

How to Live in the End Times

MEG JENISTA

When is the last time you were arrested simply for being a Christian? Never? Me either. How about an attack by a mob or an angry member of your family because you have chosen to become a follower of Jesus Christ? That has not happened to me either. But that does not mean we do not face suffering for our faith, and it does not mean that we do not need to be prepared. The Apostle Peter will show us how.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee, and I am here with Meg Jenista and Dave Bast, as we continue our look at Peter's first letter, where his main theme is about how do we face suffering as Christians; and today we are moving into his fourth chapter.

DAVE BAST

Let's start by just reading that. I will start at verse 7, where Peter says:

The end of all things is near; therefore be alert and of sober minds so that you may pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others. ¹¹If you speak, you should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If you serve, you should do so with the strength God provides.

He is going to get to the theme of suffering again, but he seems to start by addressing the Church. These are clearly words meant to be spoken in the context of the Church, and in the context of living in the end times? We are in the end times?

MEG JENISTA

I think it speaks to the idea that if you are going to suffer in the broader world, you are going to need each other, a lot more than maybe in the church we remember that we need each other; especially if you live in the West in the North American context, church can be something you do on top of all of the other support systems you have in your life; but for the Christians that Peter is writing to, if you do not have each other, what are you going to have to support yourself as you engage the culture around you?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And one of the things we need each other for is precisely to remind one another that we are living in what Peter calls the end times. Now, some people say that that meant Peter – or they thought Jesus would come back any minute now, and here it is two thousand years later, and so, some people think: Well, they were wrong. They just got that wrong; but, that is not really the only way you can take that. It is the idea that ever since the cross and resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, we in the community know that; and that helps us look at the whole world and our behavior in a completely different way; and one of the things we do for each other in the community is remind ourselves that we have a vision of what is going on in the world that the world does not share, and we need to encourage each other with that. Hey, we are living in the era of grace.

DAVE BAST

You know, one of the things that we struggle with, frankly, in understanding this letter and applying it to our lives – we in the West, so called – is that our cultural situation is so different. You said it, Meg. In Peter's

time they knew they needed each other. They were a little tiny band surrounded by a very hostile culture. I see it when I am with Iranian Christians. They are living in exactly the same circumstances, and they get it, and they know they need each other in the Church. As you said, Scott, we have so many support structures and so much going on and so much to do, the Church seems sort of dispensable; especially when we get into it and discover that, oh, you know, it is not always fun. It is not always easy to get along. We have these weird Christians. Some of them are kind of crazy. Some of them bug us. What do you do?

SCOTT HOEZEE

But how important it is though, Dave, in that perspective there to remember how much a source of hope the prospect of Jesus coming back is for those who suffer. I mean, here in the West in lot of the churches that I have been a part of we say: Come, Lord Jesus; but not yet. I would really like to see my first grandchild born, or I would like to see if I get that promotion. We have a hard time saying *maranatha* – come, Lord Jesus – but in my preaching I have often said, say it for the sake of our suffering fellow Christians who need that hope that he is coming back.

DAVE BAST

I have also found that it is easier to say that sincerely the older you get. That is something maybe you will learn, Meg, in a few decades. Come, Lord Jesus – I am ready now, you know.

MEG JENISTA

Well, sure; and when you walk alongside people in deep suffering – when you do exactly what 1 Peter admonishes us to do, which is to love deeply – to invest deeply – to engage in hospitality within the Church, which means that even though it is not suffering for the Gospel's sake, even if it is suffering for being human in a broken world when it is cancer or grief or disappointment or loss in life; when you walk alongside that and experience that with a fellow Christian, you are much more likely to pray *maranatha* – come, Lord Jesus – regardless of your age.

DAVE BAST

I think I maybe shared this before on *Groundwork*, but it is a scene I will never forget. I happened to be speaking with the late, great Lewis Smedes, and he said – you know, his voice kind of rising with passion – he said, “I no longer ask, ‘Why, God? Why are these things happening?’ I ask, ‘When? When are you going to come and fix things?’”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; how long – how long?

