

Eschatology You'll Actually Use

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[0 : 00] And if you'll open your Bibles to the book of 1 Peter chapter 4, we'll be in verses 7-19. I did ask Josh to shorten up the worship, the singing set a little bit because we have a lot of text to get through as we wrap up our time in 1 Peter.

1 Peter chapter 4, verses 7-19. 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 very 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 be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

[1 : 13] Well, we're going to spend a fair bit of time seeing how Peter connects this phrase, the end of all things is at hand, to a bunch of ethical imperatives.

He gives us a bunch of how we're supposed to act, and he roots all of that in this simple truth. The end of all things is at hand.

So, the first point for this sermon this morning is that there is a link in the Bible between eschatology and ethics. There's a link in the Bible between eschatology and ethics.

And to those of you who don't know what the word eschatology means, it just means the study of the end times. There's a link in this text between our psychology, how we think, our sociology, how we treat other people, and eschatology.

You can see that right there in verse 7, and it continues all the way through the end of our text for this morning. The phrase, the end of all things is at hand, is employing the Greek word telos, which just means the thing for which, the purpose for which a thing was created.

[2 : 26] A chair was created to sit on. A glass was created to hold liquid. That's the telos of a glass. That's the telos of a chair. And Peter is saying that the telos, the reason for everything, is now obvious.

The reason, the concluding point for everything is now at hand. The phrase at hand, the word at hand, is in the perfect tense in the Greek, and that means it is drawn near, it stands near.

So Peter is not, he's talking about eschatology, but he is not handing his readers a date to circle.

He's telling them where they stand in the story of God's work throughout his creation.

These folks are at a certain moment. We are at the same moment in God's working through history. I have watched a lot of these, you know, all the nostalgia stuff from when I was a child.

It's like almost every show, it seems like these days, deals, pedals in this sort of 80s nostalgia. And a big part of that is mall culture. And so I've seen a number of movies and shows going back to that period of time that I'm well familiar with.

[3 : 37] And, you know, you were in such a big building. There weren't buildings that big anywhere else back in that day, you know. And so to help all of us people who were new to the mall, you know, the mall was kind of a new thing, you would have these signs relatively scattered throughout the mall.

You are here, you know. You are here. And you'd find that, and then you'd find, okay, I am here.

Now, you know, where's the music store? Where's the JCPenney's? And so on and so forth.

And that's what Peter's doing. He's locating his audience and us in a particular part of God's story, the end. We are in the end.

And he is saying that because the end is here, the purpose for which all things have been created is upon us, it should affect the way we think. He says, be self-controlled and sober-minded. The word self-controlled is really just sound-mindedness, and the word sober-mindedness is just really sobriety. Both have something to do with the way that you think about your passions, your impulses.

[4 : 40] It's sort of a frontal cortex kind of governing over yourself. Watch yourself. Pay attention to your desires, your urges. Maintain jurisdiction and authority and control over your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions.

It's basically self-control. And then, not only, so he says, we're in the end. Make sure you are, you've gotten a hold of yourself.

You have control of your passions. You have control of the way you think. You're sober-minded. And then, he says, in addition to that, not only does the eschatology affect your psychology, but it also affects your sociology, he says, and keep loving one another earnestly.

And he goes through a list of commands having to do with the horizontal, how we should treat one another. This is like super common language in the New Testament.

It is just routine for ethics to be tied to eschatology. G.K. Beal, who I think is one of the best living theologians out there, says it this way.

[5 : 49] Eschatology is the key to your sanctification in the Christian life. That's running in a very different direction than what many of us have thought. We seem to feel like eschatology, as it's presented to us, is very peripheral to the most important aspects of our Christian life.

But that's because we're focusing, I think, on the wrong parts of eschatology. But the right parts, the important parts, they are, as Beal says, key to your sanctification and to your growth in the Christian life.

He goes on, the better you understand eschatology, the better you are going to be able to live your spiritual life. The better you'll understand God and yourself and your relationship to him and what your purpose is.

Now, when I say eschatology, again, I am not talking about the timing of the millennium or the classic question of pre or post or awe. I'm not talking about all those sorts of left-behind adjacent questions.

I'm talking about the telos of the universe. Where is all of this headed? Another theologian, who I won't cite because he's not as great, but he says this well.

[7 : 06] This is where the Gospels leave us, anticipating an imminent event and yet unable to date its coming. Logically, this may appear contradictory, but it is a tension built for an ethical purpose.

