

We come this morning to 1 Peter 4. If you have a copy of God's word, please turn there this morning. 1 Peter 4. We'll be looking at verses 1 through 6. 1 Peter 4 verses 1 through 6.

As you turn there, you may remember that Peter is writing this letter to serious Christians. These are not just nominal Christians, in other words, Those to whom he is writing this letter are not Christians in name only. They were serious about their faith. In fact, they were so serious about their faith that they were being persecuted at some level. They were suffering at the very least for their faith and soon there would be an increased level of persecution in their life. These are serious Christians.

And what does Peter want these suffering Christians to get way down deep in their hearts as they go through persecution. He wants them to get the whole Christ, we saw last week, the whole Christ way down deep in their hearts. He wants them to know Christ more fully, more completely, more deeply, more truly as they go through these sufferings. He's saying to them in essence, I know that you're suffering for Christ and what I want you to do is get to know Christ even better in the midst of your suffering. He's saying to them, you know Christ well enough that you're willing to suffer for him and what I'm saying for you is you still need to get to know him more. That there's never a time when you can say I know Christ too well.

So he continues to drive them back to who Christ is even in the midst of their suffering. I've always been amazed at how easily we can forget the goodness of who Christ is. How quickly we can get distracted from Christ. How easily we find our minds wandering from the Lord when we try to think upon the Lord. How quickly we find that the Lord simply isn't enough for us in our thought life. How we don't think that he can transform our lives. And you see, it's maybe because we've never really understood how good the Lord is to start. We've grown tired of him, but perhaps we've grown tired of him because we haven't really understood how good he is. to begin with and so we think we know him well and so we think we can move on and Peter is saying to these serious Christians who certainly knew the Lord well that they need to keep getting to know the Lord, they need to keep setting their minds upon the Lord even though they know him so well that they're willing to suffer for him. And he's saying you still need to keep contemplating Christ, that is what you need most.

And so it was with that spirit that Peter had finished writing chapter three, and it is with that same spirit of urging his listeners to get to know Christ in the midst of their suffering that he writes chapter four. It's out of that same heart of what you need, suffering church, is to get to know Christ more. You can never know him too well. And it's in that spirit that we will see Chapter four is written as well.

With this in mind, let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we come to this portion of your word and we do pray that your spirit would be poured out in mighty measure upon us, that we would see Christ and that we would appreciate him more fully than we did walking in this morning. We pray, oh Lord, that you would give us grace to believe and the wonderful truths found in this portion of Scripture, that we would see that in Christ we are free, free from sin, free to God, and free from judgment, and that this would powerfully impact our lives. We ask for your help in the name of Jesus Christ, by the power of your Holy Spirit, amen. We'll hear now this portion of God's word, 1 Peter 4, verses 1 through 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.

Thus ends the reading of God's holy word. May he bless the reading and now the proclamation of it to our lives.

Well, we are willing to endure some level of suffering when we think that it is worth the cost. So for example, parents are willing to wake up three or four times a night to help their infant child, not because they think that waking up three or four times a night is fun, but because they believe that that suffering is worth the cost. They believe that it's worth it to go through that suffering to help their little one grow up.

Well, in a similar manner, Peter in our passage this morning is continuing to set forth how good Christ is so that those who are suffering for Christ would be made aware again and again that suffering for Christ is worth the cost. They are going through a level of persecution at this time, and he wants to set before their eyes the goodness of Jesus, that as they suffer for Jesus, they might go to themselves, this is worth it. Suffering for Christ is worth it.

If we could sum up 1 Peter 4, one through six in three words, we could sum it up this way. It teaches that we are free in Christ, free in Christ. And if by God's grace, you here this morning are able to cling to that truth, that you are free in Christ, that will provide you helpful ammunition this week as you fight against your sin and you strive to walk in the ways of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you can cling to that by faith, that you are free in Christ, it will provide you ammunition as you fight against sin and pursue righteousness.

So this morning we see that you are free in Christ, and we have three points. Free from sin, free to God, and free from judgment. So free from sin, free to God, and free from judgment.

So first this morning, you see that you are free from sin. You see this in verse one. Passage begins, since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh. Peter bringing up that Christ suffered in the flesh should take your minds back to what he had said about Christ suffering in the flesh back in chapter three, verse 18. Look there at chapter three, verse 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. You see how he talked about how Christ suffered and he suffered in his flesh and he was put to death for the sins of all of the elect. And Peter is picking back up on this fact that Christ suffered in the flesh as he comes to chapter four, verse one. He is reminding his readers again, and he is reminding you here this morning again, that Christ suffered in his body, in his flesh, once and for all for our sins. That he took all the sins of his people on himself on the cross. And he doesn't just want you to think about that fact and then forget about it. He wants you to use that fact in your daily life as you battle against sin.

