

Happy New Year! The beginning of the year is traditionally the beginning of a new season. We come out of the holiday season, with its fun and joy and the excesses of making merry, and we enter into...the resolution season. Every January so many of us make determined decisions to live our lives in a different way in the new year. Some of us resolve to lose a little weight. Others want to exercise more. Some want to get a better handle on their finances. Others are determined to read their Bible more. All good things. But here's the problem, and many of you know what I'm going to say. So few of these resolutions are actually kept. In fact, the stat I read this week said that only 8% of resolutions are achieved. Most people don't even make it out of February. I recently heard a comedian lament his own struggle with his 2017 resolution: "Well, I made a resolution this year to lose 15 lbs...and I only have 25 left to go!" I saw more articles at the beginning of the year not on what your resolution should be, but on how to keep it. I read counsel that included writing down your goal, telling others, building a plan, and so on. Ultimately, the problem is that success is based on our willpower. And so, this morning, I want to challenge all of us to make the same New Year's resolution. It's a resolution based not on our willpower, but one based on God's will and power.

This morning we return to our series in 1 Peter called *Thriving in Babylon*. Peter is writing to Christians in Asia Minor who are beginning to experience the cost of living out their faith in an unbelieving world. Peter uses the idea of Babylon, which is the historical place of Israel's captivity where they lived in a kingdom not their own, to illustrate the reality of all Christians' existence. He refers to us as "elect exiles" to remind us of two things: that God chose us, meaning we have an amazing salvation and new identity in Christ, and that we have a new citizenship. We are no longer citizens of this world, of Babylon, but are now citizens of heaven. That means we are currently sojourners, passing through this foreign land that is no longer our own as we head towards our eternal home in heaven. We are to be in this world, but not of it, and that reality creates tension for all who follow Jesus. So Peter's letter gives instruction on how we are to live in light of all that.

Our study last year ended in chapter 3 with the glorious truth found in v18: **[1 Peter 3:18]** 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 unjust suffering of Jesus was the means by which he reconciled us to God. And that's where we are going to pick it up this morning. In light of what Christ has done for us, Peter calls on all of us to make a resolution; that we would commit the rest of our lives to one thing: to live for the will of God.

[1 Peter 4:1-2] 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, ²so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

If losing 15 lbs. is tough, how difficult will it be to make our lives all about the will of God? In light of the pressures and persecution of this world, coupled with our own desires, this may be the most challenging New Year's resolution any of us can make. And it's certainly not one we can achieve through our own willpower. Left to ourselves, we will surely be part of the 92% who fails in keeping their resolution. Thankfully Peter tells us how we can accomplish this goal.

Think Christianly. For us to live for the will of God, we must adopt the same mindset as Jesus.

[1 Peter 4:1a-b] Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.

Jesus was resolved that, no matter what obstacles or difficulties he encountered, he would remain wholly committed to fulfilling the will of God. He patiently endured unjust suffering because he knew that was what it was going to take to accomplish what God had sent him to do.

There has been growing attention over the last few years, through books, online resources, TED talks, and conferences, given to a question that sounds simple, but can actually be rather complex. The question is, “What is your why?” Your why is the purpose that inspires and motivates you, and it’s the place we should start if we are resolving to do anything. If I know I’ll be healthier if I lose 15 lbs., then I’m willing to go through the physical strain of exercising three times a week. If I want to be a better steward of my resources, then I’m willing to commit the time to making a budget and sticking to it. If I know my family will thrive with me around more often, then I’m willing to say no to other things and be present. If I want to know God more intimately, and know that will happen if I read his Word regularly, then I’m willing to get up 30 minutes earlier every day.

Jesus knew his “why”. And while 1 Peter 3:19 is a wonderful summary of Jesus’ work, John 6 gives us the words of Jesus’ that show us that. I want you to hear and see the clarity of Jesus’ why and the conviction with which he intended to pursue it.

[John 6:38-40] ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

What was Jesus’ why? To please the Father and secure our salvation. And we know through the reading of the Gospels that, no matter what came, whether it be insults, mockery, rejection, persecution, violence, or even death on a cross, he was resolved to live for the will of his Father and pay the price for his glory and our salvation by completing the mission he had been given.

