

Living in the Light of the End

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[0 : 00] Have that part of the Bible open. 1 Peter chapter 4 and we'll be looking at verses 1 to 11.

! I wonder if you think of yourself as being in a daily fight. Do you think like that?! Do you think like that? Do you feel like you walk through life as part of a cosmic struggle between good and evil? With Jesus as our champion, with the souls of humanity at stake? Do you feel like that on a daily basis? Do you feel like you're in the trenches? I think it's quite hard to think like that and feel like that. When you're in Sainsbury's with the rest of Farnham or you're arranging for the boiler to be serviced or you're sitting in class and it's geography again. Do you feel like that? Like you're in a cosmic struggle? It's hard to think like that. I've been listening to a podcast recently, boring my family with it, called *The Rest is Classified*. And that podcast basically goes through all of the amazing things that have happened in the intelligence history of our country and of some other allied countries as well. So MI5, MI6 and other intelligence services as well. Amazing stories. But one of the overriding impressions that you get when you listen to those stories being told is that there's never a ceasefire. There's never a break in the unseen intelligence war. You can't see it and yet it never stops. We don't really see any of it except sort of these kinds of sensational bits. Do you remember this? It was kind of shocking because it was so local, wasn't it? But it's just the tip of the iceberg. And it's going on all the time. And that's like the spiritual fight that we are in. We don't see it. We often don't even feel it. But it's going on all the time. And the message today is that we should really expect to struggle in that fight, to suffer in it. And the good news that comes with that message is that it has an end. It has an end.

And Peter is calling us to live in the light of that end. And he encourages us to do that in two ways. First of all, walking the road of suffering which leads to life. We're looking at verses 1 and 6.

But before we get there, just flick back into chapter 3, verse 18, where it says this, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the spirit. So this invisible fight claims the life of the Lord Jesus. Do you see that? Jesus suffers in his body, dying on the cross.

[3 : 17] And when it comes to chapter 4, Peter isn't drawing our attention to Jesus actually as our saviour. Here. Let's read verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is finished with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. Can you see what Peter's saying?

He's saying, I want you to follow Jesus' example. In fact, he's saying what Jesus said. If you know your gospels really well, Jesus says, If anyone would follow me, let him come after me, deny himself, take up his cross.

Matthew chapter 16, verse 24. I think we just need to do a little bit of explanation here. Only thinking about Jesus as your moral example, nice example to follow, if you only think of Jesus like that, which many do, then that leaves you outside of his saving work.

And it leaves you with a moral mountain you will never climb. Take it from me. But never thinking of Jesus as your example means that you're not following him.

If you're not following him, if you're not fighting sin in yourself, if you're not being known as his, then you're not taking steps after him towards heaven, are you?

[4 : 53] You're not living in the light of the end. That's not what the Bible says. That's not biblical Christianity. That's justification without the sanctification, isn't it? Peter is saying, follow the shepherd's steps.

How do we do that? What's our cunning plan? What is our strategy in this fight? It's to arm ourselves with the attitude of Jesus, which is, suffer like Christ.

That's what verse 1 says, isn't it? Take the same attitude. Put to death the desires of our bodies to make room for the fullness of life that God gives us, his children.

Starve out the old habits that dehumanise you. It's what an older generation called mortification. It's part of discipleship, isn't it?

And look, there's a healthy balance here in the Bible. Following Jesus is not about avoiding suffering at all costs, which is what we naturally want to do, isn't it? In fact, we've made a bit of an idol out of it.

[6 : 01] It's not about comfort, getting rid of risk, inconvenience. It's not. And it's also not about charging headlong into suffering like some religious zealot looking for martyrdom.

There's nothing in the Bible of that. It's simply doing God's will, living his way, denying ourselves, speaking for him, and facing the opposition that comes as a result.

It cannot all be avoided. It should not all be prayed away. And it is not all evil. In fact, we know that for Christians, suffering will end in life for us.

So let's read on. Verses 3 and 4. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless wild living and they heap abuse on you. Do you remember what we said right back at the beginning? You belong, but not here. So don't go back.