DAVE BAST

And that is such a biblical – such a New Testament question – such an attitude to have: God, when? When will you come and make it all right and make it all new; make it the way it is supposed to be?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as Peter also knows, that living into that hope is necessary, even inside our communities. So, Peter is talking to the believers inside the Church, now, saying: Hey, look. Practice hospitality. Make room for each other; right? That is what hospitality is; you make room in your life for other people. It is not always going to be easy. That is one thing that I really like about the New Testament generally. It never shies away from the idea that we are going to have to do a lot of forgiving inside the Church. The apostles never make any bones about the fact that, yes, you are going to have to do a lot of forgiving – not just to the wider world, but to each other; so get ready and do it because we are in the era of grace – Jesus is Lord – so, forgive each other – make room.

MEG JENISTA

It is what Peter means when he says that love covers over a multitude of sins.

DAVE BAST

Oh, I love that line! That is such a great verse.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is in verse 8, yes.

MEG JENISTA

And I think that is another way of saying that might be, be willing to take one for the team, and to recognize the fact that your church community is your team – for better or for worse – these are the people that you have around you; and love cannot cover over a multitude of sins if you are church-hopping at the first sign of difficulty or something you do not like within the church. You are not invested deeply enough to say: You know what, guys? I got this one. This one is on me. I will express the love to cover over this situation and be the gracious presence that is necessary.

DAVE BAST

You know, and I think, too, there is some theology behind that line...

MEG JENISTA

I hope so.

DAVE BAST

The Lord has covered our sins with the blood of Christ. I mean, we believe in a real atonement. We believe that really did something; that it pacified the holy anger of God against sin, and that it removed our guilt from us; and that means we can cover each other's sins in a different sense. Not that we cover them up; I think it means we just sort of put a blanket over them and say: You know what? I can take that. I can forgive you from my heart, or at least I can try to; and if what you did – as it so often is, is kind of a petty offence – it is not really a major, major sin – I can just forget about it. I can dismiss that. That is how love covers sin for us, because our sins have been truly dealt with and forgiven and removed. We can be, as Paul says, forbearing one another and forgiving one another.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we do for each other what we know God already did for each one of us, and still does anew every single day. So, Peter is talking about inside the Church and how we treat each other, but in the rest of Chapter 4 he is also going to come back to some of his main themes on suffering, and we will take a look at that next.

Segment 2

MEG JENISTA

This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Meg Jenista. I am here with Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee. We have been talking together about the importance of the Church community and our ability to love one another and extend grace and hospitality. For Peter, that theme is so important, because the world outside the Church will dispense suffering.

DAVE BAST

And he says clearly, this is how you should handle it – this is how to face it. Here in Chapter 4 we really get down to practicality. We have talked about the nature of this. Why this is so. How it is going to happen; but now, at the heart of 1 Peter 4, are a series of practical instructions. This is what you need to do. I remember once many years ago now, I was in conversation with a Chinese church leader, and he said: We have a regular curriculum for new Christians. As they come into our house fellowships, we teach them about theology and we teach them about the Bible, and we teach them this, that and the other thing; and then we have some very practical classes. One of them is: How to go to prison. And I thought: I don't think I covered that in my new members classes at my church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, you didn't get that in seminary.

DAVE BAST

Very practical, though, for them.

MEG JENISTA

How would the Church be different if that is what we required around the world, and not just in China. I love that idea.

DAVE BAST

Smaller new members classes, perhaps.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Could be; although I think, as I recall, in the Civil Rights Movement, I think Martin Luther King, Jr., and others did have advice on how to go to jail because they would be regularly arrested for doing no more than sit-ins; so, that did happen there; but Peter here in 1 Peter 4, beginning at verse 12, he has a few things that we can talk about. One thing that he writes is:

¹²Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or any kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear his name. Do not be surprised that this happens.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is how he starts because it is going to come; and he follows that by saying: You know, do not be discouraged. Instead, you should rejoice. You are sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

It always makes me think of Paul's statement in Philippians 3, you know, what his great ambition is: That I may know him and the fellowship of his suffering. There is another note we do not hear a whole lot of. It is all kind of come to Christ and have joy and be happy and maybe even be rich and successful and prosperous; not, come to Christ so you can share his sufferings; but that is how you get...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we have probably overcompensated a little bit. It is true, Jesus paid it all. It is true that Jesus' sacrifice was once for all, and certainly coming out of the Reformation, where we wanted to make that grace and justification by faith alone so clear that it has nothing to do with you or your works; that is all right, and that is all true, but I think we probably moved away from something the early Church knew, and that is that you still participate in Christ when you suffer as he did; and Paul and Peter and others said: When that happens to you, that is a good thing. That means you are so close to Jesus, you are suffering just like he did. We do not talk about that a lot.

