

GLENWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH

January 3, 2021

Living Fully in Light of the Future

*1 Peter 4:7-11*

Pastor Paul Jackson

[music: "Be Thou My Vision"]

*Michelle Jensen:*

Good morning, and happy New Year. We're so glad to see you here this morning, and for those of you who are joining us online welcome.

With the new year, we have a lot of new opportunities that you're going to want to be aware of. The first is, if you have not already started a Bible reading plan for the year, you're in luck; we have some to choose from. Glenwood has put three different Bible reading plans on their website this year, and the three that you can choose from, if you choose to go that route, are the M'Cheyne plan - where you can read through the Old Testament once and the new Testament and Psalms twice. There's also a plan put out by the Bible project, which includes videos and commentary to go along with your reading, and finally there is a straightforward read-through-the-Bible plan. So for more information you can head to Glenwood's website, you can see the [link above](#), or you can pick up printed plans out in the foyer this morning.

Next Sunday, January 10th, we're going to take a few minutes during each of our services to say "thank you" to Nathan and the Nymeyer family for their ten years of service at Glenwood. So, if you would like to send them a thank-you note, or a note

of encouragement, you can drop that in the mail this week, or you can stop by the office and drop that office in person Tuesday through Thursday, 9-4 PM.

And lastly, women's Bible study is starting up again this year. We'll be starting on January 18th and 19th. And, as we did in the fall, we'll be meeting on Zoom. And the session will be studying *Finding God Faithful* by Kelly Minter, which is a study of God's faithfulness in the life of Joseph. So, if you would like to join us, you can get more information at the [link above](#), and you can sign up online as well.

Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, as we look back on the year behind us, and look forward to what is ahead, we can say with confidence You are faithful. For all the ways we have seen your faithfulness evidenced around us, in each of our lives, in our families, in our church, we are thankful. Help us to be eager to recount Your faithfulness to one another. For our time spent in worship today, may our hearts be open and ready to take in Your words, so that we may be changed to be more like You. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

*Ben Rico:*

Amen. It is our prayer that we would be changed by the Spirit of our mighty God to be more like Christ-- to live like Him, to serve like Him, to be humble like Him, even as we bring glory to the Father through Him.

In preparation for this service, I was meditating on Psalm 73. And even the psalmist here is dealing with this inward battle-- to chase after the values of the world or to chase after the service of his God, to chase after the heart worship that God longs from His people. And so we're joined in that battle as well; we experience those very same things. When I was reading that, I felt like I was

praying those words to my Heavenly Father. And indeed I was. And I would ask that we would pray those together today.

Would you follow along in this portion of Psalm 73? Even as we battle with giving to the Lord what is the Lord's, or serving the world with our lives and with our desires and our intentions. This is how the psalmist concludes in Psalm 73, if you'll follow along with me.

*"Nevertheless, I am continually with you;  
you hold my right hand.  
You guide me with your counsel,  
and afterward You will receive me to glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.  
  
For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;  
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.  
But for me it is good to be near God;  
I have made the Lord God my refuge,  
that I may tell of all your works."*

[Psalm 73:23-28, ESV]

Heavenly Father, let us tell of Your works, of Your glory through how we live, through how we honor You, through how we give up ourselves as Christ has given Himself for us. You have given us Your love; let us give You all that we are. We thank You for leading us in Your Spirit to do just that. And we pray truly that You would be glorified and that You would show Your glory to Your people. In Jesus' name, amen.

[music: "Let Your Glory Shine"]

Amen.

*Pastor Paul:*

Good morning! Happy new year.

Friday morning, early, I pulled into a drive-through coffee shop, pulled up to the counter. And two gals were serving in the coffee shop, and they were both very, very buoyant and cheerful. They clearly had had their coffee; I had not. And they both said, "happy New Year!" And then they commiserated about 2020 and how crazy it was. And they said, "2021 can't be any worse than 2020." And I said, "Maybe." And they laughed! They thought that was absolutely hilarious. I mean, because we shared something; we just shared a little bit of moment-- hoping we're pulling out of 2020, moving into 2021 into something that's new and more exciting.