It's not only a great truth that declares how a person is made righteous in the sight of God, justification. It is also a great truth that you can contemplate as you strive to grow in grace and in holiness of life in your pursuit of sanctification.

Why do I say that? Well, look at what he says about this truth of Christ's suffering in the flesh. He says, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. He is saying, arm yourselves with this fact that you who are in Christ have had your sins killed with Christ. They have been dealt with in Christ. If Christ took your sins on himself, he says you must cease from sin. It should be a powerful motivation to your sanctification. He says you should cease from sin because Christ has dealt with your sins in his body on the tree. If indeed he has dealt with your sins on the cross, why would you want to live in your sins in this life? You should want to have nothing to do with them, just as Christ has nothing to do with them any longer because he has put them to death. So you who are in Christ should want to have nothing to do with your sins any longer either.

And the language he uses here for this point is helpful. Arm yourselves, he says, with this way of thinking. The imagery of arm you can imagine is that of war, isn't it? You arm yourself for battle. You take up a weapon. He's saying arm yourself with this way of thinking. arm yourselves daily with this fact that Christ has taken your sins upon himself and use it as a motivator to not live in sin any longer. He took them on himself. I do not want to live like that anymore. I want to arm myself with this truth and live accordingly.

So, He begins here by encouraging them to arm them well in their way of thinking. Notice again that it starts in the mind, in the thinking, not just in the actions, but in the thinking. This is the sort of thing we should be contemplating. And it is fascinating to remember, again, that these were people who were already so committed to Christ that they were being persecuted for him. And what he says is, I want you to keep thinking about Christ. Don't stop thinking about Christ, but he grip you. Would he fill your thoughts as you daily battle against sin? So this must be how you are striving to be thinking, to be filling your mind with thoughts of Christ and arming them as you battle against sin.

He says that when we do this, he says, whoever has suffered in the flesh, verse one, has ceased from sin. Now, of course, you know that he's not saying that the Christian never sins any longer. We know that we still sin, but he is still saying something. He's not saying nothing here. He's not saying this has no meaning whatsoever. The words are strong. He says, you ceased from sin.

Well, here's how one person put it. One person said, the argument is simply this, that Christ and his death finished definitively his relation to our sin, our sin that was imputed to him for which he died. When he died, he died once for all, and there was a finality about it. He was done with our sin. Peter then is saying, since you are united to Christ in his death, and since his death was a definite breach with our sin, then you in him also have a definite breach with your sin. You have, in Christ, made a definite breach with sin. It's what Paul says in Romans 6. Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God. You are not, if you are in Christ here this morning, you are not fundamentally your sin. You are a new creation in Christ Jesus.

you are redeemed, not just from the penalty of sin, but even from the power of sin. And often as a believer, you can get caught in the rut of identifying with your sin. Even as a true believer, you can be in the pattern of thinking that certain sins in your life are simply fundamentally who you are. And what Peter is saying is Christ died for your sins. Your sins were crushed in him on the cross. That isn't who you are anymore. Therefore, don't live like that's who you are. You should be striving to cease from that because it's actually not fundamentally who you are as someone who is redeemed. You are in Christ. Therefore, you should live like you have had your sins put to death in Christ.

What would this look like in your life this week to exercise this way of thinking at a more practical level, a more concrete level? What would it look like this? Some pleasure of the flesh comes your way, some desire that you know is not right and you want to satisfy that desire, whether it's to gossip, whether it's to lie, whether it's to cheat, whether it's to exercise lustful desires and actions. And that desire comes. And then you remind yourself, wait a second, Christ died for my sins. I'm not supposed to live in these sorts of things anymore. This actually isn't who I am anymore. I'm a Christian. He took those sins on himself. I don't have to actually do this. I actually can, by God's grace, live for God because He, Jesus, died for my sins. Now I want to live for him. I want to kill worldliness in my life because Jesus died for my worldliness. I want to put to death lustful desires in my life because Jesus Christ died for my lustful desires. I want to put to death unbelief in my life because Christ died for my unbelief. Because Christ died for my sins, I don't want to live in them. He's saying, arm yourself with this way of thinking.

But second, not only are you free from sin, you're also free to God. Look at verses two through four. He begins here. So as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God. Verse two. He says, you're free now for the rest of your life to live for God. And notice it is the rest of your life. He says in verse two, for the rest of the time. That's a way of saying for as long as you live, you get to live now to God.

