



1 Peter 4:1-5

Thinking Like Christ

January 16, 2022

1 Peter 4:1-5 “1 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, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. 3 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. 4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

One of the reasons I love the book of 1 Peter is because it so relevant to our time.

In fact, I believe this book is far more relevant to Christians in Rochester in 2022 than anything that the church at large has called relevant for the last 40 years.

What I mean is this: churches (including ours in some ways) who are real churches, who believe the gospel, who are loaded with godly saints have, with all of the best intentions, tried to persuade the masses to consider Christianity by communicating a few things to people, to try to be relevant, though sometimes accidentally:

1) Christianity Can Be Whatever You Want It to Be

Here’s how we said this accidentally. It was popular in the 90s for people planting churches to survey the people who didn’t believe in the community to ask them what they thought church should be. And then those churches shaped the programming around the demands in the market, offered the services that were in demand, created the vibe the neighbors wanted, and people came out in droves. Churches of 10,000 and 20,000 people were planted. And, because God is gracious, the gospel was preached in many of those places and many came to know the Lord. This was the environment that many boomers came to know Jesus in.

So they lived in a church that was designed to be what the neighbors wanted it to be. There was nothing embarrassing about their Christianity, they were proud to say they

were members of the big church that was what everybody thought church should be. They genuinely served the community by being what the people wanted.

“Christianity can be whatever you want it to be” seemed to be a relevant message. Another was that:

2) Christianity is safe

The relevant church also preached that Christianity is safe, with a safe bet right at its core. I remember being taught in the Christian community at RIT in the 90s that a great thing to say when you’re trying to lead somebody to Jesus is “If I’m right about Jesus, I’ve gained everything. But if I’m wrong, I’ve lost nothing. Even if I die and it turns out Jesus isn’t real, I gained me great friends, a great church community, moral standards that work, family values that work better than anything else. So what if I was wrong? It’s still worth being a Christian - there’s no real risk, no real loss, only potential benefit.”

So we told people to do the math: Christianity costs nothing but you gain everything. It was a comfortable, risk-free faith.

And then we built all of our ministries around making everybody comfortable and making the whole experience risk-free, and safe, and people were challenged and taught enough to think it was worth it because the life guidance paid off, but they weren’t so challenged that they didn’t want to stick around. They’d be greeted warmly, treated to a perfectly choreographed service, not offended, encouraged, enriched, and the whole experience was safe and clean and just what the consumer ordered.

So we said Christianity is what you want it to be, it’s safe, and:

3) Christianity Can Be Cool

Christianity can be easily acceptable everywhere if we shape it right. It can be acceptable up at the top of academia. It can be acceptable among the hipsters. It can be acceptable among artists. It can be acceptable among the biker gang. It can be acceptable at your school. And we carved out niche forms of Christianity and church that were acceptable in all of those different places. (And most of the time that was done without compromising the message, we didn’t need to to be acceptable then.) And in many pockets of society, the gospel did its thing, and we saw hipster churches here and cowboy churches in Texas and other foreign countries, and artist churches and churches for business-people

and academic churches and friends-in-low-places type churches sprout up everywhere. And Amen - the faith found its expression among all peoples just like Jesus said it would.

Most of us probably came to faith in consumer Christianity or safe Christianity or cool Christianity.

But now we've run into a couple of walls. One internal, and one external.

The internal wall we've hit is that the message that you can live the Christian life comfortably starts to ring hollow when we have internal desires that don't align with it in the long term. For everybody, there are parts of being a Christian that come easy to us, but other parts that require us to change significantly. To go against the grain of our habits, our personality, our politics, or our desires to follow Jesus.

And over time we have certain desires that are stubborn. We still desire sin and have evil compulsions. We don't want to change. In weak moments and tired moments we want to give in to being who we want to be or being the person that comes most naturally to us instead of continuing to do the hard work of being conformed to Christ.

And this struggle doesn't fit with what we've been taught. We've have had a very coddled Christian upbringing. We've been told that this should be easy, that following Jesus is comfortable. No real sacrifice is involved. We weren't sold a Christianity where Jesus was calling us to come and die to ourselves or to come struggle or to come take up a cross to follow Him.

