

# THE END OF ALL THINGS

## A SERMON

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“But the end of all things is at hand.” 1 Peter 4:7

THIS is a scripture, as every Christian will at once see, full of great solemnity; and it is by the solemnity into which the Lord brings his people that they are prepared to receive the joyful tidings of the gospel. Hence the wise man said, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that,” namely, the house of mourning, “is the end of all men.” Our end certainly is a mournful end as far as the body is concerned, and if we do not belong to the Lord it will be still more mournful as it pertains to the soul. It is, therefore, good to be brought into the house of mourning. Also the wise man said, “Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better,” made better prepared for meditation, for solemn reflection, for that godly exercise described by one when he said, “My spirit made diligent search;” and better prepared for that godly exercise to which the apostle exhorts us when he said, “Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith.” “It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.” So, then, those scriptures that seem to call us to those departments that are deeply solemn, and that concern every man; the Lord does by these scriptures, as well as by various afflictions in life, prepare us for the glorious tidings of the gospel; this is the way the Lord prepares the ground. For what cares man for salvation until he solemnly feels himself to be a lost sinner? What cared we for pardoning mercy all the time we were unacquainted with the guilt of sin? What cared we for God, for Christ, or for eternity, all the time we were wrapped up in the things of time, and sought not beyond that that came within the range of mortal vision, or of our mortal sense?

Now, taking what I think may be fairly implied in our text, that to which the text leads, I think the text will authorize us to notice three things. First, *termination*; second, *attainment*; and third, *ultimate destiny*.

First, *termination*, “The end of all things is at hand.” There are three different interpretations of these words, which I will just name; but not with one of the three can I myself fall in. The first is, some have supposed that Peter here refers to the end of the Jewish dispensation, and therefore said to the Christians of his day, alluding to the termination of the national existence of the Jews, and of their dispensation altogether, and that dispensation is called a world, “The end of all things is at hand.” Now I do not myself fall in with this interpretation, but I would by no means underrate that

great event, the abolition of the Jewish law. It is a matter that a Jew must understand before he will feel willing to become a Christian. And the ending of that dispensation to which the Savior alludes, when speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, was a greater matter than may at first sight appear. Let me just look at it for a moment. What was it? It was the great God changing his residence. He had dwelt in a temple built with hands; he leaves that temple, and takes up his abode in a temple not made with hands; takes up his abode in that order of things called a house not "made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It was the great God abdicating one throne in order to occupy another. He went away from that throne of mercy, from that mercy-seat, and Jesus ascends to that throne which is eternal. It was the great God forsaking, giving up, and leaving an earthly inheritance for a heavenly and eternal inheritance. It was the great God casting off one kind of people and taking on another kind of people. It is true they had cast him off, they had apostatized from him, and therefore were broken off. What was it? Why, it was the great God going out of a covenant in which every man belonging to it was righteous or unrighteous according to his own doings. If a man remained righteous, or in conformity to the requirements of that covenant, then he was entitled to all the advantages, which advantages were only temporal, of that covenant. Now God went out of this covenant into a covenant where not one man is to be righteous by his own righteousness, but where every man that is to be righteous is to be righteous by the righteousness of another, even by the righteousness of his dear Son. So that this new state of things into which the Lord came, leaving the old, and that vanishing and passing away into this new state of things, may well be called a new covenant, established upon better promises. So if a Jew now, you can imagine to yourselves, if a Jew understood this, if he understood that the end of that dispensation was the accomplishing of these things, why, his eyes would be opened, he would fall in with the same, and see that as the Gentiles obtained mercy by Jesus Christ, the Jew also must, through their mercy, obtain mercy, and that in the same way. Also, the end of that dispensation would confirm the faith of the saints of that day. There was the termination predicted, and they saw that it was fulfilled; and thus, the end of all things with them at that day was at hand; though I do not think this to be the meaning of our text. The second meaning given to the words is that the end of all things is at hand with God; that is, one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day; that the end of all things with him is at hand; that with him already is the end of time, and therefore with him the end of all things is at hand. Well, this is true, but I do not think either this to be the meaning of the apostle. Another interpretation, so called, is that it means the end of the present form of this dispensation, and the commencement of what is called the thousand years' reign of Christ. Well, now, this appears to me to be the worst interpretation of the three. Here are now eighteen hundred years rolled over since these words were written, and to suppose that Peter led the then living saints to look for an immediate millennium, certainly was not deluding that generation only, but it must have deluded every generation from that day to this. "The end of all things is at hand." Eighteen hundred years have gone, and yet the end is not come. So that this interpretation of Christ's coming to reign on the earth appears to me to be the worst of the three, and nothing but sheer delusion. And I may here just remind you once and for all, that it is absurd to the last degree to take the dates given in the Old and New Testament, when those dates relate to spiritual things, to take them in the usual sense. The seventy weeks of Daniel, some reckon a day for a year, amount only to four hundred and ninety years; and even in that case it does not stand good, because it was between five and six hundred years from the time of the commandment to build the temple to the coming of Christ. But if you take the seventy weeks to mean a period of time which was known only to the Lord, until the events showed the fulfilment, then you get everything that you can require, for it is not for us to know the times and seasons, which the Father