But I want to ask the question this morning. He is saying here that it is to be the rest of your life that you are living to God. And so there may be people here this morning and you could say that about your life for the first few years of your Christian walk, that for the rest of your life you were living for God, but maybe it's been a long time since you've actively been pursuing a Lord, since you've actively been seeking him. And this text says that you are to be doing that not just for the first few years of your Christian walk, or even the first couple decades of your Christian walk, but for as long as you live, for the rest of the time, as long as you get to have time on earth, you are to be living with that time to the will of God. That's what the text is saying, no longer for human passions, but to the will of God.

And he contrasts here the will of God with human passion you'll notice in verse two. He is saying that you used to be marked by whatever your will was, whatever you wanted, whatever your desires and passions were. That's that word passions. You used to be desired everything you wanted. That's what you did. But now he's saying you are to be marked by wanting to do God's will. There's been a radical change in the believer. It's not just an external change. It obviously includes external things. But it's a change even in the very affections of your heart. You don't want the things you used to want. You used to do whatever you wanted, now you are to want to do God's will.

So you think to yourself, whatever God's will is in my marriage, that's what I want to do in my marriage. Whatever God's will is in my parenting, that's what I want to do in my parenting. To the children, you think to yourself, whatever God wants me to do as a child, that's what I want to do to live well for God's glory as a child. None of us do this perfectly, but you have to ask yourself, do I even want to do God's will here this morning? Do you want to do God's will? I'm not talking about his abstract will, right? His decretive will, which is everything that he decrees to come to pass. I'm talking about his preceptive will, his actual commandments. Do you desire to obey him here this morning? This text is saying you should, as a believer, want to do his will, you should desire to obey God.

And then he continues to describe the way that the unbeliever lives. Verse three, 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. He's saying, of course, this is the things you used to do. You don't do these things anymore. This isn't the lifestyle of a Christian. This ought to not be the lifestyle of any believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this little word used in verse three to describe these people that needs some meditation is this word want. He says in verse three, for the time that his past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do. That word want is important because what it's telling you is that this isn't stuff these people used to occasionally fall into. They didn't fall into these sins occasionally. This was what they wanted to do. This was premeditated. Okay, so you might, as a real believer, fall into some sin, right? You might trip into some sin and you're still guilty and you must repent. But what this is describing is that this is the love of their life. They didn't just occasionally have passions they ought not to have. What he is describing is people who wanted the drinking parties, who woke up in the day thinking, how can I satisfy and gratify the desires of my heart and the flesh? The imagery is people who are given over to wickedness. It's premeditated. wickedness. That cannot be the wants of the Christian.

But it also says, it lists sins here that you know are quite grotesque. But I also want to point out one that is maybe less obviously horrific. He says, want to do living in sensuality passions. That word passions is simply lusts. So the sins can range from all the way from grotesque and wicked actions to lustful and wicked desires of our hearts. We have to ask ourselves, what are my wants? What do I desire? Do I have premeditated longings for wickedness or do I have premeditated longings for righteousness? Do I want to pursue righteousness and make efforts to live for the Lord?

What we need in our lives, we could say, is this, not just to have our actions and behaviors changed, but we should want to have our wants changed. We should want to want the Lord. We may not always want the Lord, even as believers, but we ought to want to want the Lord. And when we want him, we ought to ask him to give us the desires of our heart. Give yourself to me, make me want you, and then give me what I want. Does that make sense? Make me want you, Lord, and then give me what I want.

But when you're living this way, the God-honoring way, when you're striving to live consistently for Christ, he says in verse four, People are going to be surprised. And not only are they going to be surprised by your behavior, they're actually going to malign you. They will be surprised for obvious reasons. They are shocked that you're not joining in with them in their sin. Why wouldn't you want to do all these wicked things, they think to themselves. But they even go further. They aren't just surprised, they actually go a step further. They malign you. And that word malign means to verbally accuse or to attack someone verbally. They attack you because you're righteous and you're living for the Lord, because you're trying to do God's will, and your very presence convicts them of sin. Because you live so differently that your light shines, and it convicts them of their sin, and they don't like it, and so they malign you. They say to you, you Christian, you're just self-righteous, you just think you're better than me. You're holier than thou, you're a goody two-shoes, just join us. They accuse you of thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think. When the reality is you're simply striving by God's grace to live for the Lord and it's revealing to them that they are not okay, that there is a judgment day coming and they will be condemned and they don't like that.

Well, You continue to live for the Lord even when people around you don't like it. You continue to press on. That's the picture here, and that's what he wants them to do because they are experiencing some level of persecution. So that, of course, applies to all of us who are older in the room, but also to the young people in the room, to children. You will feel pressure. You will feel pushes to not do what the Lord wants you to do because your friends maybe

aren't. And what this passage says is you keep in humility living for the Lord even when those around you aren't living for the Lord.

Proverbs chapter 20 says, even a child makes himself known by his acts. You get to be a shining light that magnifies the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ when you live for him. Do you here this morning have a desire to live for the Lord? This text is saying that we ought to have that desire even if we are maligned, even if we are spoken ill of for our walk with Christ.

