

Amen. Thank you all for leading beautifully, and I pray that all of us will be able to say, by the end of this service, that we are a child of the King.

Ever since we were young, we've all probably been warned about certain things. Look both ways before you cross the street. Don't put your finger in an electrical outlet. Don't put your finger into an empty light socket. Don't go out on a date with someone that would not be a good mate. Today we have many warnings, to wear your seatbelt, click it or ticket. We are taught not to drive under any kind of influence. Don't text and drive. We have alarms, bells, whistles, lights, that try to give us warning. Even in our car when we're riding down the road, if we veer over at all in the next lane, then our steering wheel begins to vibrate and have resistance, and a light says, "Lane departure. Lane departure," to alert you to get back over onto your lane.

Maybe you've been watching, this time of year, your favorite television show, or maybe your favorite ball game when you've heard this on the screen, "The national weather service has issued a severe thunderstorm warning for the following counties, Woodford, Franklin, Anderson, Shelby, until 8:00 pm." Where is that guy? Where is that guy? Is he in a closet somewhere? Then maybe when the weather turns inclement, then we hear that tornado siren. Man, I even run out of breath and my voice breaks, but to warn us of a storm. I mean, we have fire alarms. We have smoke detectors. You go to the pool, there's a lifeguard with a whistle to warn to get out of the water or stop the running or stop the horse play, or to blow the whistle to jump in to save someone's life. All of these things are to warn us and to protect us, or hopefully to save us.

Let me ask you a question. How are you warned in your spiritual life how to live? How are you warned in your spiritual life in how to live? I think we have the word of God that gives us God's word and teaches us how to live. It gives us warning. I think we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and it's my prayer that you will. We have the Holy Spirit, which lives inside of those of us who have accepted Christ, that brings conviction and guidance and warning and direction.

We have Christian family members that try to warn us about the life that we are living. We have Christian friends or Christian brothers and sisters. We hopefully have a church that has pastors and ministers that try to warn people how to live. We have signs of the time that warn us about the life that we're living and that we need to get our lives on track.

Our scripture passage today that I've shared from in days gone by, the Lord placed it on my heart, Peter is, if you will, sounding a warning and a word of motivation because these Christians had been persecuted because of their faith in Christ, and as a result, they are suffering and scattered all over Asia Minor, which is present day Turkey. They had been scattered because of their faith in the Lord. Peter writes this letter to give a word of hope in the midst of their persecution.

I'd be willing to say that some of you here today, you find yourself in a place of suffering and a place of heartache, and a place of persecution and you're looking for a word of hope, a word of encouragement. While on vacation just recently, something happened in my family, and you're going to find out a little bit more later on. But God opened my spiritual eyes, opened my heart, and gave me an urgent message.

Some of you are here today because you got a text that said Todd's going to be giving an urgent message today. I hate to disappoint some of you. I am not going to be resigning during this service, if that's why you came. I'm not resigning.

But God placed a message on my heart that I pray that every single one of us will respond to His warning, because Peter gives a clear message. He gives a clear warning in God's word. He says in verse 7, "The end of all things is near." He's warning us that we must have a realization of the brevity of life. This is a constant note that is struck all throughout the New Testament.

We see Paul say in Philippians 4:5, "The Lord is near," or, "The Lord is at hand." We see James say in James 5:8, "The coming of the Lord is near." John says in 1st John Chapter 2:18, "My dear children, this is the last hour." Now, what are they referring to? They're referring to the Greek word *parousia*, which means the second coming of Christ.

Now, we know what Jesus said in Matthew 24:36, "No one knows about that day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, not the son, but only the Father." But the message is clear as if life is breathed. James said in that passage, James 4:14, why, you don't even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You're a mist or a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Life is so short. There is one simple truth that's inescapable for all of us. It's the one thing that every person has in common. We're all going to die one day unless the Lord comes back first. We're all going to die. The Gospel Coalition sent out these startling statistics, that 55.3 million people die every year. 151,600 people die every day. 6,316 people die every hour. 105 people die every minute. That should be an eye opener to you and me that none of us are exempt from crossing over from this life to our eternal destination.

There are 2.9 billion people groups where the gospel has not been reached yet, has not been taught yet. Think about all the people that are dying without Christ, and the message is that we must be ready. We must get our house in order. Let me ask you today, if this were to be your last day on this earth, would you be ready to meet your maker? Would you be ready for your eternal destination? I pray that every single one of us, if today was the end, that we would all be ready. We would have our houses in order, our spiritual lives in check. We would be at peace with God.

