

# 1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!  
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the  
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and  
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith  
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.  
(1 Peter 1:3–5 ESV)*

## Living with the End in Sight

January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

1 Peter 4:1-19

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter, chapter 4. You'll find that right near the end of your New Testament.

We're biting off a big chunk of the text this morning – all of chapter 4 to be exact. Pastor Peter is bringing this letter in for a landing and he is making sure that the church hears loud and clear what she needs to hear. If we are wise, we will lean in and, by God's grace, listen well.

Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant and life-giving word to us:

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, <sup>2</sup> so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. <sup>3</sup> For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. <sup>4</sup> With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; <sup>5</sup> but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. <sup>6</sup> For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. <sup>8</sup> Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied

grace: <sup>11</sup> whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. <sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. <sup>17</sup> For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

<sup>19</sup> Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Peter 4:1-19 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Peter sees a season of persecution is on the horizon for his church. The heat is being dialed up in their culture. They're not being imprisoned for their faith – yet – but some of them are being forced out of their professions. Some of them are being mocked and ridiculed by the world. The government is beginning to look on the Christian community with suspicion and malice.

Things are beginning to change.

That's the situation that this letter is written to address. Peter is preparing his church to stand firm for Christ in the face of persecution. She needs to look past the season of suffering – past the angry mob – to the glory that lies on the other side. He reminds them in verse 7:

The end of all things is at hand (1 Peter 4:7a ESV)

We get so worked up about the things that are directly in front of us, but Peter tells us that we need to look beyond these temporary troubles. Yes, persecution is coming, but NO, suffering won't have the final word! So, let's stop looking at suffering like some insurmountable mountain and start looking at it as an unpleasant but temporary opportunity.

I recently read a story about a missionary couple named John and Betty Stam who were killed for their faith as they sought to share the gospel in China. In reflection on their life, a biographer wrote:

To all eternity we shall live and reign with Christ, but shall we ever be able to make sacrifices for him again? When sin and pain and death are no more, and all tears are wiped away, shall we ever have again the privilege that is ours now of sharing the fellowship of His sufferings "to seek and to save that which was lost"?<sup>1</sup>

That's a profound thought, isn't it? Persecution is hard – no one is saying that it isn't. We don't go chasing after suffering. But when it finally comes upon us, we want to be faithful, don't we? We will be with Christ for eternity in glory where there will be no more tears and no more pain. But in this brief life, we face the only trials that we will ever face for eternity. We want to face them in a way that glorifies our King. We want to face them as those who are living with the end in sight. That's what this chapter is about.

## **Living with the End in Sight**

So, how do we live with the end in sight? First, Peter tells us:

### **1. Prepare your mind**

In verse 1, he writes:

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, (1 Peter 4:1a ESV)

The battle for faithfulness and fruitfulness begins in the mind. We need to decide how we are going to respond to these trials even before they are upon us. Thomas Schreiner argues:

The main point of the verse is that believers are to arm themselves with the intention to

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Matt Perman, *What's Best Next?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016), 336.

suffer.<sup>2</sup>

That's exactly what I see in this text. Prepare your mind to endure persecution for Christ, because following Christ is costly! Peter addresses our faulty thinking again in verse 12:

Beloved, **do not be surprised** at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12 ESV)

It would appear that in Peter's day, as in our day, Christians were perplexed by persecution. "Has God forgotten us? Does He even hear our prayers? How could He let this happen??"

But their understanding of suffering was all wrong! Peter says: Don't be *surprised* when suffering comes, as if something has gone wrong with God's plan. Suffering IS THE PLAN! At least, it's a necessary part of it. Earlier, Peter wrote:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21 ESV)

Church, we are followers of JESUS – the perfectly righteous one who was murdered on a cross and hung between two thieves! How do we look at the cross and come away with the conclusion that our lives will be pain-free and comfortable? "To this you have been called," Peter says! Jesus said it too:

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25 ESV)

Do you hear the paradox there? Because it's essential. Jesus is saying to us: "Yes, you will occasionally suffer in this life on behalf of your love for me. But it is WORTH IT because when you leave that life behind you receive TRUE LIFE from me!"

Do you believe that? Because before we will *live* as we should, we must first *think* as we should. Peter already gave us this kick in chapter 1. He said:

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude, The New American Commentary*, vol. 37, 38 vols. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 199.

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:13 ESV)

Is your mind prepared for action? Is your mind saturated and fixated on the glorious hope of the gospel? Peter says that *that* is how you will stand! Prepare your mind church!

Let's be honest: Too many of us are lulling ourselves to sleep with sports and Netflix. We're spending all of our time thinking about how we will get our kids into college and none of our time thinking about how we will show our kids that Jesus is greater than anything that this world has to offer!

Have you been coasting through life? In seasons of ease, we so quickly numb ourselves with temporary pleasures. But those pleasures don't last, and they do nothing to prepare us for the dog days of life. So, Peter says: "Set your hope fully on the grace of Christ!"