But then we see thirdly that we are free from judgment, verses five and six. Free from judgment. Verse five, but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. These people who malign you for your walk with the Lord will have to give an account, the text is saying. They will be judged by God himself on the last day. And so you should not speak ill of them or despise these people. You should pity them. You should pity them because they're storing up wrath for themselves on the day of wrath when God brings his judgment upon them. But you who are trusting in Christ are free from this judgment.

Verse six tells you this, that you who are in Christ are free from this judgment. Verse six begins, for this is why the gospel was preached, even to those who are dead. When the text begins there with this phrase, for this is why, the this of verse six is referring back to the judgment that he has just been talking about in verse five. He is saying that in essence that the gospel was preached to you in the past who are dead, to those who are dead.

Why? Because there's a judgment day coming and the gospel is the only way to not be condemned on the great day of judgment. He's saying this is the reason the gospel used to be preached to people in the past because one day they will die and they will be judged and therefore the gospel was preached to them so that they might believe and escape from the coming wrath of God.

But then it adds this phrase even to those who are dead. Now what he is saying here is that the gospel was preached to people in the past who are now dead, but who were alive when it was preached to them, and it was preached to them when they were alive so that now that they are dead they could have eternal life. In other words, the gospel was preached to these people who were alive when it was preached to them, who are now dead, and it was preached to them so that they would live forever so that they could not receive condemnation on the day of judgment.

So why is it preached to those who are now dead? So that even though they die, they might live, so that they might escape the coming wrath of God. That's why the gospel was preached to these people.

But why does Peter bring this up here in verses five and six about this coming judgment? because he wants his persecutors, his persecuted Christians to remember eternity. They're going through persecution and they're suffering and that are being pressed by these people who are maligning them to not live for God. They're feeling that pressure. And he's saying, you need to remember eternity. You need to remember that there is a coming day of judgment. And the reason you need to remember that is because it is actually It's them, not you, who are going to be persecuted. It's them who are, in the long run, going to suffer, not you.

In the moment, persecuted Christians, you may experience suffering for Christ. But in the long run, it is them who will suffer. It's much like Psalm 73, you'll remember Psalm 73, where the man, the Christian man is suffering and then he goes into the sanctuary of God. And in the sanctuary of God, what does he do? He discerns their end. He discerns that those who are persecuting him, the wicked, will come to an end. And when they do, it'll be they who suffer, not them.

At the end of the day, he wants them to understand That the ones who suffer ultimately are those who are not dressed in the righteous robes of Jesus Christ. That the ones who are going to suffer in the long run are those who are dressed in their own filthy rags. And that those who are going to prosper in the long run are those who are dressed in the righteousness of Christ. That on the judgment day, Those who have suffered for Christ and are dressed in the righteous robes of Jesus Christ, the imputed righteousness of Christ, they will no longer suffer. They will be dressed radiantly in Christ's righteousness. They are dressed, you right now who are in Christ are dressed, present tense, in the righteous robes of Christ before your heavenly Father. And that will be your righteousness on the great day of judgment.

But all who do not trust in him, all who have maligned you, who do not repent, It is they who will suffer on the great day of judgment. He wants them to keep this in mind so that they would not give up living for the Lord underneath the pressures that they are experiencing.

Well, today, Peter has said to these persecuted Christians, he has said, in essence, you are free in Christ. And because you are free in Christ, though you suffer, you are actually going to prosper. Though you go through great trials, you in the long run will receive eternal life. Though you experience the hardships, you are actually fine in Christ, even in the midst of your trials. He's wanting to encourage them to think with eternity on their mind.

He says that you are free, free from your sins. You are free to God and you are free from judgment. And this is only possible in Jesus Christ. That's how this is the case. And that's how it can be the case for you all here this morning because you're in Christ. In Christ, if you are in Christ this morning, you don't have to be a slave to sin any longer. In Christ, you don't have to live for the world any longer. You can live for God. And if you're in Christ this morning, you don't have to fear the great day of judgment because you're free from the condemnatory judgment of God because Christ has taken it. on himself.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we do thank you that in Christ we are free, free from our sins which so easily entangle us. We are free to live for you, O God, and we are free from the condemnatory judgment which is coming. O God, we pray that whatever suffering we may experience in this life, especially suffering that we directly experience for following Jesus, We would go through that suffering in a way that would bring you honor and glory, that you would allow the suffering we experience to be an opportunity for us to arm ourselves more completely with thinking upon Christ and what he has done for us. We pray that our thoughts and our lives would reflect the Lord Jesus Christ, that we would live in a way that brings you glory. Oh Lord, we pray all of this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.