MEG JENISTA

And when I am talking to younger Christians, one of the reasons they cite for being discontent in the Church is because we have not challenged them to do something beyond show up and be entertained. A lot of the church planters whom I deeply respect that are doing work right now are leading with a missional edge – the idea that this calls you to do and to be something. It is going to call you to sacrifice, and that has a compelling edge to it, I think, in this generation.

DAVE BAST

Somehow, we have turned this radical demand invitation to suffering into sort of a comfortable, middle class respectability, you know; and it is no wonder that younger people especially are saying: You know, I am not

terribly interested in that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

But the real thing still has an appeal – it has a kind of a draw.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think, Dave, another evidence of that sort of middle class, urbane sort of version of the faith comes from the fact that we maybe are blessed enough in the western world – in North America – not to have the kind of active physical persecution that some of our sisters and brothers face, but we still do sometimes meet some forms of opposition. We meet people who just think we are full of beans because we are Christians and we believe in Jesus and, what is interesting to me, that we have become so unaccustomed to that kind of thing that, as a matter of fact, today when people encounter resistance, they are surprised. They are shocked that other people do not think like Christians – that they have neighbors who do not go to church – or have neighbors who do not believe in Jesus. They are just shocked that that could even be. Well, Peter says that is not surprising at all; and unfortunately, when you are surprised, you often can also react in anger. Surprise is often a short hop, skip and jump away from incredulity and that leads to your own kind of anger that the world could possibly even be that way: Oh, my goodness!

MEG JENISTA

The other thing that Peter commands, though, is do not be surprised, but also do not be deserving of the suffering that you receive.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; I love that idea because some Christians do go overboard the other way and they think: I need to be suffering for Christ; so they go out and do something absurd or ridiculous and get into trouble as a result.

MEG JENISTA

And they do not end up suffering as a Christian for it, but the rest of us do because we have to explain: Well, I am not a Christian in that sense, or trying to distance ourselves, perhaps, from some of the weird things that people do. When Jesus commands us to suffer for the sake of the Gospel, he is not telling us that we should suffer for being jerks or for being weird. That is certainly not the calling. There is enough of a calling available to us simply in following Christ and seeing where that leads us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I love it here how he says some obvious things. He says: Do not suffer because you are a murderer. Well, yeah... or a criminal... well, yeah... but then he throws out at the end: Or even a meddler.

DAVE BAST

Because you poke your nose into other people's business, it says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and I think there are lot of Christians... Unfortunately, there are some Christian meddlers – people who picket funerals and people who have these hate-filled signs. There is a sense in which you could almost say: Yes, okay; that is not murder, that is not theft; but it is... I think Peter is getting that meddling... Do not suffer because you are a meddler. That is not the way to go.

DAVE BAST

And I think we can all recognize that behavior when we see it, and we know – you know, you are not really suffering for the Gospel, you are suffering because you are behaving like a complete idiot; and as you said, Meg, you are embarrassing the rest of us and giving us things that we have to try to explain to non Christians,

who are justifiably turned off; and they say: Well, if that is what it is like... If that is what it is about... If Christians are people who hate, what do I need that for?

MEG JENISTA

This puts us right back in mind of what we were talking about at the very beginning of the show, and how do we respond with grace and with mercy, even when our brothers and sisters in the faith are embarrassing to us? And then, moving forward, how do we speak truth in love into the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters?

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast, along with Meg Jenista and Scott Hoezee, and we are digging into scripture to give us an accurate picture of how Christians face suffering – very practical suggestions or even commands, I guess we could say, that Peter gives us for how we should respond.

MEG JENISTA

We began by talking about the love and the generosity that we owe to one another within the household of faith; but that is not the only thing that we owe to one another according to Peter, in these verses, 17 through 19:

¹⁷For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the Gospel of God? ¹⁸And if it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and sinner? ¹⁹So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.