[7 : 14] Don't go back to living like you do belong here. Don't go back to living with the enemy, Peter says. Sounds harsh? Well, the culture of the Roman Empire that Peter spoke into was in many ways not very different from our own.

It's full of ordinary people not listening to God. So some of what we think of as just freedom of choice, ordinary self-determination, following your dreams, being who you are, just having a laugh, some of that, God says, is debauchery and detestable idolatry.

Don't dabble with it. Be prepared to deny yourself and deal with the pressure that follows. So imagine for a moment with me that your old boss or your old boyfriend or girlfriend, they come to you out of the blue, they message you with a tempting offer to back out of whatever your current situation is and come back to them.

You know, all the old familiarity but now with extra benefits. You know that if you say no, that bridge is burned forever. How do you resist?

Your vanity and your fear, thoughts about financial security and flattery, it all suddenly comes gushing in, doesn't it? That's what Peter's saying. That's the danger. How do you resist if you know that there's probably no going back?

[8 : 40] If you say no. So here's verses 5 and 6. They, as those who don't follow Christ, will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

See, we live in light of the end knowing that our suffering, which is suffering like Jesus, ends in life. End of verse 6, we will live according to God in regard to the spirit.

When the end comes, we'll inherit that eternal life that Peter's already told us about. And when we're suffering, doing that self-denial thing, facing the abuse and rejection that this book talks about, it doesn't feel like it leads to life, does it?

In fact, some of you might be thinking, they're saying, well, stupid idea, suffering leads to life. Just look around for a moment, think, and you'll realise suffering does lead to life.

[9 : 46] Start with some easy examples. Think about a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. Do you know what has to happen to a caterpillar to be turned into a butterfly? Basically, it has to be broken down in the cocoon before it can become a butterfly.

Almost completely dissolves. It's slightly icky, actually, if you look into it. Think about childbirth. Suffering brings forth life.

It's true on a growth level as well. Think about what happens when you exercise. You run a long way, you lift a load. Actually, tiny tears in your muscles. That's what happens.

And when those tears heal up, your muscles are stronger for it. But most of all, of course, it's the way of the cross, isn't it? Crucifixion leads to resurrection.

Suffering leads to life. It is the cross-shaped way. But it's not the case for everyone, is it? Verse 5.

[10:52] Don't miss the warning if you're not living for the will of God. Peter says here, there is an accounting. And his verdict counts, as we heard a few weeks back.

Doesn't it? Peter reminds his readers, really, that we're walking one of two paths. There's that road of grace that this whole book has been about, grace for the road. That's with Christ, done with sin, living for his will, suffering, but ending in life.

or there's the road without Christ, choosing what you want, living for your own desires, ending in judgment.

If you're not willing to suffer for Jesus, it means in your head and in your heart, you are not done with sin.

You're not free. You're not forgiven. We have folks at Bethel, haven't we, who can't quite believe that the Lord Jesus would forgive them and that they don't have to earn their place with Jesus.

[12:07] But God's grace says, yes, he will forgive you. No, you don't need to earn your place. The moral mountain's been climbed for you. and he died on the cross to prove it.

But sadly, we've also had folks at Bethel who are unwilling to suffer like Jesus or for Jesus. Just not sure when you want to commit to making a definitive step.

Drifting. Or folks who like Jesus as their loving saviour, yet we can get on board with that idea. But I don't like him as my Lord. The one who actually expects me to live a certain way and to uphold certain truths.

You like church and you like community. Yeah, those are good things and you're welcome here. But you don't like the commitment and the inconvenience. Here's the root issue according to Peter, inspired by God.

You're not done with sin. And you won't be unless you come to the cross and you let him deal with that sin. And then you take up your own cross and you walk the road of suffering that leads to life.

[13:31] For those of us who are walking that road, there's pressure from the outside, isn't there? Be like us. It's so much easier. Don't put a break on me doing me. Don't sacrifice satisfaction in favour of something bigger, better.

Don't put in the hard miles killing off your sin. It's just easier not to, isn't it? It's easier to choose convenience fitting in. But a willingness to suffer, Peter says, the flip side of the coin, is evidence that we are done with sin.

It's an outworking of our union with the Lord Jesus who himself suffered and defeated sin. You see, our self-denial comes from his.