And we find stubborn aspects of our personalities, stubborn sins, stubborn ideals, and giving them up feels like something is being amputated at times. We've been told this has no cost and can be comfortable, but we reach places along the way where following Jesus is anything but comfortable.

So we fall back on what we've been taught - that Christianity can be anything we want it to be. And I want a Christianity that will tell me that my relationship with money, or with sex, or with people, or how I spend my time is just fine the way it is. I want a Christianity that won't restrain my desires.

And the culture is right there cheering this on, saying that the true you is who you are in an unrestrained state of nature and any restraint put on that is to be cast off. "Resisting temptation" isn't seen as a good thing anyway, that will just mess you up - you be you.

So we run into this internal wall where we see the demands of Christ on our lives, they are hard to follow, and we have been programmed that this should be easy so we either give in and do the easiest thing, or we question those claims of the relevant church - can this really be easy? Anything i want it to be? comfortable?

Comfortable Christianity hits an internal wall eventually - and you can read the stories of many who bail out - I tried to follow Jesus but it was sexually repressive, it made me conform to a mold, it told me Jesus is the only way. And that's not me. So I'm out.

And the external wall we've run in to is that there is no full, robust, biblically-faithful form of Christianity that's broadly acceptable to our culture anymore. We can sand the edges off of it until it isn't Christianity anymore and doesn't call for any repentance, and that still flies. But Christianity is maligned and mocked and thought of as evil certainly in much of academia, and that has now spilled out into most institutions of culture, into entertainment, into schools, and into the mindset of our age.

And if you survey the community and ask them what church should be, you're likely to get not just some good ideas for things the church should do (you'd get some), but you'd get some suggestions that would essentially make the church approve of sin and not be Christianity. Don't tell people Jesus is the only way, reject historic Christian teaching on sex and gender, don't ask anyone to repent, and also don't meet together, it's a pandemic, you probably shouldn't have church. (Schools yes, restaurants yes, but don't risk getting together at church - just the important stuff.)

So hitting these walls means that we can no longer make the argument that if you follow Jesus and you were wrong, it won't have cost you anything. It sure does! It costs a ton! Just like Jesus said it would.

Christianity can't be cool anymore. You can dress it up all you want, but the days of plaid shirts and beards and a cool band making biblical Christianity palatable in the culture ended in about 2015.

The "relevant" paradigm for Christianity has become irrelevant.

Now this may sound like all doom and gloom.

But there's really good news in this. I believe God is shaking us - I believe He is shaking the church in our day.

But listen to this in

Hebrews 12:26-29 "At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken--that is, things that have been made--in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire"

Notice how God shakes away the manmade things - the things that can be shaken. But He does so so that what cannot be shaken may remain. God has been shaking away comfortable, easy, safe Christianity. But there's good news: it's so we will cling to that which cannot be shaken- so we approach worship like it's all about God and come near with reverence and awe.

And as irrelevant as comfy easy Christianity has become, Jesus hasn't become irrelevant. His word hasn't become irrelevant. And 1 Peter is exactly the paradigm shift we need, both for the internal wall we're running into and the external wall we're running into.

We'll take this phrase by phrase.

4:1 "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking"

So Jesus Christ had a way of thinking that we should adopt as armament.

Arm yourself he says.

Arm yourselves for what? It seems in this passage there are two related things we are armed for:

1 for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

So we are armed to cease from sin - whatever that means. We'll get there in a minute.
And:

4With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

And we are armed for being maligned by people in the culture around us.

So we are given here an armament against sin and an armament against the insults of the culture around us. Armed for the inner battle against sin - the first wall we are running into. And we're armed for the external disapproval by culture, the second wall we're running into. It's like Peter read our news and studied our culture and told us what we would need as Christians for all of this.

So how do we arm ourselves for all of this? A certain way of thinking (verse 1) **“arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.”**

So a certain way of thinking helps us with sin and with living in a world that rejects our faith.

And that way of thinking is (verse 1) the way of thinking of Jesus, who suffered in the flesh.

Jesus had a way of thinking we need to put on as armor. And that was that Jesus accepted hardship and suffering and loss when it was necessary to obey His Father.

When He was faced with a test: either sin or endure whatever hardship is necessary to do the will of God, He endured the hardship.

