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Will The Circle Be Unbroken

1 PETER 4:7-11

Introduction

1. There is a hymn which is not found in our hymnals, but one I believe that many of you have heard at one time or other.
2. It was written in 1907 by Ada R. Habershon, and its words help to prepare us for God's words to us today through the apostle Peter.
3. This hymn is known by the title, *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*.

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4. These are the words from the first two stanzas and the chorus:

¹ There are loved ones in the glory
Whose dear forms you often miss,
When you close your earthly story
Will you join them in their bliss?

² In the joyous days of childhood,
Oft they told of wondrous love,
Pointed to the dying Savior,
Now they dwell with Him above.

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Refrain:
Will the circle be unbroken
by and by, yes, by and by?
In a better home awaiting
in the sky, in the sky?

5. If you will notice, Peter begins this section of his letter with the words, "The end of all things is near . . ."

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6. This was a constant theme of the New Testament writers:

“ . . . now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.” (Romans 13:11, NASB95)

“ . . . the coming of the Lord is near.” (James 5:8, NASB95)

“Children, it is the last hour . . .” (1 John 2:18, NASB95)

7. If we were to consider all of redemptive history to be a play, you and I would be living during the last act.
- a. God created the heavens and the earth.
 - b. Sin entered into His perfect creation through Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve in the garden.
 - c. God sent a flood to destroy the wickedness of man from the earth, but preserved one man, Noah, and his family with which to start over again.
 - d. From his descendants, God chose one man, Abraham, and his descendants through which to bless mankind.
 - e. He raised up the nation Israel by delivering them from their bondage in Egypt, and brought them into the land he had promised to Abraham hundreds of years earlier.
 - f. Though that nation would prove unfaithful, God kept a remnant and ultimately brought forth His own Son as the One who would die to redeem the faithful.
 - g. Through His death, burial and resurrection, He purchased salvation for those who would come to Him in obedient faith.
 - h. He has returned to His Father’s right hand and is awaiting the day when the Father tells Him it is time to come back and claim His own.
8. It is for this day that you and I now wait.
9. The fact that “the end is near” is the guiding principle in all that we do.
10. One of the proofs that you and I are Christians is not just that we have a hope for the future, but that this hope makes a difference in our lives today, in the present.

11. As we each live in expectation of our Lord's second coming, there are some things which need to take priority in our lives.

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We Are People Who . . .

A. PRAY WITH PURPOSE

“The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.” (1 Peter 4:7, NASB95)

1. Prayer is a powerful weapon that God has put in our hands:
 - a. Through it we reach out to God in times of persecution and temptation (Ephesians 6:18-19).

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,” (Ephesians 6:18–19, NASB95)

- b. We pray, not just for ourselves, but for one another (1 Thessalonians 5:25; James 5:16).

“Brethren, pray for us.” (1 Thessalonians 5:25, NASB95)

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” (James 5:16, NASB95)

2. For this reason we must “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
3. If we are to pray as we should, Peter says that we need to be “of sound judgment and sober spirit” (NASB95).
4. We need to be alert to the events going on around us and we need to

evaluate those events correctly in order to pray more intelligently.

- a. Do you and I know what is going on in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ? What are their needs at the moment?
 - b. Do we know the struggles which lay ahead for our youth? Those things which will attack their faith?
5. When we pray with purpose for one another, we pray for the specifics, those things which will help our brothers and sisters in Christ not only sustain their faith, but grow in it.

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B. LOVE FERVENTLY

“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8, NASB95)

1. This is the first of three statements in which Peter teaches us to respond to “one another” in a specific way.
2. Notice what Peter wrote at the beginning of this verse: “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another . . .”
3. Fervent love for one another is to take priority in our lives.
4. This is the fourth time in this letter that Peter exhorts us to love one another (1:22; 2:17; 3:8).

“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,” (1 Peter 1:22, NASB95)

“... love the brotherhood ...” (1 Peter 2:17, NASB95)

“... love as brothers ...” (1 Peter 3:8, NKJV)

5. Love is to be the controlling factor in all our relationships within this body of believers.
6. The love of which Peter writes here (*agape*) always seeks the good of our brother or sister.
7. It is a love of action, not just words, a love that involves sacrifice.