has put in his own power. Just the same with the twelve hundred and sixty days, which are not to be understood chronologically in the ordinary sense of calculation but must be understood spiritually to mean a long period in which the enemy shall reign; the measurement of that period, though nominated by that measurement of days, known to none but the Lord himself. Just so with the three days and a half; just so with the thousand years. Some say the thousand years are to be taken a day for a year, making three hundred and sixty-five thousand years; so that by taking these dates literally we get into all sorts of delusions. But take those dates mystically, then we leave the times and seasons with the Lord, that are not revealed unto us, and we go on then and can speak with some degree of clearness. Now, for instance, when the Lord said to the Smyrnian church, "You shall have tribulation ten days;" who would take those ten days literally? You would take that ten days to denote that they should have tribulation for a certain time; that ten days might mean ten years, or more than that; I can't say how long it might mean. But it does show, first, that they should have trouble; secondly, that that trouble should continue a certain time; and thirdly, that it should not continue beyond that time. Then, again, in the 103th Psalm, 8th verse, it is said of the Lord, "He has remembered his covenant forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations." Now if you allow forty years to a generation, then, if he has commanded it to a thousand generations, allow forty years to a generation, that will make forty thousand years; and then, if you take a day for a year, you will get forty times three hundred and sixty-five thousand years. Now if the world is to continue forty times three hundred and sixty-five thousand years longer, why, then time has hardly begun its course yet. But if we take, then, all these dates to denote certain periods the Lord alone knows the measurement of, then we are on safe ground.

Now what then, is the meaning of our text? "The end of all things is at hand." People have lately, some ministers, found great fault with me because I make the Book of the Revelation a matter of individual experience. And yet I can understand my text only just in that way. I believe the end here means death; and it thereby comes home as a truth to the conscience of every Christian. Well but, say you, there won't be an end of all things when I die. But there will be with *you*; you will have done with the sun and the moon; you will have done with the earth; you will have done with your gold and silver; you will have done with your nearest and dearest friends; you will never come back to see them again; the place that has known you shall know you no more. So that very, very soon it will be with you the end of all things. Our text, therefore, is an abstract text with a concrete meaning; a text that seems abstract, but is relative in its meaning. Suppose there is not the end of all things when you die, what is that to you? It is the end of all things with you; that is your concern. Now, then, does this individuality lessen the glory of it? Yes, is it not, as I have lately said, a part of the glory of it. Just so, it is you are all the world to yourself; you know your individual self in reality; you are all the world to yourself. You know one of old, when he would pull down his barns, and build larger, and say to his soul, "Eat, drink, you have much goods laid up for many years; the Lord said, "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you; then whose shall these things be?" There was an end of all things to him. So presently there will be an end to all things under the sun to you. I don't think it is wrong for the Christian to look at his own soul, as being all the world to him. Why he says, my soul is everything to me; my person is everything to me. As to what I possess in the world, that presently will come to nothing; just a few pieces of wood nailed together, and a little piece of ground, a few feet, all that I shall occupy; there I shall lie silent in the dust till the heavens be no more. Is not this a truth, then, that comes home to every person's feeling, "The end of all things is at hand"? And is not the apostle right in founding, which he does, two very beautiful exhortations upon this fact, the near approach of death,