You see this in the temptation of Jesus when Satan tells Him to turn the stones into bread to ease His hunger - tempting Him to use His Deity to cheat at being human by easing His own hunger with the bread.

You see it in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus wrestles in prayer and tells His Father, “not my will, but yours be done.”

Which leads to the greatest place we see it: at the cross of Jesus. Where He was faithful to His Father, and for the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross so we could be saved.

At the center of our faith is not a comfortable, risk-free, consumer church with a cool vibe, but Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins.

The Gospel that we center our lives on is not the cool church experience. It is the message that all had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All are deserving of his wrath and punishment.

But still, while we were still sinners, Christ came. He lived a life of perfect obedience, even when it required hardship, and then went to the cross to pay for our sins by suffering and dying in our behalf, being buried, and rising again.

And now, whoever will turn from sin and unbelief and trust in Him will not perish like we deserve, but have everlasting life. And that's the most important news there is, it's the greatest news there is, its the only thing that can save us.

And Jesus repeatedly said that the cross is our paradigm for living.

Mark 8:34 “34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Jesus, again and again, was willing to suffer if that's what it took to be faithful, and He said that His followers think that way too.

Now Jesus didn't suffer for suffering's sake. In fact, He was often criticized for not jumping in to the unnecessary ascetic suffering of the Pharisees (why do your disciples not fast?) So Jesus didn't go looking to suffer and was against meaningless religiously imposed suffering. So this is not a call to self-denial for self-denial's sake, it is a call to self-denial when that's what's required for faithfulness.

Jesus knew that faithfulness to his Father would require hardship and suffering at times. And the hardship and suffering was never a reason not to be faithful, and also was never the evidence that he was doing his relationship with God wrong.

We tend to think that hardship in following Jesus means that Jesus isn't real or that we have gotten Christianity wrong because it should always be easy - it should always work.

But he says a key to living the Christian life is to take on the mindset of Jesus, that at times faithfulness does bring great hardship and suffering. And we opt for God in all of those situations.

I think that's what the next phrase means:

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

He is saying that the person who, like Jesus, is willing to suffer for faithfulness is living for God and not for human passions, and has ceased, not from all sin (as in they never sin again,) but ceased living for sin (ceased living in such a way as sin gets to call the shots.) The “ceasing from sin” here correlates with no longer living for human passions but for the will of God.

The Westminster Catechism asks the question:

What is the chief end of man? (Or what is a person's ultimate purpose?)

Answer: Man's chief end (a person's ultimate purpose) is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

That's what we exist for. We exist with an ultimate purpose of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

And it is so easy to, when threatened with hardship, fail to live to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, because we are opting for the human passions and doing what seems like it would bring the most enjoyment and ease and freedom from suffering now.

And when we start living with comfort and safety and our consumer desires as ultimate, we are living for a different chief end, a different ultimate purpose.

And our souls become disordered.

And we so avoid risk, and discomfort, and pain, and suffering that we fail to do our duties to God and others. Because we've been taught that obedience is easy, comfortable, risk-free, and culturally acceptable.

And its amazing what we, who have the cross at the center of our faith, will say to justify disobedience. "We're living together before we are married because if we didn't, we'd have two rent payments, and that would be hard."

"I don't spend time with church people because they are kind of a drain and community is tiring."

"I can't read my bible every day, it's hard to stick with it - if you give me an easy way, I'll do that, but making myself do it isn't gonna happen."

We live like the chief end of man is to glorify ourselves and enjoy ourselves maximally in this life. And we think this is the best way to live, but it is soul-shriveling.

We live for ease and make our decisions based on what feels right (because the chief end of man is to glorify myself and enjoy myself for life.)

When faced with potential loss we become timid. When our flesh wants something that the Spirit of God within us is calling sin or that the scripture calls sin, we choose our compulsions instead, hoping that will help us to achieve our chief end and enjoy ourselves maximally in this life.

And we think we are on a quest for the true self, the realest me. I think that I should pursue becoming who I am in a state of nature without any external restraints, religious or otherwise. And we think that that can maybe satisfy our souls. So we live like we're supposed to be trying to figure out how to fulfill all of our compulsions in a way that will finally, this time, satisfy and free us.