But how do you describe 2020? Well, my brother was out for a walk, and he saw a yard sign, and he took a picture, and he shared it with our family thread. And here is what he sent me. How do you describe 2020? That's right. "Stink, stank, stunk." Glad that that's behind us. It was a challenging year.

But let's be optimistic. Before long, the daffodils are going to bloom. Before long, we're going to feel the splash of the sun and its warmth. Before long, we're going to emerge from hibernation, absorb the blue of the sky, look around us, see faces for the first time in a long time. We're going to think, "That person looks familiar. Where have I seen them before?" And then we'll remember.

And what is it that we will remember? Will we remember the distance and disagreements of 2020? Will we distrust? Will we feel anger or dislike? How does a family recover from the disagreements of Covid and the disagreements of 2020?

How does a church family recover? How does a church come together when it's been pulled apart? What's that going to look like? How are we going to do that?

Well, let's open our Bibles to I Peter 4:7-11. We're going to resume our study, our sermon series in the book of I Peter. And the last line of I Peter 4:11 is the best New Year's resolution of all time. The very last line of 4:11. "*So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*" God is glorified in and through His Son Jesus Christ. To Him belongs all glory and dominion. Jesus Christ is our High King. Jesus Christ reigns from on high. He is at work in us and through us.

I hope that's the dominant and ultimate experience for each of us in 2021, that we experience God's power and God's person in fresh and vivid ways, that He revives our heart and inspires our relationships, that He works through us and in us to restore and to draw near to Him, giving glory to Him, that He works in us in tangible ways that shine a light on what only God can do. Only God can accomplish our salvation, our redemption, and work in us and through us. And I hope that's the outcome for us, individually and as families and as a church, when we look back on 2021-- we can say, "To God be the glory; He has done great things; He is doing great things." I hope that's our experience in 2021.

How do we get there? How do we get there so that God is glorified in any and everything? Well, that's where verses 7-11 come in, in I Peter 4. How do we get there, so that we're glorifying God in everything and in every way?

Well first, let's get ready for the return of Jesus Christ. That's the first part of verse 7. Verse 7 it says, in I Peter 4, "*The end of all things is near.*" Now, that sounds really ominous, doesn't it? The world is going to end! The end of all things is near, but if we share a resurrection life with Jesus Christ, then this is great news.

Right now is just a blip on the radar of redemptive history. What Peter says here at the beginning of verse 7 is that we're in the last stage of God's salvation

redemption plan, that we've already seen creation and its fall. We've already read of God's blessing and promise to Abraham, of His chosen people Israel, of Moses, the Exodus, the promised land, exile of Israel, the return, the birth of Jesus Christ, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, the giving of His Spirit, the completion of His word, the working in us and through us, prepping us as His bride for his return.

There is a coming judgement that God will do when He returns. That's how Peter began the book, is looking forward to the hope that we have only ultimately in and through Jesus Christ. Look at the opening words of I Peter 1:3-5. "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*" So Jesus Christ is alive. Because He is alive, so is our hope. It's real. It's legit. It is as alive as Jesus right now because of Christ.

In verse 4, "*to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*" And the "you"? That's us. That's each of us who have a personal relationship with this Jesus who died and is raised from the dead.

And what is God doing in the life of those who share this living hope? Verse 5, "*who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*" That's what Peter means in 4:7, that we are to be ready for this salvation that will be revealed in the last time.

We're in the last time, the last stage of God's redemptive plan, so that right now it's just, as I said - a blip. Our lives are but a moment on the radar of God's redemptive history. But right now, God's working in us, prepping us to be with Him. We're His bride, and as His bride, this moment is that moment when we get ready to present ourselves to Him, so that we can be without shame at His appearing, at His return. Right now is not for long, but right now God is working His plan. He's working in our

world. He's working in His people and in His church, shaping us prepping us to be with Him.

How can we glorify God in 2021? The second part of verse 7, pray about everything. I read verse 7 in its entirety. *"The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgement and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer."* We're to inform our prayers with clear, alert, biblically-shaped thinking. *"Sound judgement," "sober spirit"* are almost synonyms. They mean almost exactly the same thing. They're added together like that for emphasis.