That's part of what it means to be his. So if you think of yourself as Christian but you've never really suffered for Jesus, you've not denied yourself, then have you really understood what the suffering of Jesus for you means?

Not just for your salvation, your justification, but for your growth in godliness, your spiritual walk, your sanctification.

[14:47] Because Peter here is saying there is a direct connection between your suffering and his. we walk the road of suffering that leads to life.

So, warnings, instructions, how can we do this? Second point, we walk that road together and by God's grace.

Maybe you're thinking, you know, no, really, I know the suffering bit. At least some of it is because I'm doing my best to follow Jesus. And it helps to know that this is Jesus' way and that that suffering leads to life but still, do you know, it hurts and it's hard and I'm tired.

There is good news. Let's read verse 7. This is the first bit. The end of all things is near.

So, here is where our invisible fight is not like the unseen intelligence war going on. There's never an end in sight for that war, is there?

[15:55] But for us, the end is near. We're used to hearing that as a prophecy of doom, aren't we? Kind of repent.

Doom is at hand. But for Christians, this is good news. This is good news. There is not long to go now. Just a little longer, beloved, in the grand scheme of things.

And victory in that fight against sin and pain and evil is already achieved. See that at the cross. Power of sin broken. Penalty of sin paid for everybody who believes. And with resurrection, even death is defeated.

And Jesus' kingdom is established. The battle continues. But Peter is saying, we don't have to hold out much longer. The end is near.

Just a little while, it will be done. So now, what are my priorities as a Christian? How do I survive the last skirmishes? How do I walk that road of suffering?

[17:04] How do I live in light of the end? And the answer is, I don't. We do. We do it together as a church. We walk it together.

Can you see all Peter's encouragements and instructions? They're all done together. Last time I spoke, we talked about how important it is in the face of this kind of suffering and persecution from the outside to have strong relationships at home.

But Peter here is widening it out. And he says, we need strong relationships in church if we're to endure those pressures. So what does it look like to live together in the light of the end then?

Well, it doesn't mean build a bunker, stockpile tinned food, get your placard ready because the tribulation is coming.

Isn't that interesting? That's not Peter's instruction. He says, the end is coming and the next breath, what does he say? Verse 7b, therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.

[18:04] pray together. The end of the universe is coming and Peter's instruction is, go to the prayer meeting. Isn't that something?

Don't hear me wrong, there are legitimate reasons for not coming out to a prayer meeting at various times in your life. Of course there are. And for some people it just is not possible.

of course. But perhaps the prayer meeting sometimes is not well attended and when we come we feel, dare I say it, it's a little bit boring.

Perhaps we feel that way because we don't really believe we have to suffer like Jesus did. Or because we don't really believe that the end of all things is near.

pressure to fit in doesn't always look like being beaten or insulted, does it? Sometimes it looks like choosing to stay and to catch up on traitors instead of coming out to the prayer meeting.

[19:09] I'm not saying watching traitors is wrong. I'm not saying that. What else? Verse 8. Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.

This is so important. Peter's saying it for the second time in the book. Go to chapter 1 verse 22. It says exactly the same thing. On this difficult road where we live as exiles in the light of the end, we need to love each other, love each other at full stretch.

That's how one of the commentators puts it. We do that when there is sin in the room and when suffering is the backdrop because there will be sin in the church and it will need to be forgiven and love will need to cover it.

Not cover it up, that's not what that means, not hide it, but cover it in the sense of binding it up like you cover up a wound with a binding, closing it up, closing up the wound that sin has opened.

Love one another deeply. Verse 9. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. So Peter says, the end is coming, be in each other's lives.

[20:30] Whatever that looks like for you, do it without grumbling. Oh no, I forgot that we're going to have folks around on Sunday again. Do you feel like that?

I forgot I said I drive those kids there. Not now! We've all been there, haven't we?

I have. Isn't it amazing that Jesus didn't grumble when we stumbled over his doorstep, muddy and smelly and not particularly grateful?

Verse 10. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

Serve. Here's one definition, a one-sentence definition of Christian service. You could do a whole sermon just on this verse, couldn't you? I won't, don't worry. Faithfully use what you've been given for others and do it out of God's grace.