Just this past weekend, just yesterday, as I mentioned in my prayer, this town grieved over the loss of a fine, young teacher from Franklin County High School. Adam Hyatt was 38 years old, taught history, was active in his church. He was a Christian, was a deacon. Had worked with youth. He had taught Sunday school. He was a mentor. He was a great guy. I remember playing church softball against him, and always had a smile on his face.

I received a call just yesterday from one of our church members, Joyce [inaudible 00:10:03]. Joyce [inaudible 00:10:04] shared with me that she and Wendy last weekend were coming back on the interstate northbound. They had just come on this side of the Jellico Mountain and were at a rest stop when they heard squealing, screeching tires and a terrible crash. It was that moment when Adam met his eternal fate. She shared with me that an off-duty EMT ran to the scene, a registered nurse, and many others. But the death was fast and it was painless. Even though they tried to revive him, he had already slipped on over to the other side.

Joyce said, "Todd, you can share this if you want," but she said, "He was gone. It was peaceful. And she said, "We need to thank God. Every second from God is a gift." Every second that we're given on this earth is a gift. Now, I'm going to be the first to tell you, I don't understand these things, except that we live in a fallen world. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden is when death entered, sickness, pain,

hardship, why bad things happen to good people one day. We can ask Him now, but we may not know until we get over there and we can stand before the Lord and ask Him face to face. But the message is clear, none of us are promised tomorrow. We must come to the realization that life is brief.

Now, if there's something we need to do, we need to do it now. Paul said in 2nd Corinthians 6:2, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation." And I pray that we would hear His call because we must realize the brevity of life. But then we must hear the warning to live the right kind of life. He said in the second part of verse 7 that we are to be alert and of sober mind, ought to be self-controlled and to be alert. That means we can't be intoxicated. A man cannot be polluted with things of the world, with the sinful things that go on around us.

It seems to me that if a person realizes the nearness of Jesus Christ, then we would be prompted to change our lives to live the right kind of life. The right kind of life, I pray, is that we have the right kind of life with Jesus Christ, that we would be moved to start living. Let me ask you that question right now. Would you say you're living the right kind of life? You say, "Well, what do you mean by that? How do I know if I'm living the right kind of life?" Let me ask you this. Are you living in obedience to the Word of God? Are you living in bounds or out of bounds? Are you following God's ways or the world's ways? Are you living for Him? Are you living for yourself, or someone else?

If we are following God, then we're going to be inspired, we're going to be moved to live the right kind of life. It seems funny that Peter in one translation says to be serious and awake. To be serious and awake. It's funny that Peter is the one that's writing this because you remember when Jesus took his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, when he was praying about his father's will on the cross, do you remember in Matthew 26:40 and 41, Jesus came out. He found Peter and the others. Peter, James, and John had gone into the inner garden, and he said in Matthew 26:40 and 41, "Could you men not watch with me for one hour?" He asked Peter. He said, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." He said, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Peter must have been thinking back to those times. That's why he continued to repeat, like in 1st Peter 5:8, "Be self-controlled and alert. You enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

You better know this. The devil's not just looking to take a chunk out of you. He's looking to take you down. He wants to destroy your life. He wants to mess you up, not just for this life. He wants to mess you up for eternity. He wants to send you down the wrong path.

I recently told someone... I said, "I want to tell you this. The people you're hanging around with that are leading you down that wrong path, and leading you astray, they don't care about you at all. But God does. God loves you, and we love you, and we care about what happens to you."

Paul even said something very similar in 1st Thessalonians 5:6. He said, "So then, let us not be like others who are asleep. But let us be alert in self control. Then he said in Romans 13:11. He said, "The time has come for us to wake up from our slumber because our salvation is newer than when we first believed. The time is now to wake up from our spiritual slumber. Look, unbelievers and even some believers are spiritually insensitive. In other words, they are asleep in their sin. They don't care about spiritual things. All they care about is the here and now.

When we as Christians and those that are longing to have a relationship with Christ, we are called to live a right kind of life. What kind of life is that? A holy life. That means to be set apart, to be different than

the rest of the world. I pray today that you would be holy because he is holy, and we'd be challenged to get rid of those things that we know are bringing us down.