It's the same idea that Peter introduced in 1:13, in which he compels us to be alert. Verse 13 chapter 1 *"Prepare your minds for action."* So how do you get ready for action? How do you get ready to do what God wants you to do at any given moment? *"Keep sober in spirit."*-- that's that alertness of mind that's informed by Scripture, that's shaped by the word of God.

It's the same idea in 1 Peter 5:8, exact same phrase, in which Peter warns us that there is an adversary that wants to do damage, wants to do damage to the people of God, to all of humanity. That we should be alert. So check out 5:8. *"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* We're to pray about everything. But when we pray, we're to think with clarity.

So, we are to think with truth, so that we would-- the best explanation is, we can think-- go back to 1 Peter 2, look at verse 1-- we can think this way. We can think with malice. We can think with deceit. We can think with hypocrisy. We can think with envy. We can think with slander. We can step into all of those natural impulses of the flesh. We can think with doubt and fear and distrust God in the moment. We can question whether or not He wants us to actually obey that verse or find reasons why not to.

But how do we displace verse 1 in 1 Peter 2? And that is with the next verse. *"Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted of the kindness of the Lord."* Since we've tasted of the kindness of the Lord, we hunger and thirst for the word of the Lord that builds us up, that matures us, that replaces negative thoughts, that gives us nourishment and sustenance, that grows us up in our thinking, and then our thinking is alert and informs our prayer that God is able to do far more abundantly than we ask or think. That He has done great things, He is doing great things, and He will do great things. So that the Word of God informs our prayer and that we can trust Him with all we are and all we have.

We can trust Him in the moment; we can trust Him for tomorrow and however many days God gives to us. The end of all things is at hand. We're at the last stage of God's redemptive plan before His Song returns, and we are to pray in a biblically-fashioned, alert way.

Why? Why pray? Because you and I can't do the next verse without God's help. This next verse is just about the hardest thing to live out in its full and truthful way.

Thirdly, work hard at loving others from the heart. Verses 8 and 9, chapter 4. Peter writes, *"Above all."* Above all. *"Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining."* Keep fervent in our love for others. Don't give up on loving others like God loves us. When love dies, insults and grievances rule the day.

The phrase is pulled right out of Proverbs 10:12, which is picturesque: *"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses."* Peter's not saying that love ignores an offense, but that we respond to an offense - an insult, a hurt to us - in ways that are true and loving and characteristic of the person of Jesus Christ. What it means for love to cover an offense or an insult is that it doesn't return in kind. It doesn't multiply wrongs, so that one wrong doesn't give birth to a host of wrongs. Love interrupts the offense.



God initiates love with us. God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 1 John 4:19 says that *"we love because He first loved us."* Because He loved us first, that means that in Christ we can love like Christ. We can love because we are loved. His love covers us; His love forgives; His love covers our weaknesses and our failures. And so we too can cover the weaknesses and failures - the humanity of other people - in true, legit, loving actions for the good of the other. So that love covers an offense.

So let's not roll forward the offenses of 2020. Let the offenses of 2020 be in the rearview mirror, becoming smaller and smaller as we get further and further away from them. Let's use 2021 as a new opportunity to interrupt the insult, the offense, the wound, the wrong that others may have said to us or have said about us.

Loving like that is hard; it's messy. So, pray. Pray. Don't let the offense rule the day. Don't let it ruin your home or your relationship. Keep fervent in love for each other. And stay connected to each other. This time of physical distancing has been so very, very difficult for all of us. Now we're going to emerge into the spring and into the summer. We don't really know what's in front of us. But we want to reconnect. We want to welcome. We want to embrace. We want to invite people who are different than we are, who think differently than we are, with a warmth of acceptance, a welcome, a sharing of God's blessing with others, without grumbling about the past or the inconveniences that we might feel in that moment. So let's work hard at loving others from the heart.

And then fourthly, let's use God's gifts for the good of others and the glory of God. Chapter 4:10-11. *"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who serves by the strength which God supplies. So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."*

God gives. God gives special gifts. And that makes sense, because God is the most generous person we know. He is generous with us. To those who were trapped in darkness, He transfers us into His kingdom of marvelous light. To those who were dead to Him, He makes us alive to Him. To those who were trapped in sin, He forgives, so that forgiveness itself is a gift. He forgives us. He cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

God is the most generous person that we know. He gives salvation life; He gives special gifts. He blesses us with special gifts so that we can bless others with special gifts. These are spiritual gifts. He's not just saying that we only get one gift. We may get multiple gifts. Spiritual gifts are a wide range of gifts. We have different gifts.

