

## Divine Purpose in Suffering 1 Peter 4:1-6

“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, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. 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; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 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.” 1 Peter 4:1-6

The life expectancy in the year 1900 in the US was 47 years old. In 2018, it was 79 years old. The death rate in 1900 was 2518/100,000. In 2018, it was 724, a decrease of over 70%.

God acknowledges the reality of suffering in this fallen world and wants his people to not only be prepared for it but also to trust that he will work out his divine purposes in us through it.

And in doing so, not only is our love and appreciation for Jesus suffering in the flesh on our behalf revealed, but it also allows the power of the gospel to be preached through our suffering.

### **Vs 1: “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking...”**

The Greek word for “arm” is **hoplizo** which means to “equip with weapons”.

Ephesians 6:10-11 “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God...”  
Philippians 2:5-8 “**Have this mind among yourselves**, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, **he humbled himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

What is this way of thinking that marked the life of Christ in his suffering? It’s humility. It’s choosing to humble yourself even unto death.

### **Vs. 2: “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.”**

Ceasing from sin doesn’t mean that we become “sinless”. Biblical scholars believe it more likely means that sin ceases to have mastery over us so that we can live the rest of our time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

Romans 6:6-8 “We know that our old self was crucified with him **in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing**, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

When we choose to die to self, to put our flesh under the authority of God, to patiently endure suffering, we give the Lord opportunity to grow and strengthen our faith muscles so that when other temptations, trials and sufferings come, we will be better equipped to continue to follow after the will of God instead of the natural desires of our flesh.

1 Peter 1:6-7 says “So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. **So when your faith remains strong through many trials**, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.”

Knowing there is purpose in the pain can help us endure and persevere through suffering with peace, hope and even joy.

### **Vs. 3 “For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do...”**

“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...” (vs 3-4)

Three primary areas of passions of the flesh:

- Impurity (impure thoughts, words, actions: lust, malice, slander, gossip, etc)
- Intemperance (over-indulgence, greed, lack of self-control, addictions, etc)
- Idolatry (anything that takes supremacy over the Lordship of Jesus Christ)

...we can then “count it all joy” when we face various trials and temptations knowing that through suffering in the flesh, God will work out his divine purposes that we might “cease to sin”, no longer living after the passions of our flesh but rather for the will of God.

**Vs. 4-5 “and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”**  
We can rest in knowing that God is a righteous and just God and in due time, he will exact perfect justice for all people.

**Vs. 6 “For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead...”**

The power of the gospel preached throughout history offers us hope that as Christ suffered, was persecuted, was judged in his flesh and crucified...and is alive now in the spirit, we too can know that when we suffer, are persecuted, are judged in the flesh by man and face death...we can have the assurance that we too, like Christ will live in the spirit.

The vast majority of commentators believe that the phrase “preached even to those who are dead” refers to Christians in Asia Minor who heard the gospel while alive but are now physically dead.

1 Peter 3:18 “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...”

The power of the gospel then frees us from the:

- Fear of the wrath of God for Jesus paid the price for our sins and now we have the gift of eternal life with him (Colossians 1:13-14, 22, John 3:16)
- Fear of physical suffering and death for Jesus conquered death through his life, death and resurrection. And we have the confident hope that God can purpose our pain for our good and his glory and trust that our momentary afflictions here on earth do not compare to the glory that awaits us (1 Cor 15:54-57, 2 Cor 4:17)
- Fear of approval of man for Jesus will judge the living and the dead and exact perfect justice for all (Galatians 1:10, Romans 12:17-19, 21)

“Growing My Faith in the Face of Death” by Tim Keller, March 7, 2021 ([www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com)).

“But as death, the last enemy, became real to my heart, I realized that my beliefs would have to become just as real to my heart, or I wouldn’t be able to get through the day. Theoretical ideas about God’s love and the future resurrection had to become life-gripping truths, or be discarded as useless....And so I set out to reexamine my convictions and to strengthen my faith, so that it might prove more than a match for death.”

“As God’s reality dawns more on my heart, slowly and painfully and through many tears, the simplest pleasures of this world have become sources of daily happiness. It is only as I have become, for lack of a better term, more heavenly minded that I can see the material world for the astonishingly good divine gift that it is. I can sincerely say, without any sentimentality or exaggeration, that I’ve never been happier in my life, that I’ve never had more days filled with comfort. But it is equally true that I’ve never had so many days of grief....But I have come to be grateful for those sideswipes, because they remind me to reorient myself to the convictions of my head and the processes of my heart. When I take time to remember how to deal with my fears and savor my joys, the consolations are stronger and sweeter than ever.”