The reason for the tension is because the main driving point of eschatology in the Bible is to teach you how to act, not to give you a very particular timeline.

So the big takeaway, first of all, point one, there is a tie in the Bible between eschatology and ethics. Our eschatology should inform our psychology the way we think and our sociology the way that we treat one another.

Point two, there are essentials to a biblical eschatology that most of us lack because we have been trained to focus on the wrong pieces.

And so when Peter says the end of all things is near, we go into a place that Peter's mind wasn't going at all. And we miss the deep-rootedness of where Peter is actually coming from.

[8 : 16] And so I want to give you some essentials of a biblical eschatology that are just the most important things to think about because I think, I have a feeling, that you often receive in other places, as you've been taught about this, you've often received the least important things to think about in this subject.

Let me tell you what I believe are the most important aspects of eschatology. First, essential is this. There is a new creation coming. There's a new creation coming.

I think the single most important thing about your eschatology is that you understand that a new creation is coming and that that new creation is as solid and as physical as the ground beneath your feet.

This needs to be said over and over again because most of us grew up on some sort of inference that heaven was just a wispy place where we floated in immaterial reality.

Nope, there is a new creation coming. This is not the future of disembodied souls and clouds and harps and endless service somewhere off into the edge of the misty cosmos.

[9 : 25] Scripture promises the opposite. We are headed toward a physical reality in the same way that Jesus' body, his new creation body can be touched and yet is exceptional in many respects.

That is the first fruits of the new creation, the Bible teaches, coming to us. The manner of Christ's body is all you need to study to understand the manner of the future world that we are all headed to. He is the first fruits of that future world. That's essential number one. Essential number two. There is an already not yet status to biblical eschatology.

It's sometimes referred to as the inauguration and the consummation. It's the beginning and the fullness. Something like that. This is so important for us to understand almost all errors related to eschatology have to do with people getting too caught up in the already or too caught up in the not yet.

We live in a world that is the beginning of the end. We live in an age that we can rightly say is the end of all things and yet not the fullness of the end of all things.

[10 : 43] I think the writer of Hebrews says it the best in the Bible where he says, all things are subject to him, but we don't see all things in subjection to him. So this second most important thing about eschatology, number one, you're headed to a real future, a real world that is like Christ's body in its composition.

Number two, we live in an already not yet kind of dynamic. This is the second probably, I think the second most important thing to understand about eschatology.

And this is reflected throughout Peter's book and I'll reference this later as we get back into our main text. But as early as the first chapter in verse three, Peter writes as if this is just completely understood.

Listen to this, verse three of chapter one of first Peter. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ according to his great mercy. He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Future. This is all future forwarding. In this, verse six, you rejoice though now for a little while if necessary you've been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire may be found to result in the praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 19] A little mixture here. In this you now presently, currently rejoice but we still have some future leaning stuff going on here, right? And then he says this, verse eight, though you have not seen him, seen him, you love him and though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory obtaining the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

So salvation is both future and present in this text. Joy in Jesus is both future and present in this text. This is what we mean when we talk about inauguration and consummation or already and not yet.

I think this is a crucial thing to understand when talking about eschatology and we Midwesterners are, we already know we live in God's country. I was telling someone, oh, we had a membership meeting at my house.

You'll appreciate this stuff. We had a membership meeting at our house yesterday and we're talking about Dove. I was just like, this guy, like, I just love him so much. I just commend everything about him except one thing.

He wasn't born in the Midwest. He got here as soon as he could but he wasn't, but, you know, in the Midwest, I feel like inaugurated seasons, inauguration, consummation, it's like, it's like our seasons.

[13 : 41] Like, you live in the Midwest, you're going to experience three seasons, possibly within three days of the same month. We experience all four seasons and there are, I think, probably two months out of the year when we will reliably experience the past, the present, and the future in those months.

I'm talking about October and March. I think in October and in March, you'll experience a little bit of what was past. So October, you'd experience a little bit of summer, a little bit of what is present, fall, and a little bit of what is future, winter.

I think the same is true of March. You're experiencing a little bit of what is past, winter, a little bit of what is present, spring, and a little bit of what is future, summer. That's one of the many advantages

of living in the Midwest besides learning manners, you know.

East Coasters, my goodness, Philistines. Anyway, that's why we had to get Dove and Christine out of there because they just didn't fit. They were saying hi to people on the streets in Philadelphia and they were just getting scorned at.