Maybe today you're here and you know you're not living the right kind of life because you've got anger toward someone. Maybe you're here and you've got unforgiveness towards someone. Maybe you're here today and you have jealousy or envy. Maybe you're here today and you've got guilt. Maybe you're here today and again you've got a critical attitude and spirit. Look, that's not the right kind of life that God desires. God desires us to live a life filled with the Holy Spirit and the fruits of the spirit. He said that we are to be the right kind of person so that we can pray, so that we can pray.

One Christian writer said that prayer, to him, is when we have Jesus in our hearts, as being in communion with the God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, you can gauge your spiritual vitality by how much you pray. Most of us can gauge how alive we are in Christ by how much time we spend in the presence of God in our prayer closet. And that you're not spending time in prayer, then you're probably not going to be on fire or awake for Jesus Christ. We'll only grow as much as we pray, and as much as we desire to be like Christ.

That's why Paul said in 1st Thessalonians 5:17 to pray continually or to pray without ceasing. That's being a constant awareness of the presence of God in our lives. Are you aware of the presence of God in your life? I'm reminded more and more everyday of how great God is and how I need Him every moment of every day. Nothing without Christ, and you're not either. He's what brings purpose and meaning into our lives.

But then, not only are we warned about the brevity of time and that we must live the right kind of life. But lastly, we are warned and encouraged to have the responsibility to love, the responsibility to love. He said in verse 8, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

Did you know the number one mark of an authentic Christian lifestyle is love. If you don't love people, then you better check yourself at the door to say, "Then maybe I have not fully given my life to Christ," because when we know Christ, we love people, and we love them anyway. We keep loving people.

When Jesus was asked by one of the teachers of the law, out of all the commandments, what is the most important one, in Mark 12:30 and 31. He said the most important one or the greatest one is this, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. The second is this, love your neighbor as yourself.

Let me ask, do you love your neighbor or do you hate them? Do you resent them? Do you despise them, can't stand to look at them? If you today call yourself a Christian, we love because Christ first loved us, is what the Bible says. For God so loved the world, John 3:16, that he gave His one and only son that whoever would believe in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Boy, that's some kind of love. That sacrificial, all-in love. He laid it all out for you and for me. What are you giving to Him? What are you doing for Him? As Christians, we have a responsibility to love.

Now I want to share with you what happened at summer vacation that opened my eyes, and I pray will do the same for you. Our family always enjoys going south for vacation. Just seems like that's where we always go. We love being on the beach, love being at the ocean. It's so peaceful. It's so beautiful. Just love being there with my family. This year I think was one of the best vacations we've had.

I usually take a book to read. I was all into my family. I didn't sit under an umbrella and read a book. I mean, I was down on my hands and knees, and that's saying building sand castles with Anne Catherine, and building turtles and putting the shells on its [inaudible 00:22:00]. I was all in jumping waves, and my son, Isaiah, has gotten into fishing, and so he brought his fishing pole and the girls loved it. It was sticking out over the back of the seat all the way, 14 hours to Florida, and 14 back. But love just being with my family having that quality time.

Well, we went through a series of beaches throughout the week. There were some public beaches, Wabasso Beach, and Golden Sand Beach. Well, it came to our last day and we were planning to go to one of those beaches that were closest to us. But Isaiah, the previous day, had gone fishing and he had lost his salt water bait that he had gotten at the local Walmart, and he said, "Dad, please can we go back to Walmart and get another bait so I can fish on?" "Okay, Isaiah." Well, he put into his phone directions to the closes Walmart, which took us 15 miles out of the way. That smart phone wasn't so smart after all.

Finally went into Walmart. He found his salt water bait. As a matter of fact, he bought two in case he lost the one. Instead of going back to where we had been going all week to a couple of the beaches, the closest beach was South Beach and Vero Beach there in Florida. That's where we decided to go. We went, beautiful, beautiful beach. There is a big lifeguard tower right there on the beach behind us, and you felt safe. It said, "This area guarded. This area unguarded." Certainly, if you had to fish, you had to go a pretty good way down shore to get away from all those swimming.