Peter says we are to arm ourselves with that same thinking. The word translated “arm” has its roots in military preparation. That is not accidental. Peter is using that word because he knows living for God’s will can bring difficulty. He knows this is spiritual warfare. But he calls us to be prepared to accept unjust suffering, just as Jesus did.

Now, some of you may be thinking “Yeah, that’s easy for Jesus to do, he’s God.” But understand, Scripture is clear that we have been equipped to do this. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2 we have been given the mind of Christ. To have the mind of Christ means “[To] look at life from our Savior’s point of view, having His values and desires in mind. It means to think God’s thoughts and not think as the world thinks.” (Warren Weirsbe) We have a choice.

We can continue thinking in the way the world thinks, meaning our motives will be self-centered and our instincts will be self-preservation. Or we can put on the armor God provides, allowing us to have the same disposition as Jesus and being mentally prepared that, no matter what comes, particularly suffering, we would stay the course in our pursuit of living out God's will.

Starting in February, it is our prayer that hundreds of you will go through a Training Experience journey we call Repurposed. Through it, you'll get greater clarity on why God specifically made you for this time and this place. And as you gain more clarity, you'll be able to begin to live it out. Imagine the joy, and the activity, and the ministry that will emanate throughout our church, city, and world from the people of Fellowship as this begins to happen. Imagine the things God will do in and through us if we all wake up each morning and say "No matter what comes today, I live not to do my own will, but the will of the one who made me and sends me." Does that get you fired up? It does me, and I can't wait to get going.

But for us to do that, we not only have to think differently, we need to **Live Differently**. Change to thinking leads to change in action. If I am thinking Christianly, then I should be acting Christianly.

[1 Peter 4:1c-3] for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ²so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³For 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.

Peter's use of "in the flesh", differs from Paul's. Paul's use of flesh refers to the package of sinful desires left over after we have come to faith in Christ. For Peter, in the flesh refers to our time spent in this body, on this earth so, when he says "for the rest of the time in the flesh", he means for the rest of our lives.

V.1 ends with an interesting phrase: for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. If we live as the world lives, that means we're swimming in a pool of sin, and we won't suffer for our faith. But if we are suffering in the flesh like Jesus, it must mean that we have denied ourselves and are living for Christ, and the control of sin in our lives is broken. Sin's dominion has ceased in my life.

If the power of sin is broken in our lives, then the occurrence of sin should diminish. The time that is past suffices for doing these things. You've had your fill, now let's get on to being about the business of the Lord. It's like turning the page on the calendar. The reason resolutions usually come at the beginning of the year is because it's a fresh start. We have closed the chapter on 2017 – it's done with, it's put away – and are starting anew in 2018. Some of you were very happy to close the book on 2017 and start fresh on 2018. Peter is saying the same thing about our lives before and after Jesus. Let's be done with the season of self-indulgent passions, let's close the book on them, and start fresh as eager followers of Jesus Christ.

If we are serious about living for the will of God, there's a question we all need to ask ourselves this morning. Where are we still living for our own passions that aren't in line with God's will? The answer may not be from the list that Peter gives, but they are self-indulgent and destructive

practices, nonetheless. Some of us may be living in full-blown disobedience to God, and it's time to make a change, it's time to turn the page. For others, and this is the more common issue for those of us who have been believers for a while, we have sectioned out a part of our life and are keeping it from God. We'll live for his will in 94.7% of our lives, but this other small part we'll keep for ourselves to live for ourselves. Either approach is a roadblock to remaining in the will of God and living out our purpose. **Arming ourselves with the same mindset as Jesus means a relentless pursuit of obedience.** It is not a call to sinless perfection, it's a call to holy progression, where we allow the Spirit of God to show us where we are falling short of God's standard and empower us to overcome it and live for him. One of most faithful and courageous prayers we can pray is "Lord, show me where my life displeases you." Expect an answer, not one of condemnation, but one full of grace and truth, because he wants you to be done with it.