It's like, we had to move to Kansas City or that's normal. The Midwest provides you some glimpse of this concept that something can be here but not fully here but undeniably here.

[15:00] and I would just give you the, if you want to, like, what biblical eschatology is in one picture, I would give you the picture of tulips emerging out of snow.

If you want to know what I think biblical eschatology is and when Peter says the end of all things is at hand, if you want to know what already and not yet means and all that kind of stuff, you've seen this image.

You've reliably seen this image. Now, I need to qualify a little bit. I'll do that at the end of the sermon but this is basically what biblical eschatology is. Okay, so that's essential number two.

Essential number three. The properly biblical way of thinking about eschatology is to think about the messianic age. This is a huge problem that we have but let me say it this way.

The Old Testament trains us to think about the end not by timing the millennium or the question of the rapture the Old Testament trains us to think about the end by identifying the coming of the Messiah.

[16:09] So, let's kind of imagine that we grab Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Joel that'll do it for now and we take them to the mall but instead of the map of the mall we're all standing there and it's a map of time and we'd say Isaiah am I living in the end times where am I where am I on this map tell me where I am and Isaiah would say has the Messiah come?

I'd say oh yes he came absolutely he came well then you are in the end times that's the way the Bible teaches us to think about the end times did the Messiah come?

The Messiah has come there are certain aspects of history that suddenly open up and break forth like tulips and snow simply because the God of the universe took on flesh and shed his blood on this ground like certain glorious realities have opened that were not opened before and the way that the Old Testament prophets would think about the end times was always centered around the appearance of the Messiah I will tell you quite honestly so much of our eschatology lacks any centrality on Christ whatsoever he is literally an afterthought to most of the eschatology that gets talked about today but the reality is that if Christ has come then something new has happened did Jesus Christ take on flesh live a perfectly righteous life talk about the coming of the kingdom constantly say it is both here and not yet here talk about it having appeared but also asking us to pray that the kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven did this Jesus shed his perfect blood not only for the salvation of those whom he would save but also for the elimination of strongholds principalities and powers yes did that happen yes it happened did he make a mockery of the satanic rule on the earth yes did he tell demons here and no further yes did he redeem broken people from their bondage to sin raising them up from spiritual death and the newness of life yes all these things have taken place then Isaiah and Ezekiel and Amos and Joel would say well buddy that's all we were writing about we were writing about the day when that would happen you can see that proof text by the way at the beginning of first Peter

I won't turn to there now so the essential number three is is if you want to think properly about eschatology you have to think about the messianic age you have to think like the Old Testament prophets did has he come and the answer is absolutely he has come and you might say well but then he left no no no no he actually didn't he said explicitly it is good that I go away so that the helper may come the presence of God is still on the earth in a unique way as a result of the first coming of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit is active in this world in a way he was not prior to his coming something new has happened something completely new has happened it's a marvelous thing essential number four the main feature of the messianic age is shalom the main feature of the messianic age is shalom just as those tulips spring out telling us that well winter is still here but so is spring so shalom is the main sign that we are living in the messianic age let me illustrate this after a glorious sermon preached by

Peter our guy who wrote this letter later on and a mass conversion event takes place in Acts 2 the story of God's spirit pouring out on the nations is summarized with this little section by the way that's from Joel the prophet Joel all of it gets summarized at the end of chapter 2 with this and they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship and to breaking of bread and the

prayers awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles all who believed were together and had all things in common they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes they received their food with glad and generous hearts praising God and having favor with all the people the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved you know for the longest time I didn't understand why that was there but now looking at it it's really clear that that whole passage is meant to say we are living in the messianic age it specifically cites Joel 2:20 which is a messianic prophecy and when Luke describes this glorious festive socialization happening amongst people who were just new friends right brand new brand new friends he is actually saying something eschatological he's saying the tulips are breaking forth out of the snow and what are those tulips those tulips are people who are right with

[22:00] God and with each other that's how the Old Testament describes the beginning of the end and the messianic age people who get right with God and each other that's what I mean by shalom Carlos Cornelius Plantinga says it this way he defines shalom as this it's translated in our Bibles as peace but man it's so much more than peace he describes it as this the webbing together of God humans and all creation in justice fulfillment and delight is what the Hebrew prophets called shalom we call it peace but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a ceasefire between enemies in the Bible shalom means universal flourishing wholeness and delight a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its creator and savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights shalom in other words is the way things ought to be so that's very key the very key element to the