Sometimes people say, "I don't know what my gifts are, what my unique talents or skills or skill-set." We tend to look at ourselves and-- instead of looking at the God who gives our gifts. And so I encourage people. I encourage people to explore, to do something for the good of others. I mean, I've told people that before, "Just do something." Do something for the good of others. See how it goes. See how it rolls out. Go through a process of discovery where you're willing to try something new, you're willing to explore, you're willing to get out of your comfort zone. Say "yes" to somebody who asks you to serve. So that we can be a part of a body who's giving of ourselves in meaningful ways. Let's be willing to learn. Let's be willing to fail.

And then let's listen to people that are worthy of our trust. People who know Jesus. People who'll tell us the truth about Jesus and His word, and tell us the truth about ourselves. Let's discover how God wired us, and then let's give it to Him and trust Him with our gifts.

Let's do like Paul exhorted Timothy. Let's stir up the gift that God has given to us. And we stir up that gift. We grow by using our gift for the glory of God and the good of others. So that our spiritual gifts are tools that are for the good of the

body, that are for the good of the church. So that we can bless each other in the giving of our very different gifts.

This last year was full of highlights as a church and reason to thank God and glorify God. I mean, in early March, who would have saw this coming. And then we move into April and into the summer. We had never done a service online. We had never recorded, filmed, done a video of a service in this room. People emerged. They gave of themselves. We learned; we failed. There's a lot that we didn't like at first, but we kept persevering; we kept going. People kept giving. And as they gave of themselves, they gave of their technical gifts, their artistic gifts, their teaching gifts. Women's ministries having zoom Bible studies. Men's ministries, Friday morning, Saturday morning Bible studies. Glenwood Kids became a connection point for our congregation. Who would have envisioned Glenwood Kids? Introducing such a wide variety of people and families, so that there is this merging of the body and the giving of our gifts to each other, introducing us to new people in our congregation, watching with delight those who taught kids about Jesus in creative and life-giving ways.

So many have blessed us with their technical gifts, taught us new skills, serve us without us even knowing we're being served, running cameras, hooking up wires, editing. You've welcomed people into our services on Sunday mornings. You've made phone calls to check on people. You've written emails, notes of encouragement. You've prayed for others. You helped others move from one home or one place to another. You've fixed broken things for people. You've comforted hurting people who've suffered unexpected and deep loss. You've shown compassion. Thank you for giving of yourselves for the good of others.

And as we emerge into whatever is next, let's open our eyes, look at the opportunity that God sends our way so that we can give of ourselves in ways that we may not even imagine right now, that we would be willing to help, willing to serve in big and small ways, as teachers and on teams. Let's introduce people to Jesus and train and disciple others in the way of Jesus.

God graces us with gifts so that we can then grace others. Because of His grace we don't deserve the gifts that He gives, but we give our gift, first of all, back to the one who gave us our gifts.

Then Peter gives us two big categories of gifts. He says, "*Whoever speaks, speak words that give utterance to God's word.*" So that whatever speech, whether it's in personal conversation with a friend, or between a husband and a wife, or a family, or whether it's public, whether it's in a small group or in a larger group, that our words would advance the person and the way of Jesus, that our words would teach of Jesus, that we would encourage people to follow Jesus, that our words would reflect the words and the way of God.

And if our words are to reflect the word of God, then our speech begins, first of all, with a humble posture before God. A listening to God, a listening to what God says. So one of the wisest things that we can do for 2021 is that we listen and lean into the word of God. So, when we encourage the read-throughs, as were introduced to you this morning, that's not intending to be a mechanistic, mechanical check off the list thing; 'okay, now I've done that.' It is sustaining. This is life-giving, that we would listen with a humble and open heart, not reading into what God says, but reading and understanding what He says. That recreates the way that we think. It sharpens our mind, so that now we can use our tongue in the way that God delights in us using our tongue, so that we can listen to what God says, that we can engage God's word on a regular basis. And let's memorize something new. Let's memorize something from the word of God this year that we have never before memorized.

