

Last week I referenced the Mike Huckabee show because his guest was the Rev. Franklin Graham. He was on the show because he had his invitation to pray at the Pentagon on the National Day of Prayer rescinded because of his comments about Islam. Which incidentally were true – but we won't go there for now. Besides, since my sermons on the Internet, someone is bound to come after me, if they can find out what I said.

One of the things that Franklin Graham said on the Huckabee show was that he believed that we are in the last days – but more in the sense that he believed that Jesus was going to return sooner, rather than later. While I don't fully agree with him, I can understand where he is coming from as the 2nd coming our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith.

It is something that we confess each and every week in our Creeds. So, what he was saying was not off base. Quite simply, we believe that our Savior can return at any time! Some believe that it will be sooner, rather than later. I believe that it will be later. But the timing is not what is important.

Thursday was Ascension Day – the day that we celebrate our Savior's rise to heaven where he sits at the right hand of God, waiting to come again in judgement. Since that time – that is, the Ascension – we have been in the last days, or the later times, waiting for the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ – that is, it could happen at any time.

As we read in Acts 1:9-11: *“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

In the next chapter in Acts, Luke calls the coming of the Holy Spirit in the “last days” as fulfillment of prophecy – Acts 2:17: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.”*

In 1 Timothy 4:1, which we will look at in couple of weeks in our Tuesday Bible Study, Paul calls it “*the latter times*” and in 1 Peter, he calls it the “*last times*”.

This is exactly what we see in our Epistle lesson, so I ask you to turn with me to 1 Peter 4, beginning at verse 7. Peter begins this section with a statement: *“But the end of all things is at hand;”*

There are at least a couple of answers as to what Peter means when he writes these words. He could mean the destruction of Jerusalem which happened in 70 A.D., and so gives the exhortation which follows. Peter knew what would soon happen to Jerusalem and he wanted the Christians to be prepared.

But most scholars conclude that what Peter is talking about is the final consummation of our Savior's return, when he will come to judge all the earth and reign forever.

As I said, since the Ascension, we are in the last days or latter days. Jesus can come at any time. A song that is our Hymnal has the lyrics: *“May be morning, may be noon, may be evening, may be soon.”* We just don’t know.

However, having said that, I don’t think that we should be looking at the events of the world to try to determine when he is coming. We call this newspaper exegesis. People look at the events that are happening around the world, and they try to fit what is happening into the Scriptures.

Since his ascension, multitudes of people have been predicting the return of Christ. In the last half of the 20th century there were numerous books predicting the return of Christ. I remember receiving a book in the mail entitled *“88 Reasons why Jesus will return in 1988.”* The next year I got a book, again in the mail by the same author, *“88 Reasons Why I was I wrong the first time, but I am right this time.”* Some people just don’t learn. I wish I had saved them, but they were good starters in my fireplace.

Ironically, I googled the title, and unbelievably it is available on Amazon. Incredible!

Well, the only thing all these authors had in common is that they have all been wrong – 100% of the time. If the authors had lived under the O.T. law they would have been stoned to death to because the test for a prophet was 100% accuracy – not 99.9% – and they were off by a long shot! We are still here and Jesus has not returned.

Having said all this, we are still in the last days, as the Scriptures teach, and we are to do certain things while we wait expectantly for his return.

In general, if we look at these things we see that essentially we are to live our lives as if he is going to return at the next moment! The question can rightly be asked, what would our Savior find you doing when he returns?

Peter gives us some direction as what we should be doing in light of his imminent return. Look at what he says: *“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.”*

Therefore – in light of the fact that the end of all things is at hand *be serious* ... this is the same word translated *“sober- minded”* in our study of 1 Timothy. It means to be vigilant – always on guard against sin.

We know how easy it is for sin to creep in – that is why we confess: *“we have left undone those things that we ought to have done, and we have done those things we ought not have to done.”*

And one of the ways that we are vigilant is being *watchful in your prayers*. In other words, we should be praying that God would keep us from sin, and we should be praying for those things around us. We really have no shortage of things to pray for. Just listen to the news. This is why there is an exhortation in your church bulletin to pray each day for our nation and those in authority that God would lead them in the right way. In one sense, every day should be a National Day of Prayer for the Christian!

As he goes he encourages the Christians to truly love one another: *“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”* Peter tells us that we are to love – and the reason for it is that *love will cover a multitude of sins*. If Christians don’t love one another, who will? It doesn’t mean that we will agree with them always – but our differences and disagreements should not get in the way of loving them.

We should be reminded of how Paul describes true love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: *“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own,*

is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Love for one another is the response that we should have because God has loved us and sent his Son to die for our sins. And one of the ways that we show that love is in the next verse: *“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”*

Times are tough – the economy is bad – persecution against Christians is on the rise – and when given the opportunity to help one another, we should do it. If you see someone hungry, feed them. If you see someone homeless, give them a place to sleep.

Last week I watched The Blind Side – a great movie. It was a true story about how a white Christian woman took in “Big Mike” – or Michael, as he liked to be called. Michael was a huge black teenager. When she prepared a room for him, he said that he never had one before. She said, “your own room?” and he said: “a bed!” This is hospitality – and our Christian duty.

The last thing that Peter tells us we are to do, as we are in the last days is to exercise the gift or gifts that God has given each and every Christian. And by the way, hospitality is one of those gifts.

Look at what he says: *“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

As we exercise the gifts that God has given we are being good stewards of what God has given us – stewards of *the manifold grace of God*. Remember, we have been saved by the grace of God. He has given each and everyone of us a gift – and we are to exercise those gifts to His honor and glory for the benefit of others.

When we do this we will be helping other Christians and we will be witness to the non-Christian world around us. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that there is a world out there that needs to know Christ as Savior and Lord. And one of the ways that we witness to them is exercising the gifts that God has given us – as the mother in the movie exhibited. She was a witness to Michael, her family and those around her.

So, as we contemplate the fact that we are indeed in the last days, let us strive to live in the light of God's Word, waiting expectantly for the return of Savior ... living as if he could return in the next moment and following the way the Scriptures has laid out for us to follow as a witness to the manifold grace of God.