Old Testament's eschatology is the emergence of human flourishing sharing generosity right relationships that's the tulip in the snow according to the old prophets that's the tulip in the snow the early evidence of a return to a greater and expanded Eden is human beings in right relationship with one another now I could walk you through all of the Old Testament passages that are super clear about this but they're in the parts of the Bible we probably don't read very often and we probably miss what's happening there but let me just read a little summary that I wrote because I thought well this is faster than taking you through all of these or many of these passages so let me just read this little summary the Old Testament presents shalom as the defining characteristic of the messianic age not merely the absence of conflict but the restoration of right relationships across all dimensions of creation the messianic figure emerges as the prince of peace after all whose government expands infinitely with no end to peace established through justice and righteousness forever this peace isn't passive it flows from the messianic's active reign nations will transform instruments of war into agricultural tools swords becoming plowshares spears becoming pruning hooks and warfare itself becomes extinct each person will sit securely under their own vine and fig tree with no one to threaten them and you read that and say well that is certainly not happening right now well yeah you're looking at the snow buddy come on come with me right over here there's a small patch of tulips that some person put in the ground now now evaluate where you are if you if you look to where the tulips aren't you're not going to know what season it is but you look to where the tulips are and you say well huh that's pretty different

I could drive you out to western Kansas where they still shut the roads down because of wind during the storm or snow and yeah there's no tulips out there but I could take you to my front yard and every year almost every year you'll probably see tulips emerge with a little bit of snow on them so I would say that yeah if you look in one direction clearly it is still a long way off the world is not mostly full of tulips not even anywhere close but the reality is is that the messianic community has started and it's called the local church and it's not perfect by any means but it is a place where shalom happens that's the goal of the local church to be an outpost of shalom in a frosty cold world righteousness produces peace as a natural effect yielding quietness and trust peace becomes the governing principle overseers embody peace task masters embody righteousness and violence vanishes from the land

God establishes a covenant of peace crucially this covenant of peace proves immovable more stable than mountains and God's people experience great peace in their children the messianic figure himself becomes their peace shalom in the eschaton represents the comprehensive healing of all fractured relationships between God and humanity within human community and across

creation so again back to the image of the tulip in the snow it's really the operating illustration for everything I think Peter's doing in this particular section he is saying because Christ has come and shed his blood and started the beginning of the end we now have ethical responsibilities and ethical opportunities to be aligned with the Lord to be aligned with one another I'll go back to this in a moment but let me hit number five the number five essential this is key just to your understanding the Bible in general eschatological preparation is eschatological participation what I mean by that is the right way to prepare for the coming of any of God's promises is to participate in its coming see we don't need we don't need eschatological preppers if your understanding of eschatology tempts you to flee you're doing it wrong if it puts you in a bunker mentality that you have to resist because there are other parts of the

Bible that clearly tell you not to do that you're doing it wrong that's not what the Bible's teaching the Bible's teaching that a new kind of biblical community is now available because of Christ isn't that glorious you know all throughout the Bible when God gives a promise the answer you know there's always some kind of sense of like he's giving you this promise well in advance of it coming to pass and then the question is like well why is he doing that why is he telling me about something that's coming to pass down the road it's not to prep in a traditional prepper kind of sense it's to participate in the coming of that promise why would God tell Abraham hey I know you're super old Sarah I know you're super old but you're going to have a child and that child's going to be the beginning of a marvelous story that winds up in the blessing and healing of the nations through Jesus Christ why do you tell Abraham and Sarah that are they just supposed to sit around and wait for it to take place well why would you humanly speaking tell a very old couple you're going to have a baby because there's something they need to do to prepare and participate in the promise that's coming so whenever

[29 : 56] God gives us a promise of a future glorious age of people knitted together in harmonious ways lions laying down with lambs and all sorts of other things we don't just sit on our hands and say okay well that'll be nice when I see it we participate in it we participate in the coming promise this is why Jesus taught us to pray thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven what does that participation look like well now we're back to 1st Peter chapter 4 thank you for joining me on that excursus around the bible we're back in our text how do I participate in this shalomic spring look at 1st Peter chapter 4 verse 7 the end of all things is at hand therefore there's some stuff we've got to do to participate in the promise therefore be self controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers stop right there in some sense all eschatology is a return to