[21:42] Peter says that should be one of our priorities if we're living in the light of the end. Verse 11. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.

If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever.

Peter circles right back to where it all begins and where we need to keep our eye. Living in the light of the end is ultimately about relying on, sharing God and his grace.

We only do it by God's grace. We can only do this with God's help, his strength, and for him. Don't miss that. Otherwise, it can just feel like a to-do list, can't it?

The clue is in verse 10, stewards of God's grace, and he fleshes it out in verse 11. Do it with the strength that God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

[22 : 56] Christ. Can you see that for Peter, if you're having a hard time at work, or you're under a lot of pressure at school, or someone in the church has wronged you, or you're just weary of struggling in the fight, that's not a reason to hide at home, give church a miss.

That's actually a reason to lean in, to be in each other's homes, to receive that care, to be loved, to be prayed for, to be where God pours out his blessing in church, Christian.

Perhaps you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. What would it do to your priorities if you knew that tomorrow was the end? That's the obvious question to ask here, isn't it? If you knew that things were going to be over tomorrow, and the books were going to be opened, and the figures were totted up, and the final totals paid out.

How does that message strike you? Verse 5, but they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

The credit column will not pay out the debit column. Your goodness will not cover your sin. Only God's grace, which is already paid for by Jesus on the cross, can do that.

[24 : 27] So don't wait. Don't wait for the end to arrive. Instead, make sure that his suffering leads to life for you, that his love covers your multitude of sins.

One of the stories that was shared on The Rest is Classified is the story of Operation Gunner Side. I'm going to tell you a little bit about it.

It's the Second World War, 1943. Hidden deep in the mountains at Vermork in Norway, the Nazis are producing heavy water. Heavy water is a crucial ingredient in developing nuclear weapons. If the Nazis succeed, it changes the outcome of the war and the future of Europe. So the Allies need that plant destroyed. You can understand. Tiny team of exiled Norwegian soldiers, trained by the British Special Forces, volunteered for what was thought of as a suicide mission.

They're known as the Gunner Side Team. The commandos had to carry an incredibly valuable and precious package, small explosive charges, because that's what they needed to destroy the heavy water cells.

[25 : 44] an explosive message, if you like. And they also carried tiny packets of British emergency ration chocolate in the same kit, in the same package.

Think joy, grace. And they were both irreplaceable. So the men treated this package almost like it was a living thing. And that chocolate, they rationed it strictly, because it was the only thing that was keeping them alive long enough to keep going.

here's where the suffering comes in. To reach the plant, the team had to cross blizzards that lasted for days, winds minus 30 degrees C, 15,000 foot plateau, cliffs, ravines, weeks of near starvation. And one of the commandos, a man called Joachim Röneberg, later said, we were at the limit of what a human being can survive. That describes suffering, doesn't it? Every time they faltered, they touched the package, feeling the weight of what it can bring.

Freedom, safety, a future hope. After a 200 mile trek, the team infiltrates the plant. They crawl across an icy ravine on a single handrail.

[26 : 59] They place those charges on the heavy water cells, and they light the fusions, and the entire facility is destroyed. Cripples the production line and the nuclear program for the Nazis, and basically prevents Hitler from developing a nuclear weapon, and the commandos escape.

Do you know what they said afterwards? That touching that package reminded them why they were suffering and who they were suffering for. One of them later said, we kept going because we knew that what we carried mattered more than our lives.

that's us with God's grace, isn't it? It's like explosives, and at the same time it's like chocolate. It keeps us going.

Joy in the midst of suffering, knowing that it will make all the difference, except of course that in our version of the story, Jesus has already been and blown up the plant.

God and his grace are the means. God and his grace are the message. God and his grace are the end.

[28 : 15] So then we need to move closer to the heart of that God, don't we, who denies himself and his comfort and his convenience in order to put sin to death and to share life and to make the good news known.

By his power, we live as he lived, sharing his grace, putting sin to death, speaking his words, because he loves us.

Because he loves us, let us love each other. Live together in the light of the end. So remember that his grace means there is a guarantee of life at the end of that road and that the end is not far. to him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.
Amen. Amen.