other place we can serve.

I have to serve in this way. Well, it's not about God anymore. I have to do this.

No one ever gives me the credit or the honor that they don't understand how important I am. That's not serving by the strength that God supplies. We know it's no longer about God and his strength when we can't hear feedback about what we're doing.

[24 : 39] If no one's able to give you criticism in your service, to provide constructive feedback to encourage and also help you understand ways it could get better, it's not about God anymore.

In fact, the gospel is what allows us to not get everything right. Part of the gospel is this profound humility to realize, okay, I'm so bad that Jesus had to die. So there's probably a few things that I'm still getting wrong.

And there's ability to laugh at yourself, right, and say, man, that's right, I didn't even see that, I really messed that up, didn't I? Glad God's gracious enough.

When we really understand God's love for us in the gospel, when we understand how serious sin is, and when our goal is to bring honor and glory to God, we are going to be humble people in our service.

we'll be able to receive feedback and criticism. We'll be able to hear, hey, actually this isn't maybe the right fit for you in this particular service.

[25 : 44] Oh, it's not the right fit? Well, I'm just interested in serving God, so where's the area I can best serve God? And I know I'm imperfect, right? That's what the gospel tells me, so of course there are things I'm not good at.

And God's going to give me the strength no matter what comes. There is a rich humility that comes with understanding the gospel. Humble enough to admit there's things you're not good at.

Humble enough to risk doing the things you're good at. And sometimes fail. One way to fall off the path, by the way, is to be really good at something and withhold that from everyone.

I've talked about people serving in areas where they shouldn't be serving or people serving but not serving for the glory of God but serving for their own glory. There's also having a tremendous ability and a gift but thinking, but what if it's not good enough or it's not perfect?

God's given you a gift. Use it to serve the body. If you're afraid it's not going to be good enough or it's not going to be perfect or maybe it might lead to some conflict, it's not about God's glory anymore.

[26 : 57] If it's about God's glory, then you use your gift knowing at times you're going to mess up. And the gospel's big enough to cover that up.

By the way, hopefully you're in a community where love covers a multitude of sins. And you're able to trip and make some mistakes and God is still glorified.

Harry Truman says this, it's amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit. It's amazing what we as a church can accomplish if we don't care who gets the credit.

If we are, verse 10, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace. You want to be a good steward. Another way of thinking about it would be this, and we're in the context of suffering, right?

That's what's coming next week, that's what came the last several weeks. When you're up against the weight of suffering, it is too large of a weight for one person to lift.

[28 : 06] We need the entire community working together. It's the difference between what someone who's doing, who's working out, would tell you the difference between an isolated exercise and a compound exercise. If I'm doing a bicep curl, that's an isolated exercise.

I can't lift a lot of weight. If you're doing a bench press, that's a compound exercise. You can lift a ton of weight, but you need all the parts of the body.

The challenges that we face as a church suffering in this world is too heavy for anyone to lift on their own. If you're bicep curling 60 pounds, man, you're really strong, that's impressive.

If you're bench pressing 60 pounds, you're not really strong, that's not very impressive. God has called us to compound exercises as a community.

He's not called us to isolated exercises. And so we serve one another as each has received a gift. in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

[29 : 15] To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. And so there's two things here. Talk about this first, that God's glorified.

We've talked about how that works practically. Of course, it's always tempting, right? When we see success in ministry, we're serving in any area of the church, whether it's speaking oracles, whether we're serving with our hands and our abilities.

As humans, we're always tempted to bring glory to ourselves and not to God. I told you several weeks ago, a couple weeks in a row, the story of Corrie Ten Boom, and she's going to continue to teach us a little bit.

After all her suffering in the Nazi concentration camp, she went on to have an amazing speaking career. And at some point, someone asked her, how do you handle all the praise that you receive?

How do you stay humble and centered on God? And she said this, when people come up and give me a compliment, Corrie, that was a good talk, or Corrie, you were so brave, I take each remark as if it were a flower.

[30 : 24] At the end of each day, I lift up the bouquet of flowers I have gathered throughout the day and say, here you are, Lord. Lord, it is all yours. When we serve in a way that brings glory to God, we recognize that he's the one who's given us the strength.

And so we take the praise that other people give us, we bring it to God, and we say, here you are, Lord. It is all yours.

And finally, we do it by the strength that God supplies, that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

I mentioned earlier that we have more baggage than we're often willing to recognize or admit. We're also more flawed and less gifted than often we think.

Most of us are good at one or two things. I read someone say this once, and after that, it just kind of all falls apart. If you see someone who's amazing at one thing, you think, man, that's an incredible person.

[31 : 38] They're probably terrible at 15 things. And so as we serve, we're not resting in our own strength, but on the strength of God, knowing that when we accomplish something of spiritual significance, it's only because of God's power working through us.

And so that allows us and other people to give honor and glory to God. The story that best illustrates this that I know of comes at the very end of a book named Cinder Church, and it's a book, a story about a donkey.

This donkey is the donkey that Jesus rode in on Palm Sunday, and this is a story about the next day for that donkey. He'd come in. Jesus was riding on him. Things were great.

It goes like this. The little donkey awoke with a smile on his face. He had been dreaming of the previous day. He stretched and then happily walked out into the street, but the many passersby simply ignored him.

Confused, he went over to the crowded market area. With his ears held high with pride, he strutted right down the middle of it. Here I am, people, he said to himself.

[32 : 55] But they stared in confusion, and some angrily struck him to drive him away. What do you think you are doing, you donkey, walking into the marketplace like this? Throw your garments down, he said crossly.

Don't you know who I am? They just looked at him in amazement. Hurt and confused, the donkey returned home to his mother. I don't understand, he said to her.

Yesterday they waved palm branches at me. They shouted Hosanna and hallelujah. Today they treat me like I'm a nobody. Foolish child, she said gently.

Don't you realize that without him, you can do nothing? You can do this ministry with God's help, so give it all you've got.

You can't do this ministry without God's help, so be at peace. It's in one verse recorded in John's gospel. I am the vine, you are the branches.

[33 : 55] If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. But apart from me, you can do nothing. And earlier in his gospel, remember John told us he must decrease.

He must increase, but I must decrease. God gives us gifts, but he's the one who gives us the strength. And he gives it to us so that we would bring service to each other and honor and glory not to ourselves, but to him.

And so how do we have rich and thick community? We understand that we're in the last days, and so we pray to God with that in mind.

We're quick to forgive and cover over the sins of others. We serve showing hospitality without grumbling because we want the community's good more than our own.

And finally, we use our gifts humbly to serve others and to serve God. Praying to God and serving one another.

[35 : 04] Please pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for this community that you've given us at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church.

We ask that you would work the gospel deep into our hearts so that we'd be more and more humble and more and more eager to serve, not for our glory, but for yours, and that you would use that to draw us close to you and to draw others to yourself.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen. Amen.