when it will be with us the end of all things that pertain to this life? “Be you therefore,” he says, “sober, and watch unto prayer.” And when a sight and sense of the emptiness, for everyone, more or less, carries with him a sight and sense of the emptiness of human life; it is true youth enters upon life with great ardor, with great interest; and they think they are going to make something better of it than their forefathers; they do not believe in the testimony of men that have tried it; they do not believe that all is vanity and vexation of spirit; they are going to do something better, beyond what others have been. But generation after generation, they have all found out their mistake; it is all a cheat; it is all vanity and vexation of spirit; and happy, thrice happy, the youth, as well as those of riper years, that are brought to feel the emptiness of the things of time. I mean, of course, in comparison of the things of eternity; in comparison of the dreadful state we are in as to our ultimate destiny; and in comparison, of the salvation of God and of the person of Jesus Christ. “Be you therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” And a feeling sense of this will make a person sober-minded. Hence one said, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” That is the sobriety that Peter means, and that is the watching unto prayer that he means. And David, or at least the psalmist, when he wrote that Psalm, when there seemed to be with him the near approach of the end of all things as pertaining to this life, he said, “O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.” It is not always that we feel that sweet acquaintance with the love of God, with the Christ of God, with the promise of God; it is not always that the glories of eternity so rise to our view, that we can feel a willingness that there should be the end of all things with us, and that we should thus depart and be with the Lord, which is far better. Thus, then, “the end of all things is at hand.” Take the text in this way, and then it applies to the Christian in every age of the world; and not only the Christian, but as I shall presently have to observe, to the ungodly as well.

“Above all things,” he says, “have fervent charity among yourselves.” And if we have Christ among ourselves, we shall have fervent charity among ourselves; if we have the Holy Spirit among ourselves as the Spirit of life and revelation, the Spirit of Christ and of God. there will be fervent charity among ourselves. If we have God the Father in the eternity of his love and in the abundance of his mercy, and what he has in reserve for us, we shall have fervent charity among ourselves. The way sometimes in which the love of a Christian, grown a little cold, is revived towards the people of God is by being thrown by circumstances unavoidably into the company of bitter enemies to the truth; into the company of ungodly men; that if they open their mouth about religion it is either to blaspheme it, or if they are Pharisaic professors, to express the contempt in which they hold the truth of God. That is the way sometimes the Lord so orders it to revive the love of the brethren. Hence, “Woe is me, that I should journey in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!” “I would rather be a doorkeeper”, ah, you feel it now, then; got among the dogs; found fault with the sheep, and so the Lord has put you among the dogs; found fault with the sheep, so the Lord has put you among the goats for a time; you found fault with the lambs, with the quiet ones, and so the Lord has put you among the wolves for a time; and now you are crying out about it. Yes “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God.” Yes, I dare say you would; you have just come to yourself now. I would rather have the humblest place in God s house. Why, I envy that poor little sparrow; if I had a pair of wings, and could fly off to the house of God, I would fly off at once. “The sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even your altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God” Now, then, he says, “Have fervent charity among yourselves.” What is this charity to do? What God the Father has done, do it over again? that will be an acknowledgment of what he has done; to do what Jesus Christ has