And I also want to encourage you with something. Some of you may look at this list of passions and think "Well that sounds like my junior year in college!" You may have lived a lot of years, in a lot of ways, far from Jesus. You may think that you are beyond hope, that you have simply sinned beyond being useful for God. But the righteous one died for you and fully paid for your unrighteousness. It is settled, and you are free of it. You are useful to God because you have been bought by God, you have been redeemed by God, and you now belong to him. He is going to use you. A tough battle you don't want to do alone...Men's Breakfast.

Another reason you don't want to do this alone is because difficulty will come. **[1 Peter 4:4] ⁴With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.**

When we begin to live for the will of God, particularly if we have been living far from it, it is potentially a drastic change, and one that clearly shows others we have become exiles in this world. Christians in Peter's day, in obedience to their Savior, stopped participating in these pagan practices Peter lists, and they began to pay the price for it. If we cease from the cultural practices we have been a part of, our lives now become a great big spotlight on the things we consider sinful and idolatrous. Our abstinence implies we have the truth, given to us by the one true God, and it is tacit judgment on others' behavior and beliefs. And, like in Peter's day, those who participate in the cultural norms from which we refrain will likely take offense and push back. And that's when there's potential for suffering.

Hope Eternally. Peter concludes this section with two reminders that should bring peace to the suffering believer and encourage us to stay on the path of the will of God.

[1 Peter 4:5-6] ⁵but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶For 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.

We can patiently endure unjust suffering, and live our lives for God's will, because he will judge all, including those who persecute us. This is arming ourselves with the same attitude of Christ because, as 2:23 says, Christ did not take judgment into his own hands, "but instead trusted the One who judges justly," that is, God the Father. Peter does not say this to encourage vindictiveness. This is not permission for us to point at those who persecute us, laugh, and say

“God is going to get you!” It’s just the opposite. If we leave judgment to God, this frees us from having to look at the unbelieving world as our enemy, where it’s us against them, and instead live our lives as a blessing to unbelievers, perhaps causing them to ask us about the hope that is in us, and giving us an opportunity to tell them about our Jesus.

We can also patiently endure suffering because our eternity is secure. There’s been a lot of debate on what V6 means. Some have suggested there is a second opportunity to come to faith in Christ after we die, and so the gospel is preached again to the dead. That does not align with other passages of Scripture, particularly Hebrews that says it is for man to die once, and then be judged. So what’s he saying there?

To better understand this verse, we should read it as **“For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are NOW dead.”** He is referring to those who heard the Gospel, responded in faith, and ultimately died. Understand the kind of accusations pagan unbelievers were making. For them, the death of a person who followed Christ was a disaster, and that there was no benefit to the Gospel. They witnessed these Christians change their way of living, and concluded it was all a waste. It’s as if they might mockingly say, “Well what good is it to follow this Jesus? You live a life that sure seems boring. You cut out all these indulgent practices and, in the end, you die anyway.”

Peter is reminding us that death does not have the final say for a follower of Christ. He uses a phrase that mirrors what he said in 3:18. Jesus was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he was raised from the dead. Followers of Christ may be judged by man in the flesh, and we will all experience death, but we too will one day be raised with him in the power of the Holy Spirit. The sufferings of this life are temporary when compared to the eternal glory that awaits us, and that should encourage us persevere in living for the will of God.

Remember regularly and reverently

This is not something Peter mentions, but it’s something we’ll do this morning as we take communion. This may be the day you choose to make your life all about God’s will and become a follower of Jesus.

There have been times in my life, I’m embarrassed to admit, where I took communion every week, but thought little of it. It was just the next thing you did in a church service. But as I have gotten to know the Lord more through the years, this practice has become more and more meaningful to me, and it’s one of the things I most love to do as a church. And, in light of our study of 1 Peter, it is even more significant to me.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus had one more thing to do to fulfill the will of the Father. It was going to be the most difficult, and he knew it. His suffering would be at its most intense. But he was resolved to endure it. So he gathered his friends and followers one last time and instituted a celebration to glorify himself, to remind us that he gave his all of himself for the will of the Father, and to compel us to do the same.