Stop setting your hope on your finances, or your family, or your pleasure. That hope won't save you. That hope is evidence of a mind that is not prepared. A mind that is prepared is fixated on Christ. If we are going to endure to the end, we need to prepare our minds to see reality as it truly is. That brings us right to our second point, because as you see reality as it truly is you will:

## **2. Remember who you ought to fear**

Peter writes:

They malign you; <sup>5</sup> but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (1 Peter 4:4c-5 ESV)

Perhaps you feel that the world mocks Christians now. But if we are thinking the way that we are supposed to think and if we are seeing what we are supposed to see, then we're going to become less concerned with what the world says about us.

Peter is reminding us that one day we're all going to stand before the great judge and we're all going to give an account. Those who persecuted you because of your love for Jesus are going to stand before Jesus, the Judge. You don't need to fear them. If anything, Peter has been telling us

that what should REALLY be concerning us is how we can share the gospel with our persecutors before it is too late for them!

But now Peter describes the one who we SHOULD fear in verses 17-18:

For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” (1 Peter 4:17-18 ESV)

Hear this, church: We are going to stand before the God of the universe, and we are going to give an account for our lives. We are going to stand before the One who searches hearts and minds – who sees every thought we’ve ever entertained and every deed we’ve ever done in secret – and we are going to be completely exposed before Him.

Now, if we have turned from our sin and have placed our trust in Jesus then by God’s grace, we are going to escape the judgement that we deserve, but what fear and trembling will we feel in that moment when all of our sin is revealed to us in the presence of the Living God! Can you even imagine?

I worry that we have lost this holy fear in our day and age. We take sin lightly. We entertain ourselves with shows that celebrate all of the sins that Jesus hung on the cross to save us from. We laugh along with the sin that God hates.

The prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the final judgement, and in his vision an angel of the Lord went through the city with a paintbrush marking all of those who would be spared. Notice what they have in common:

“Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men **who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.**” (Ezekiel 9:4 ESV)

Do you sigh and groan over the abominations of sin? Or have you made peace with it – both the sin in our culture and the sin in your heart? Perhaps this is a better question: Who do you fear?

Jesus said:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28 ESV)

When our fear is properly aligned, we are enabled to stand as we were made to stand. Let me give you a modern example: On Sunday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, over 100 members of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, China, were arrested. Included in this number was their pastor, Wang Yi.

I want you just to stop and think for a moment what that day must have been like. Imagine how frightened you would have been if this was your congregation. 100 members of the church, including the pastor, were dragged out of their homes and thrown into prison for their faith.

Pastor Yi had left behind a letter which has since gone viral. In it he writes:

I have no fear of any social or political power. For the Bible teaches us that God establishes governmental authorities in order to terrorize evildoers, not to terrorize doers of good. If believers in Jesus do no wrong then they should not be afraid of dark powers...

I also understand that this happens to be the very reason why **the Communist regime is filled with fear at a church that is no longer afraid of it.**

I hope God uses me, by means of first losing my personal freedom, to tell those who have deprived me of my personal freedom that there is an authority higher than their authority, and that there is a freedom that they cannot restrain, a freedom that fills the church of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Isn't that incredible? The church in China is standing because the church in China has not forgotten who they are to fear. This leads into Peter's third point. If we are fearing the One who we ought to fear and if we are living with the end in sight, then we will:

### **3. Be self-controlled**

Peter writes in verse 7:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake

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<sup>3</sup> Pastor Wang Yi, *My Declaration of Faithful Obedience*. [https://www.stevechilders.org/5862-2-2/?fbclid=IwAR3XPPqCvEC2jTO-i50CX7c1Lp3xDQq9xWozHOAcLM2FkYaAFQXK-MID\\_6o](https://www.stevechilders.org/5862-2-2/?fbclid=IwAR3XPPqCvEC2jTO-i50CX7c1Lp3xDQq9xWozHOAcLM2FkYaAFQXK-MID_6o) accessed on January 8, 2019.

of your prayers. (1 Peter 4:7 ESV)

Stop thinking about how you're going to escape the wrath of the world and start thinking about how you will avoid the wrath of God! If you're afraid of the world you're going to compromise. But if you have a healthy fear of the Lord, your holiness is going to shine brighter and brighter even as the world grows darker around you. He says in verses 1 and 2:

whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1b-2 ESV)

Now, it's important that we don't overhear this verse. Peter is NOT saying that suffering for your faith somehow transforms you into a state of sinlessness. What he IS saying is this: The one who endures suffering for the sake of Jesus gives unmistakable evidence that he is done with his former sinful way of life. One commentator puts it this way:

What Peter emphasized was that those who commit themselves to suffer, those who willingly endure scorn and mockery for their faith, show that they have triumphed over sin.<sup>4</sup>

In verse 3, Peter goes on to say:

For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you (1 Peter 4:3-4 ESV)

Peter says, there was a time when you were living like the world, but you have left that life behind. That time is past. Yet, isn't it sometimes true that our break with sin is a painful break?