done, do it over again, that will be an acknowledgment of what he has done; to do what the Holy Spirit has done; and what is that? Cover a multitude of sins. God the Father has thrown the propitiation over the whole; Christ has thrown his mediatorial work over the whole; the Holy Ghost has thrown the work of Christ over the whole, and not a fault is seen in, about, or with the people. So, then, all I say is this, that our time is short, and let us go on in the little time as well as we can. You will not have your minister much longer, the Lord make him a blessing to you while you do have him, and I shall not have you much longer, or I shall not be with you much longer, may the Lord make you a blessing to yourselves, and to one another, and to his cause, while we are together. We have no time to spare; our time is short; days, and weeks, and months roll away. And let me tell you, from my own personal experience, that the older you get, the faster time will seem to go. I can look back to circumstances now twenty years ago, that seem to me to have occurred but yesterday; time seems so short. "The end of all things is at hand." Well, there are states of mind when we are thankful that it is so, when perhaps we say with Job, We would not live always; but still while we do live we desire to live to God, to live in a spirit of sobriety and of prayer, to live in intense love to the truth of God, the Christ of God, the people of God, and the ways of God. Thus, then, "the end of all things" is at hand, I take to mean death. But lest I should deprive myself of the privilege of dwelling upon the other parts, I will say no more upon this; after just observing that the end here does not appear to me to mean the end of the Jewish nation; second, that it does not mean that the end is at hand with God; and much less does it mean the coming of Christ to reign upon the earth. There is not a scripture in all the New Testament that authorizes the doctrine of Christ to come to reign upon the earth. The apostle in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians said a few words concerning the coming of Christ, and people, misunderstanding him, took it for granted that Christ was coming directly, that the millennium was close at hand; and many actually gave up their business, shut up their shops, gave up work; Oh, he is coming directly: no work done after that. And the apostle had, in his Second Epistle, to put them to rights upon it, and to show them that the day of Christ was not at hand, and also to show that when he did come he would not come on the earth, but that we should meet the Lord in the air, meet him in the clouds, and we should ever be with him in that eternity into which he has entered. "Comfort one another," said the apostle, "with these words." But if we take the words, then, to mean death, that the end of all things here below will come, when you and I shall die, with us, we shall then have done with the whole. Our children, and all those near and dear to us, we must leave them in the hands of God; what will become of them God Almighty alone knows. We leave, before we leave this world, at the footstool of his mercy, many solemn prayers on their behalf, and pray over those prayers, that if they are not answered while we live, they may be answered when we are gone. Praying breath, as we sometimes say, is not spent in vain; and those petitions of faith that we have laid at the throne of God, he will regard them and answer them, if not now, when time with us shall be no more. Therefore, if we do not always see the fruits in our lifetime, let not that for one moment hinder us in our solemn concern for all whom we should be concerned about. God is my witness, if I pray ever over any one thing of a local kind more than another, it is that the new Surrey Tabernacle may be an almost unprecedented blessing to thousands upon thousands when I am no more. I seem to imagine almost, if I could look down from heaven, when you are there, and I am gone, how should I rejoice to see a man occupying my place in a way that should crowd the place! I mean a man of truth, a man of grace, and a man of God. Petitions to this end I leave at the footstool of his mercy and must leave the results with him that works all things after the counsel of his own will.