So I began to walk with Isaiah. We walked probably, what do you think, two football field lengths down the shore and we just passed a family, an extended family that had their big fishing poles down away from people. Isaiah went on even past them. [inaudible 00:24:14] Isaiah. For a few minutes, we both went into the water, almost waist deep, and I stood there while he fished with no luck. The day before, he had got a pretty good-sized fish and thrown it back in. But I waited, waited, no fish. I said, "Isaiah, I'm going to go down and play with Ann Katherine, Sophie, and visit down there. I'll keep an eye on you down here."

I went back down. We were doing our own thing. Several minutes passed by. We'd watch down there occasionally and see Isaiah. The next thing you know, we see Isaiah running. I mean, not just trotting. He was running pretty past carrying his fishing pole toward us. We didn't know what was going on. He got there and he said, "There was a shark and it was right by my leg." I said, "What? What?" He said, "There was a shark and it's headed this way." So instantly we began to tell people, "Get out. Get out of the water. There's a shark swimming this way."

There was a couple just going in. The man began to blow a whistle and try to get people out. Showing up is everyone and these high school girls right over here. We look in the water and there's a seven-foot tiger shark swimming right there close to the shore. People scream and jumping out of the way. About 30 seconds later, a second one swam right by just underneath. They're not even out of the water. You could just see it under the clear water right there.

I said, "Isaiah. How did you see it? How did you know?" Out of the blue, all the people were down on this end. A family fishing considerable distance way Isaiah... there was one old man sitting in a chair by himself that said, "Hey, son. I'd get out if I were you. There's a shark headed right for you." And Isaiah got out and I saw that shark. The only thing I'm sorry about is that I didn't go back and say thank you to that old man.

But when the lifeguards saw, and I think it could have been an angel... when the lifeguards, three of them, up on this tower saw everybody getting out, they nonchalantly and casually just changed the flag to a red flag with somebody swimming with an expert. That was it. Then they just came back and looked over the rail.

We, as a family, began to thank God. There'd been a couple of shark attacks. There had been a drone that a father had seen one going right toward us, his son, and had called his wife, to warn them. You saw maybe that video on YouTube, right, swimming by. That's how close it as. I said, "Isaiah, you could have stayed down there. You didn't have to come running to tell us. But because you did, you cared enough about your family and others, maybe many lives were spared that day or limbs that were saved because you were bold enough to run down and warn us."

I started thinking about what do we do as Christians when we have family members and friends in imminent danger of dying and going to hell without Christ, and yet we say, "We're okay. We're safe. It doesn't matter if they die, because we're on shore. We're on solid ground." It doesn't matter. We must care enough to love others, to share the love of Christ, so they won't die and go to devil's hell.

I think about that terrible Luke 16 when the rich man and the beggar Lazarus... you remember that? The rich man died and he went to hell. While in hell, he said, "If Lazarus, this beggar, then used to be on this porch and the dogs would lick his sores. He said, "If you send Lazarus to just dip his finger in some cold water and place it on my turn." He said, "Send him to my family. I've got five brothers, and warn them not to come to this place of torment." Yet we, many times, casually sit back and just let people die without making any effort to be the lifeguard, to blow the whistle.

Well, I'm telling you today, I'm here to blow the whistle. People are dying. It's our turn to tell them, come to the peace. Come to the shore where you'll find life. Warn them before it's too late. Aren't you ready to do that? Even now, think about hat Jesus did for you and me. He gave his life so that we might have eternal life. We confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved.

Romans 10:13, "Everyone that calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive us of our sins and cleanse us or purify us from all unrighteousness. Aren't you ready to come today? Quit putting off. You've got to do this, you've got to do that. You might not have tomorrow. You come to Christ today. You bring your families to Christ. You bring your neighbors to Jesus. So we all can be safe over there on that eternal shore. Aren't you ready? The warning's been given. Now will you respond as we pray?

Oh God. We pray right now in the stillness of this moment, that if there are any men or women or children or young people that have never given their life to you, may they know how much you love them, God. May they know you sent Jesus to die on the cross, and through his blood, a multitude of our sins are covered. Lord you tell us we're not only to love. We're to love deeply, intensely, fervently. That we are to love people with full strength, and Lord I pray we would care enough about people that are dying without Jesus to share our faith, to be bold, to tell them they don't have to die and go to hell. They can come to Christa and experience light. Oh God, give us the strength to turn to you just as we are today, brokenness, sin, past mistakes, and may we find forgiveness and newness of life. In Jesus' name, Amen.