These are two totally different ways to live. Glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Or glorify self and enjoy self for life. And we arm ourselves for a life of long-term Christian faithfulness by having the mindset of Jesus who was willing to suffer when necessary to obey His Father.

1 Peter 4:3 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.

So he lists these sins, calls them the sins of the Gentiles, a term Peter sometimes uses to describe those who haven't come to faith in Christ. And without God, without the chief end of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever, a new chief end takes over.

And Peter calls that sensuality - free living for the thrills of the moment.

Passions - epithumia - sometimes translated lusts. It's wrong desires (desires for the wrong thing) or "overdesires", desiring good things too much or in the wrong way.

He mentions drunkenness and drinking parties. It's probably the distinction between the personal habit of consuming too much alcohol and public wildness and carousing.

Orgies in the Greek seems to the worship of Roman gods through unrestrained drunkenness and sensuality. One definition is: *"a nocturnal and riotous procession of half drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honour of Bacchus or some other deity, and sing and play before houses of male and female friends; hence used generally of feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry."* (Pretty specific)

Speaking of Bills games. A few weeks ago I got to take Hudson to the Monday night game against the Patriots - the one the Bills lost, and which the Bills avenged sevenfold last night. And it had been years since I'd been to a game, and we had endzone seats. And we were surrounded by very drunk Patriots fans, hooligans, who were plastered by the National Anthem. There were lots of moments for moral lessons - that's why you don't drink too much. This is what Patriots fans are like. That's why we're Bills fans. (Because the Bills mafia are known for their restraint.)

But underneath all of that Hooliganism is this idea that I need to enjoy this experience as much as possible - and through getting drunk and being totally unrestrained I will get the most pleasure out of this thing - I will hold nothing back making sure this thing satisfies. (And of course, it doesn't work - by the end of the game many of them seemed to be enjoying it far less than they would have had they been moderate and just said, "we're going to enjoy the game." This "orgiastic" way of thinking is a saying this experience must satisfy so I have to go at it with no restraint."

And he mentions “lawless idolatries” - worshipping the wrong things. When something else becomes the chief end, everything else becomes disordered. And we expect a game to satisfy or drink to satisfy or sex to satisfy - and none of those things can do that, but with God out of the picture something else steps up and it all becomes disordered.

He says, “Christian, maybe you’re wondering. Maybe you’re wondering if living for self-actualization and self-glorification and self-enjoyment may hold some promise of fulfillment. If you could just cast off all restraints and live for these things, you’d find a solution for all your soul is longing for.

But Peter says here, “That’s been tried. There have been millenia of human history where people tried hedonism: they lived for sensuality and passions, you have lived for yourself at times and you know how it goes. You tested it, humanity has tested it - we’ve sunk enough time into that kind of living. And where is the person who did it all and said this was the answer?

Everything spins out of control when the chief end changes. The reason the planets in our solar system retain their orbit is because of the centrality and gravitational pull of the sun. If the sun disappears, they all go spinning out of control. There’s a place for a good party, but if there is no restraint and the party is ultimate and this one must satisfy, it won’t work. There is a God-designed place for sex in a marriage between a man and woman, but if sexual satisfaction and freedom is ultimate and must be pursued without restraint, it doesn’t work.

We’ve tried that. We’ve tried glorify self and life for the self for life. But the Christian life is the life of living for God and casting off those human passions. Which isn’t easy, it involves sacrifice and hardship and risk. And, it won’t make you a ton of friends:

4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;

Christians in Rome were hated, in a number of centuries, because they were thought to so undermine the Roman way of life. They were thought to be traitors because they worshiped a different God, not the Roman God. They didn’t participate in Roman sensuality. No parades to Baccus. They wouldn’t worship the Emperor so they were thought to be less loyal and less patriotic and it was feared they would undermine Roman military strength as a result.

By calling unacceptable what their whole society had come to accept and by refusing to participate in it or celebrate it like everybody else, they incurred anger and slander from their neighbors.

They ran into the same wall of Christian unacceptability in broader culture that we run into.

And Christians got blamed for everything. Maligned.