But, secondly, the word “end” means also *attainment*. You have to attain a certain end, and that end that you are aiming to attain is at hand; you will soon attain it, it will not be long before you possess it, what the apostle calls the prize. Now let us see in what way he sought to attain it, and if we are in the same path, then in that sense also the end, that is the attainment of all things that we shall require for the completion of our happiness and for God's glory, is at hand. The apostle Paul, in the 3rd of Philippians, marks the path very clearly, and reckons up the several items, which I will not now stop to do, of his Jewish religion, which religion gained him great worldly advantages, great human friendships, great human applause, that no man was more admired; got on well by his religion; and who would not like such a religion as that? But when the Lord opened his eyes, and turned him from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, what does he then say? He marks out the path for us to walk in, that “what things were gain to me, those I counted loss.” They were gain to me after the flesh, but I saw that by those things I should have lost my precious soul; so that by such a religion as that I should have been eternally ruined. And what does he count these items he reckons up? He says, “I count them but dung, that I may win Christ;” “count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” And how is Christ won? He is won by three things, or rather, I ought to say, two things; you will remember them better, and that will include all; and those two things are confidence and sincerity of prayer. Those two will win Christ. You cannot win him by any works, human doings, for that would be like meriting, trying to merit his favor; that would be like trying, if I may without irreverence say so, trying to buy him over, as it were. But if you are led to see what his atonement can do, and have a corresponding confidence in that atonement; if you are led to see what his righteousness can do, and have an unbounded confidence in his mediatorial work, and in his power, see yourself ruined and lost without it, and that in connection with this you can say, and you can pray the prayer with some degree of earnestness, not merely for one moment, but that the desire itself remains a living desire in the soul, “O Lord, I beseech you, deliver my soul;” and when you read such a scripture as the following, that “you have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; you have cast all my sins behind your back,” you will pray thus, Lord, do so to me, show such mercy to me, bring me into such happy experience and realization. That is the way to win Christ. We have examples of it when he was in this world; every one that had confidence in him, and that looked sincerely to him, did he send one away? Oh, look at it, just look at the character of the suppliant, and compare your own character with it. They all came to him, those that came in a right spirit, in sincerity. The leper had confidence in him, but he was at the same time sincere in his desire to be cleansed. So, the man who sought for his eyes to be opened; in a word, so of all that thus came to him. Now, then, “that I may win Christ;” so, that faith in him, a sincere desire for the mercy of God by him, that wins Christ; he never turned a deaf ear to such, and never will. Only look to the words, “Him that comes to me.” Well, now, I suppose you have not one-tenth of that concern you could wish; yet you have enough to see your need of Christ; you have not one-tenth of the soul-trouble you could wish, you wish you had more soul-trouble, and you have not that realization of the truth you could wish; you feel somehow or another as though you had none of that experience and of that divine teaching that seem to distinguish the Christian. And yet with all this deficiency you see your need of Christ, I mean in the perfection of his work and in his righteousness; and you can truly say that every other confidence and hope is swept away; that if you have any confidence in God it is by what Christ has done, and not by what you have done; it is by the excellency of the Son of God, and not by any excellency in you, that if you have a right to conclude you have a hope at all, it is simply in and by what he has done. Now his words