8. Paul called it “. . . the perfect bond of unity.” (Colossians 3:14, NASB95)
9. One very important fact about this love is that it “covers a multitude of sins.”
10. Long ago, a wise king, whom we know as Solomon, wrote, “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.” (Proverbs 10:12, NASB95)
11. How, does love do this?
 11. When we love our brother or sister as we should, we do not take offense easily.
 12. We bear the weaknesses and faults of others, just as they bear ours.
 13. We don't harbor grievances and look for an opportunity to get even.
 14. Instead, we look for ways to help that person.
 15. We seek to restore him or her if they have strayed from God (cf. Galatians 6:1).
 - ❑ Imagine what this congregation would be like if we each loved one another fervently from our hearts.

Slide 7**C. DELIGHT IN HOSPITALITY**

“Be hospitable to one another without complaint.” (1 Peter 4:9, NASB95)

1. Travel in Peter's day was not as convenient as it is today.
2. The hotels with which we are familiar were unheard of.
3. Inns were few and far between. Those that did exist had bad reputations.
4. Christians traveling from place to place often stayed in one another's homes.
5. The need today is for us as Christians to practice hospitality in a general way — to open our hearts and our homes to one another.
6. How often have we or someone we know complained about a congregation being “cold.” Our goal here is not to let that be said about us.

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2, NASB95)

7. Let's make it a point to get to know our brothers and sisters in Christ.

8. Invite an elder and his wife to your house for a meal.
9. Sponsor an activity which will bring young people together with other young Christians.
10. Hospitality requires time and effort on our part.
11. Peter said that you and I are to make the effort and take the time to be hospitable without complaining.

Slide 8**D. SERVE WITH DEVOTION**

“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 is serving by the strength which God supplies . . .” (1 Peter 4:10–11a, NASB95)

1. Each one of us as Christians have received a gift from God, given to us at our salvation.
2. In Ephesians 4:7, the apostle Paul wrote, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7, NASB95).
3. Five verses later, he wrote that the elders, our teachers, Kyle and myself are to equip each of you “for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12, NIV84).
4. Every single one of us is crucial to the effective working of this church family.
5. This is why Peter says that you and I are to use the gift we have received “in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (v. 10).
6. What God has given to you as a gift of His grace, is not for you alone.
7. He has given you this gift for the benefit of all of us.
8. So, as Peter writes, “Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God” (v. 11a).

- a. We cannot limit the speaking to just preaching, teaching, and evangelism.
 - b. We might also add singing, words of praise or encouragement.
 - 1) It is through our singing, according to the apostle Paul, that we teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16).
 - 2) It is also through our speaking that we “encourage one another and build up one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
 - 3) We comfort one another with the words concerning our Lord’s return (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
 - 4) The cards which so many of you have sent over the last 20 months to those suffering because of the flood and to those who have helped in the recovery have strengthened many a soul.
 - 5) The cards you sent recently to those in our school system, letting them know that you are praying for them.
 - 6) The cards you regularly send to those who are going through various medical procedures or who are caring for a loved one.
 - c. When we do any of these things we are to do so “as one who is speaking the utterances of God” (v. 11a).
9. Peter also tells us that whenever we serve, we are to do so “as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies” (v. 11b).
- a. It is evident all around us that the service which we as a congregation have rendered to our community is through the strength which God has supplied.
 - b. Left to ourselves, many of us would have worn out long ago, but God has given us the strength to see it through to the end.
 - c. When it comes to what many of you do for various members of this congregation, you are like the “energizer bunny.” You just keep on going and going and going.
 - d. However, I know it is through the strength which God supplies.

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10. The point in all of this is that in all the things we each do with the gift which God has given us, we glorify Him through Jesus Christ.

“ . . . so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:11a, NASB95)

11. As we keep saying over and over again, “the glory is all His” because to Him “belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Conclusion

1. With all this in mind, I would like to ask you one question.
2. When all is said and done, and our Lord returns in “His glory, and all the angels with Him” (Matthew 25:31), will the circle be unbroken?

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3. The last stanza to the hymn written by Miss Habershon so long ago contains these words:

**One by one their seats were empty,
One by one they went away,
Now the fam'ly is parted,
Will it be complete one day?**

4. Will you be there on that great and final day?
5. Will others from this congregation be there because you have used your gift to in faithful service to our Lord?
6. Let's do our best to see that no one misses out on that eternal home going for which we all yearn.