Peter's response to them was not "run a PR campaign to get them to think better of you," or "go to war to defend your image or defend your power." It wasn't "make sure you have the last word in a shouting match." It was (verse 5)

5 but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

God will judge. God will call them to account. Don't let it freak you out. You will be maligned and lied about and misunderstood because you don't want to jump into the sin and weirdness of your culture. And one day they'll give an account to God, so you don't have to fix that.

So the only way to live the Christian life faithfully is by arming ourselves with the mindset of Christ, who was ready to suffer when necessary to be faithful. This will arm us for our personal struggle against sin when following our passions seems right and easy and desirable (ease and desirability don't make it right.) This will arm us for life in this world - people are going to be surprised at our Christian lives if we actually live them. And this will cause them to malign us. So be prepared for that suffering as well.

And trust God to sort it out.

Now so far, that's all true, but there is a danger that we can think that Peter frames it this way: we either experience the joy of sin or the suffering of obeying God.

But that's not all Peter says about suffering and obedience. It's not all the scriptures say about it. Yes, following God does mean suffering at times.

But the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The call to suffer at times is not a call to give up on joy. In fact, it's a call to our deepest possible joy. To borrow a verse from the sermon in a couple weeks:

1 Peter 4:12-13 “**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. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.**

Cody unpacked this a lot last week so I won't hit on this too hard. But the call on our lives to be willing to suffer is not a call to avoid joy. It's a call to cultivate true joys, and lasting joys.

Piper writes, “i find in the bible a divine command to be a pleasure-seeker- that is, to forsake the two-bit, low-yield, short-term, never-satisfying, person-destroying, God-belittling pleasures of the world and to sell everything “with joy” (Matthew 13:44) in order to have the kingdom of heaven and thus “enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21,23).” - John Piper

He quotes:

Matthew 13:44 **44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.**

Yes, there is sacrifice and suffering in this kingdom. This guy finds the field and sells all that he has to buy it. He has to part with all that he has.

But he's doing it with joy because there's treasure in that field. Christians who accept suffering when necessary are not joyless people. Not if we're doing it right. Because if we are doing it right, we are doing it like Hebrews 12 calls us to:

Hebrews 12:1-4 “**1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”**

Being part of the kingdom of heaven doesn't mean we've given up on joy. It means we are trading the temporary comfort, and ease, and pleasure of living for self for a far greater treasure - for solid joy and lasting pleasure. We are trading the sugar-high for the steak dinner. We are trading the lottery ticket for a guaranteed retirement account. We are trading acceptance before people for the "well done, my good and faithful servant" from God.

And in the end we will have far exceeded the Hooligans in attaining pleasure - as we enjoy Him forever.

Prayer of Confession

Father, we confess that, though we claim to be followers of Christ who suffered, we see our own temptation, our own suffering, our own hardships as signs that things have gone wrong. That we are not doing what we should, because we believe that what we should do should be easy and comfortable and without risk. But we confess that to believe this is to take our eyes off of Christ, who always did what He should have done, and that often involved suffering and hardship and loss.

It was through, and only through, His faithful suffering that we could be forgiven. So we thank you that when Jesus was tempted, he chose to suffer rather than do the easy thing. He chose the lasting pleasure of closeness with You over the temporary thrills and easy ways out that sin would have given Him. He was very not-like-us in that regard, perfectly choosing to obey even when suffering was involved. And we thank you that it is through His faithful suffering that You have taken our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

Spirit, Help us to consider Jesus. Help us to keep our minds on Jesus. Help us to remember His cross as the only medicine for our faithlessness, and as the example of what it means to embrace suffering for the joy set before us, and to exchange the temporary pleasures of ease and safety and comfort for the lasting pleasure of knowing you. Thank you that the faithfulness of Jesus is counted as ours. And thank you that your Spirit is at work in us to make us more like Him. Continue that patient work in us.

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) Try to think of all of the things 1 Peter says about suffering. Discuss them together.
- 2) How is the mindset of Christ toward suffering armament for us?
- 3) How might resisting temptation involve some suffering for us?
- 4) What kind of suffering can we expect in society because of our faith and lifestyle?
- 5) What hope does this passage offer us for that suffering?
- 6) Share with one another how you are experiencing hardship because of your faith (personally or in your interactions with others.) Pray for one another.