DAVE BAST

So, Peter, as he brings this chapter to a close, actually goes back to the idea that he started with – at least, we started at verse 7 – with the idea that we are living in the end times. We are living in the last days, and one of the things that happens at the end, Christians believe, is judgment; and Peter says: Actually, that last judgment is already kind of breaking into history. Judgment begins, and it begins, he says, with the Church. It starts with us; so, we better be aware of that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and I think among the things that that means is that salvation is not simple. I mean, it is easy in the sense that you are saved by grace; Jesus did it all; but that does not make it a simple or simplistic thing. The whole program of salvation that came to its climax in Jesus has the restoration of the whole cosmos in view. That means – so, he talks about being obedient to your creator – that means getting back to what God wanted in the beginning: to lead lives of radical obedience to God and to the way God set up the world. That is not easy. That is going to take everybody in the Church working together to help us figure that out.

DAVE BAST

You know, he says here – this is a line that jumped out at me: It is hard for the righteous to be saved – and actually, I guess that is a quote according to... I looked at the footnote in the Bible and it is from Proverbs. You know, what do you make of that, Meg? It is hard for the righteous to be saved? I thought we were justified and everything was...

MEG JENISTA

Sure, well, and I think Scott nailed it on the head there when he said that salvation is easy in that it was won for us by Jesus Christ, but it is not simple in its outworking; and I think that this speaks to the life of faith that we owe to one another in the Church: that if God is judging in these last days, then there are also times when a word of truth needs to be spoken within the Church because we are all on the same team. We are all pulling in the same direction; and if you are on a team and one person is not pulling their weight or they are running toward the end zone in the opposite direction, you are going to tackle them and get them back on course.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, it depends on what you mean by saved. This comes into play again.

MEG JENISTA

Sure.

DAVE BAST

We cannot just throw out texts and quote them and say: Oh, see? It is clear. Saved in the past sense, yes; that is the simple, the easy, the justification, the grace, the faith, all of that. Saved in the present means we are struggling with sin right now – in ourselves – in our own lives – in our communities of faith – in opposition to the world that is often hostile; and that is not easy. That is where it takes the willingness to even rebuke, maybe, a fellow Christian.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A friend of mine has noted that if you actually look – you can look it up in a concordance or you can do a word search if you have an online Bible or something – but, look at the word *rebuke*; Paul, Peter, James, a lot of people, most of them – John – the writers in the New Testament seem to assume that the Church would be a place where a lot of rebuking would go on. With gentleness and respect and love and forgiveness and all the things, of course, Peter has been talking about in this letter, of course; but, that we would be willing to say to each other: I don't think so. The way you are living – that decision – what we are going to do with our money – no, that is wrong; and we have to be willing to say that to each other and we have to be (even more important) we have to be willing to take it from each other; but does that happen??

MEG JENISTA

Maybe a good example of this would be that it was not difficult for me to become a Jenista. All my parents had to do was sign my birth certificate and it is a done deal; but I have spent 33 years of my life trying to figure out in practice what it means to be a member of this family; and I think that speaks to the salvation. It is not difficult. Our name is written in the Book of Life based on the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf; but it will take a lifetime figuring out what it means to live a life worthy of the calling that we have received.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That reminds me of the last scene in the movie, *Saving Private Ryan*, where the soldiers have to go in and rescue this private, all of whose brothers – five brothers – have died, and they have to get this kid home. Near the end of the movie, the captain who led the rescue effort to get Private Ryan home dies, but as he dies, he looks at Private Ryan and he says: Earn this. Earn this. Well, how can you earn what you have already been given? Well, what he meant was, in your subsequent life, live a life worthy of what we sacrificed for you. You got it by grace, as it were, but you can still live into it from here on out; and that is the hard part, and that is the part where we have to help each other and discern in community what is right, what is wrong, and what is the difference?

DAVE BAST

Right; I like the analogy Meg used a few moments ago. If you see somebody running the wrong way on the football field, you tackle them. That is how Christians should act with one another. You say: Please, no; you are going in the wrong direction. But it takes real humility if you are the one being tackled to say: Yes, okay. I see, you are right; I accept that. There is where we need grace, too; not just to do the rebuking, but to be the one...

SCOTT HOEZEE

To take it.

DAVE BAST

Being rebuked, yes.

MEG JENISTA

Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and do not forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you hear, and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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