Sometimes leaving behind our former sins means inviting the wrath of our former friends. Sometimes it means we lose our families. Sometimes it means we lose a girlfriend, or a job, or it means that we go through a painful detox or withdrawal.

But there is something encouraging about our response to that pain, isn't there? Peter is telling the church that their right response in the face of suffering should be an encouragement, because

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude, The New American Commentary*, vol. 37, 38 vols. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 201.

it gives evidence of the transforming work that God has done in their hearts!

For example: Most of us like the idea of fitness. We would love to be in shape. Right? But fitness often requires managing what we eat, and many of us quickly discover that we value our favorite deep-fried foods more than we value our fitness. It also requires exercise, but when aching muscles kick in, many of us reveal that we value comfort and leisure more than fitness. But the person who changes their diet and who presses through at the gym even as their muscles ache – that person can look at their life and be encouraged by a real change that has taken place.

So it is with our faith. Persecution causes true faith to shine. In times of persecution we are forced to decide: Do I love Jesus more than I love the praises of man? Do I love Jesus more than I love my financial security? Do I love Jesus more than I love my own life?

What Peter is saying in verse 1 is that the person who is willing to suffer for Christ – the one who is willing to stand no matter the cost – that person can rejoice because he is done with his former life! His perseverance proves that, by God's grace, he is a new creation!

Finally, if we're seeing what we are supposed to be seeing – if we are living with the end in sight – then we will:

#### **4. Love one another in word and deed**

Peter writes:

**Above all**, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup> whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:8-11a ESV)

This is now the third time that this command to love one another has arisen in Peter's letter. If we fail to see the importance of this command at this point, then shame on us! Peter is telling us that God has given us what we need to stand firm through the storm, and that gift is sitting right next to you. We're not just a group of individuals gathered together in the same room by necessity

because we want to hear a sermon. We are the body of Christ. We are the family of God. We were made for God and for EACHOTHER.

Therefore, we must love one-another with the kind of love that covers over a multitude of sins. This is a love that is quick to forgive the wrongs that are done to us by others. True Christian love refuses to harbour grudges.

Hear that this morning. The devil would love for you to keep a long list of all of the ways that Suzy has sinned against you in the past. He'd love for you to rehash in your mind how angry you were when Bob lost his temper with you twenty years ago in the parking lot. Bitterness and unforgiveness divide the church. They push us farther away from one another when we need to be pressing in closer together.

Peter has said time and again in this letter that the harder it gets out there the more important it is that we are safe and loved in here.

And this love is an active love. It manifests itself as we bring our gifts to the table in service of one another. The text says that **each** one of us has a gift. Every single believer in this room has a gift that they have received from God that is meant to serve His people.

Some of us have speaking gifts. Perhaps God has given you the ability to teach, or to preach, or to counsel others with the Word.

Others of us have gifts of service. Perhaps God has given you the gift of hospitality, or wisdom, or healing.

We don't have the time to talk much about spiritual gifts this morning, except to say that Peter sees the use of your gift in the context of the church as **ESSENTIAL** for our survival in the coming storm. Hear that. The word of God says that lone wolves won't survive this storm. You need to fight the urge that pushes you away from community. We **NEED** each other!

Let's get really practical. Every year there are new reports of North American church trends. One of the most concerning church trends right now is that our view of corporate gatherings has

changed dramatically from what it was. It used to be that believers who identified as “faithful attendees” attended church every week unless their house was on fire. Today, those who identify as “faithful attendees” attend an average of twice a month.

The message is clear: We don’t really feel that we need the body of Christ in the way that we once did. We can listen to sermons online, so if Jimmy’s sporting event is scheduled at the same time as the church service then Jimmy’s sporting event will take priority. We only have access to the cottage four months of the year, so we’ll do the “corporate gathering” piece in the winter.

We separate ourselves and our kids away from the flock as if we don’t really believe that there is a lion prowling about seeking to steal, kill and destroy.

Listen, this isn’t me trying to up our average attendance. This is me responding to what I see in the text and responding to what I see as I look out into our culture. If you think the times are changing now, just image how challenging it will be for our kids when we hand the torch off to them. Church, I don’t want to see a single one of them fall away. And God’s word is telling us here that we will not stand unless we stand together. Soccer can have Saturday. God gets Sunday. My kids need to worship with God’s people. They need to be served by their brothers and sisters in Christ. They need to be loved by you. So, this is where they’ll be.

## **Conclusion**

I want to close this morning in the same way that Peter closed. Look with me at verse 19:

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Peter 4:19 ESV)

By the grace of God, we’re going to weather the storm and we’re going to keep doing good. Our brothers and sisters around the world have been living this out for years and years. And do you know what’s amazing? Their churches are GROWING! They’re standing firm, trusting God and He is proving Himself to be who He says He is.

He is our faithful Creator. He made you. He knows what it will take to sustain you, and He will bring you home when and only when He decides it’s time to bring you home. So fix your eyes on

the finish line – live with the end in sight – and press forward. For the glory of God, and the good of all people.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.