God is the giver of grace gifts, and sometimes people are totally surprised by the gifts that God gave. One of the most phenomenal communicators I have ever heard, who advanced the word and the way of Jesus-- I could listen to him-- I just grew up delighting in this guy's skillset and ability and what he said about God. But in one of his books, he said this: "With the kind of start I had in life, I'm sure I could have died and gone to hell, and nobody would have particularly cared. I was

born into a broken home. My parents separated before I was born. The only time I saw them together was eighteen years later when I was called to testify in a divorce court." But then a man came into his very rough neighborhood and began a ministry for kids and introduced a bunch of them to Christ, including this young boy. And that boy would grow into a man-- who is now dead; he is with Jesus-- but he had a long and fruitful ministry for Christ. And the last time I heard him speak, it was in a stadium absolutely crammed full and packed with people. And you couldn't have found any of us out in that room with a telescope. But here he is, in the spotlight, and you think, 'now that is a special gift.' It is, but it is no more special than the gifts God has given to you.

God knows us, inside and out. He knows who we are. No gift is too small. No gift, given to Christ, is insignificant in any way.

There are two categories. The first is a speaking category of gift that has many, many faces; looks like many different things. But the second category is "*whoever serves*." There are countless opportunities to serve. And, before we serve, it's not uncommon, in those moments before we serve, to think, 'I don't really feel like serving.' But, then we get up; we get out of the la-z-boy, and we start doing something for the good of another. And suddenly, we feel a lot better about ourselves and about what we're doing, and, almost by accident, we've taken the focus off of ourselves, so that we can give this other person something for their good. And God supplies, He says here, the strength.

Elizabeth Elliot was just a remarkable woman. And she wrote, of what to give God, she wrote:

"If the only thing you have to offer is a broken heart, you offer a broken heart. So that, in a time of grief, the recognition that my gift is material for sacrifice has been a very great strength for me. Realizing that nothing I have, nothing I am will be refused when offered to Christ I simply give it to Christ as the little boy gave his five loaves and two fishes-- with the same feeling of the disciples when they said,

'what is the good of that for such a crowd?' Naturally, in almost anything I offer to Christ, my reaction will be, 'What is the good of that?' The point is, the use He makes of our gift is His blessing to us."

God gives so that we can give to Him, for the good and gain of others. God gives strength to serve Him. It's God who uses our gifts to advance His cause and His person, for His glory. And no gift is too small if it's given to Christ.

So what are we going to do next? What are we going to do in 2021?

Well, let's get ready for the return of Jesus. Let's pray about everything. Let's work hard at loving others from the heart. And let's use God's gifts for the good of others and the glory of God.

And that's what we get to do next. This morning we get to remember God's greatest, most gracious of gifts. That God so loved, that He gave. That He gave His own Son, who would live our life, die our death, raise to life, so we have life - resurrection life - with Jesus, now and forever.

So, I invite you to prepare your communion elements for the Lord's table. Whether you're online or in the house. And I also invite you to prepare your heart, that we confess, that we thank God for His goodness, that we thank God for what He has done, that we look forward with faith in His goodness to what He is going to do next. And that we would take some time, some silence, as Ben and Colleen come and play, and that we would get ready to obey the words of Jesus.

[music: "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (instrumental)]

The night on which He was betrayed, Jesus gathered those who knew Him best and loved Him most. He gathered them, and He broke bread and drank the cup with them, and He assigned new meaning, a new understanding to the breaking of the

bread and the drinking of the wine. He said that the bread represents His body, broken for us. He tells us, *"Take, eat, do this in remembrance of me."*

Then He took the cup, and He said that the cup represents His lifeblood, spilled out for the many, for the forgiveness of sin. He said, *"Take, drink, do this in remembrance of me."*

*Ben Rico:*

Amen. To Him be all glory and dominion forever and ever. Would you read, or recite, with me as we pray to our heavenly Father:

*Our Father in heaven*

*Hallowed be Your name*

*Your Kingdom come*

*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*

*Give us this day our daily bread*

*And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*

*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*

*For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever*

*Amen*

[music: "Lead On, O King Eternal"]

Amen. That is our prayer, and He is our God. Give Him glory, give Him honor. Go in peace.