must prove true in your case. You are come to him in the way of approbation, in a way of hope, in a way of acknowledgment; he sees that you feel and see that without him you can do nothing, without him you are lost; you are come to him, and he has said, "Him that comes to me I will in no way cast out." Thus, then, such an one, though his faith be small, he shall attain the great end; and great faith and little faith, strong hope and weak hope, will both by-and-bye be lost in sight; and then little faith will come into the same beatific vision, into the same glory, into the same scene, into the same degree of knowledge and of joy, in a brighter world, when these differences and degrees of faith shall cease to be. Look at the dying thief, and see how he attained, by faith in the Savior, by confidence in him, and by sincerity of prayer. Think you that the thief had not full confidence in the Savior's ability? Think you that he was not sincere when he said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom"? And did the Savior make the slightest hesitation whatever in giving that promise to the thief? Not the slightest. Did he make any hesitation in any of the good that he did? Did he make any hesitation with Saul of Tarsus, or with anyone? No; nor does he now. And we all know that there is a great deal to be reckoned from the spirit and the manner in which a thing is done; and so, the Lord does things in such a spirit of love, of willingness, of perfection, everything to encourage. We may toil and row till the fourth watch of the night, but when the Master comes, the winds and waves are at once silent, and we can rejoice that we have not followed a cunningly devised fable, but that we have followed him who is mighty to save; his own arm brought salvation. "And the fellowship of his sufferings." I should think that meant two things: fellowship with God by the sufferings of Christ. I should think it alluded to that; but I am more inclined to think something else, that it means to be reproached with him. If his people are afflicted, let me be afflicted, with them rather than enjoy the Egyptian pleasures of sin for a season. If the truth be reproached, let me be reproached with it; if the truth go down in public estimation, let me go down with it; if the truth be almost universally denounced, and even by men who profess to preach it in one part of their ministry denounced it in another, let me go down with it. If God in his sovereignty be hated, let me be hated with him; if Christ in the perfection of his work and the eternal security of his sheep be hated and despised, let me be despised with him. And thus, while we win Christ, are found in him, and know the power of his resurrection, we shall be willing to suffer reproach for his name. We should learn a lesson or two, if such a thing were possible, which it is not, that we could be transferred back to the apostolic age, and the world could be replaced just as it was then; though you may judge, if you read carefully the word of God in what light the apostles were viewed, yes, the Savior himself, "And if they call the master of the house Beelzebub, much more they of his household." So, then, the people of God, if they are reproached, or faulty, I will side with them rather than side with their enemies; and let them be reproached where they may, or how they may, or the truth either, the people of God are the people of God; and whatever faults they may have, they will come out of them in God's own time; and as for the truth itself, that is faultless, and we rejoice that Christ is faultless, that our God is faultless. So, then, "You shall be hated of all men for my name's sake; but he that shall endure" this hatred and its consequences, "unto the end, the same shall be saved." That is the path by which the apostle sought to attain the prize. "Not," he says, "as though I had already attained, either were already perfect," not in the sense I shall be by-and-bye, "but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also, I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Thus, then, the great end at which we aim is at hand. God is near unto us, we are near unto him; eternity is nigh unto us, and we are nigh unto it; there is but a step between us and the attainment of that eternal bliss that remains for the people of God.

But, lastly, *the ultimate destiny of the people* is a doctrine that this text leads us to, if not contained immediately in the text. Now those of you that know not the Lord, not concerned for eternal things, you have a fivefold wrath to come in contrast to Christians. The man that lives and dies not born of God, the first part of the wrath that man has to meet is in death. And although with the ungodly there are no bands in their death, and they very often die apparently happy, yet they die under the wrath of God; the indignation of the great God is in their death; his wrath is in their death; but he turns the ungodly man to destruction, and says, "Return, return," dies under wrath, God is against him there. The second part of the wrath is that as soon as ever, the very instant, that the soul is absent from the body, it lifts up its eyes in hell. What a fearful condition, then! the natural man, the man that knows not God in the faith of the gospel, "The end of all things is at hand." The third part of the wrath is the demonstration of his guilt at the last day. Sin will be by the Judge himself demonstrated to everyone. The whole world:

"With joy or terror shall confess  
The glory of his righteousness."

The fourth part of the wrath to come is the terrible sentence, "Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire." The fifth part of the wrath to come will be the destruction of their estates. This earth and the works therein shall be burned up. We will suppose one, only one, could linger in the air until that is accomplished; he would say, That is the only abode we had and that is burnt up, that is gone, there is no hope of ever returning; the great God does not intend we shall return, for all our inheritances are burnt up; it is all gone before the great conflagration, and the very space once occupied by that globe is now filled with the clouds of God's wrath, and an awful scene it is. This is the wrath to come. But, in conclusion, just look at the Christian. The Christian dies, what does he meet? In the valley of the shadow of death, the smiles of heaven, the presence of Jesus, the comforts of the gospel, the consolations of eternal mercy. "To die is gain." Die, for him to die is a blessing. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." When the Christian is absent from the body, where is he? Present with the Lord. And what is there there? Fulness of joy, pleasures for evermore. When the Christian comes to judgment, what is there to be demonstrated to him then? His perfection by Christ Jesus. He will present you unrebukable, unblameable, with exceeding joy, without a spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, What a contrast between the two! Fourth, what will be the sentence toward the Christian? Come, you blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," Fifth, is the Christian's inheritance gone? No.