Eden and the reason why that's in some sense and not 100% is because the new Eden is going to be way better than the old Eden and there's an expansion and a fulfillment that is all parts of God's plan but generally speaking if you read the Old Testament promises about the messianic age they actually use the word Eden a lot there's a lot of references to that concept you know the central glory of Eden is not the abundance of food the absence of sin the lack of clothing requirements or even you and your honey hanging out in paradise just don't answer out loud but like what would you think is the central glory of Eden okay the central glory of Eden is that you get to walk with God in the cool of the day the central glory of Eden is that your soul was made to have a friend a very specific friend God and your soul will never be happy fully happy until you get to live your life shoulder to shoulder with your creator doing life with your creator that is what you were made for and if you have an addiction here this morning or have had an addiction

I will assure you that that addiction is an echo of this yearning all the dumb things we do we can't figure out why our souls are aching for our relationship with God even if you think that's not true I promise you it is the most true thing about you and you're in trouble by the way if you don't think I'm right you're denying the most true thing about you I'm just going to tell you right now it is the most true thing about you you were made to delight in the one who made you your soul was made to walk with God so when Peter says be self controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers he's almost saying it this way he's used this logic once before in 1 Peter 3 where he tells husbands to be good husbands don't be bad to your wives for the sake of your prayers!

We say we are going to have dessert but before we have dessert we have to eat our vegetables we're going to go outside and jump on the trampoline but before we jump on the trampoline we have to clean our bedrooms one time we were very incongruous in some ways and I realize this now but we didn't do Santa but we did do the!

! fairy Anyway I the tooth fairy and one time we just forgot now the kids will tell you now that I am a very loud walker and a very loud breather and so they knew that the tooth fairy probably wasn't going but all that to say I forgot one time and thankfully God gave me the grace because I think it was Sarah Brooke They were like we put our tooth We didn't!

[34 : 43] And I said did you clean your room? And they are like no I am like oh yeah tooth berries do not go into messy rooms they have to go into clean rooms and what I am doing there is I am saying there is something you want there is some stuff you need to do right the best one I think is eat your vegetables before dessert what is dessert in this statement look at your Bibles if you have your Bibles what is dessert in this statement it's prayer be self controlled be careful be sober minded so that you can pray what what's dessert in first Peter three treat your wives well don't be jerks why so that you can have your prayer life friends whether you feel this or not your prayer life is fundamentally the most privileged thing you have talking to the

God of the universe as the text later says here in a moment entrusting your soul to your creator that is the gift Eden has been returned the most central piece of Eden is back baby and it's better than ever because it's not just two people you tomorrow can walk with God in the cool of the day you can do that you get to do that the central glory of Eden and the central cost of sin have been reversed slash restored the central cost of sin is not pain during childbirth it's not toil in a job you hate it is missing fellowship with the one whom your soul was architected to interact with on a regular basis and that's back man that's back because

Jesus suffered for your sins to make you right with God don't go soiling that special privilege with a lack of self control and a lack of sober mindedness that will tell you where most of your struggles will come from in terms of prayer number one you will stop talking to God if you have obvious patterns of self indulgence in your life that you know you shouldn't have number two you will stop talking to God if you lack the sober mindedness to get yourself under control and believe the truth of the gospel what is the least sober minded thing to do to doubt that a crucified savior can make you right with God right enough to approach his throne with confidence it's the least sober minded thing there is the evidence is everywhere Jesus Christ has offered himself to make you right with God therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness and if you can't get past all of your own neuroticisms all of your own self doubts all of the you you're not being sober minded and then you can't have dessert I have often wished as I have found someone who has shipwrecked their faith that they had noticed how far back in the story they had stopped joyfully jovially casually talking to their creator throughout their day that's when stuff started to go wrong probably went wrong before that all right I could talk about that forever I cannot express to you how important it is that you ask the Lord please help me to see my soul needs you all day I need you all day Lord it's the central glory of Eden and it's the central privilege that God has brought back onto the table you are now adopted as his children you can talk to the

God of the universe like he's your dad because he is your dad so Peter twice in this little letter says protect that privilege at all cost so one way we participate in the coming promise of shalom is we talk to God we enjoy talking to God even if those conversations are imperfect friends by the time you notice they're imperfect they've been imperfect all along when you notice their imperfections they're just really imperfect but you will never say a perfect prayer talk to God set an alarm on your phone schedule it on your calendar make it a priority to begin a daily conversation in the restoration