

Prepared for Jesus' return

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[0 : 00] 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.

The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

[1 : 21] Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God. Whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything, God may be glorified through Christ Jesus. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 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. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

[2 : 46] For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

And, if the righteous are scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

Father, we thank you so much for this gift, this book of 1 Peter, this letter. Please, would you grant us ears to hear and hearts to receive.

And please, would you help us see the glory of your Son, the Lord Jesus, and his suffering as we look at your word. Amen. So why should we suffer for Jesus?

I mean, why should we suffer at all? I mean, we live in modern 21st century London, don't we?

Everything around us, from mobile phones to the latest coffee machines, to Alexa, to voice-activated roller shutter blinds, they're all designed to improve the quality of our lives, not make it worse.

[4 : 07] The famous psychologist Jordan Peterson recently posted on Instagram, if you deconstruct what people mean when they say they want to be happy, what they really mean is they don't want to be miserable.

People are way more concerned with avoiding suffering rather than pursuing enthusiastic positive emotion. Now, no one enjoys suffering.

We really avoid suffering like the plague. Now, we've just read 1 Peter, and already, if you turn with me back to verse 1, already, verse 1 makes for a fairly uncomfortable read.

Let me read it. Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.

In other words, hey Christians, be prepared to suffer as Jesus did. I hope we haven't missed that. Jesus is the suffering servant, prophesied in Isaiah 53.

[5 : 14] He was despised as a criminal, rejected by the people, mocked, spat on, flogged, nailed to the cross, pierced, and left to die. Yet 1 Peter, chapter 3, verse 18, gives us the purpose of Jesus' suffering.

Just turn with me, just one page before. 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.

Jesus took on the punishment we deserved, so that those who follow him may have new life with God. Jesus' pattern from suffering to glory is the Christian's pattern from suffering to glory.

Now our suffering can't atone for the sins of others or ourselves, but as followers of the Lord Jesus, Peter's message to Christians here is, prepare to suffer as Jesus did.

Now Peter's original audience for this letter were Christians living under immense suffering and persecution, probably under the rule of the Emperor Nero, and many of them were at the wrong end of ridicule and opposition for their faith.

[6 : 35] Some were brutally treated. Some had their livelihood stripped away or had to flee their homes. Some may even have seen some friends lose their lives simply for living for Jesus.

For them then, they were exiles and life was bleak. And it's completely understandable if they wondered, is suffering for Jesus worth it? Why persevere?

Why not just give up? But back in chapter 1, from the start of this letter, Peter peels back the curtain of the spiritual realm, and he reminds them of the glorious inheritance as they lived through suffering they experience now.

Now here are some highlights. Just turn back with me to chapter 1 of 1 Peter. I won't go through the whole thing, but here's just some highlights. So verse 3, we were once lost, but God's mercy caused us to be born again into a living hope.

Verse 4, we can look forward to that glorious inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven. And verse 5, that glorious inheritance is safe, guarded by none other than the power of the Almighty.

[7 : 45] And because of this, verse 6, we can rejoice, although now we suffer momentarily. And verse 7, we're tested by fire, by suffering. And again, verse 8, rejoice, as our joy is inexpressible, filled with glory, as we obtain verse 9, what we look forward to, the salvation of our souls.

In other words, yes, Christians will experience suffering now, but, Christians, we have a glorious living hope in Lord Jesus. So hold tight to that.

Hold tight to that. And like them, we are to hold tight as in the same living hope if we're to live out our Christian lives. So hence, the three points of my talk, you'll find it in the back of the service sheet.

I hope it's easy to follow along. So in light of Jesus' return, so back in chapter 4, this is where I've taken it from verse 7a, the end of all things is at hand.

In light of Jesus' return, expect suffering, sow through suffering, and rejoice in suffering. So firstly, in light of suffering, sorry, in light of Jesus' return, expect suffering.

[9 : 03] That's right, expect suffering. Now look with me at verse 12. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Now notice Peter doesn't say, do not be surprised if you suffer. He said, do not be surprised when you suffer. This means, contrary to popular belief, suffering is the normal Christian experience.

Suffering is the normal Christian experience. Now please don't misunderstand. Peter isn't saying that we're not saved unless we actually experience suffering, nor is he saying that if we're not experiencing suffering now, we'll go and do something silly to ensure that we will suffer.

Nor is our suffering somehow earning brownie points for God. But, suffering is the vital vehicle that God uses to deepen our joy in Christ Jesus and to build each other up.

And as we live out the Christian life, as we live radically godly lives distinct to the world around us, suffering will naturally be part of our Christian walk.

[10 : 14] And suffering can be a trial. Now, this is in the start of a letter in chapter 1, verse 6, that these trials are in effect a refining fire to authenticate our faith.

The Lord Jesus suffered, so would we. If we're not already experiencing suffering, we must expect it. So how do we prepare for suffering? How do we suffer well?

Well, verse 1 continues, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has seized from sin. Wait, what? Seized from sin? How can that be right?

I mean, that doesn't fit our Christian experience, does it? I mean, I for once sin far more than I care to admit. Just ask Annie, my wife. But Peter doesn't mean that once we suffer, we will no longer sin. Now, see with me verse 2. It's so that we no longer live for human passions, but we live for the will of God. Now, once we grasp that we are God's chosen people in exile to bring him glory, we will want to live our lives more and more consistently aligned with Jesus'.

[11:26] Our priorities are turned upside down. The world's priorities, money, sex, popularity, comfortable life, whatever it is, that's no longer what we live for.

Our lives are transformed. We now live for God. We chase after holiness. We long to bring glory to Jesus. We live with the sole purpose of winning the worship of the world for God.

And as we live lives different to the world around us, don't be surprised that others looking in on our lives might be surprised themselves. Now, see with me verse 3.

For the time that has passed 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.

[12:29] Now, we might not be participating in orgies or drinking rivalries, but how much of our time is actually spent chasing worldly things? To use Marcus' word from last week, for leisure, pleasure, or treasure.

Now, how much of our waking hours are spent on building our careers of wealth, climbing social ladders, chasing after academic success for ourselves or for our children, indulging in mindless hours of entertainment, or trying to get that dream home, or planning the next holiday?

The point is this. If our Christian lives look indistinguishable to the lives of people around us, the way we live will be powerless to attract anyone to Jesus.

And frankly, why would they even bother? It's only if we live distinctive godly lives and be willing to suffer for it, we would then stick out like a sore thumb to the world and cause others to question their own lives.

And as their own sins are exposed, they may mock us, they may despise us, and we may suffer. Now, as a result, we may lose income, or be passed for a promotion, or even lose our jobs.

[13:41] Our grades at school might drop, we may never even get the recognition that we deserve. Our friends may think that we're weird and we may never be popular, we may miss out on invitations of parties, and so on.

But God is just, and for those who reject Jesus and abuse us, one day they will be called to give account to the judge of the universe himself. God uses our suffering to transport the gospel to this dying world.

The more we are suffering for God, the more the world sees the glory of God. Now, for many of us, one reason we don't experience suffering is because we're too in love with our comforts.

Now, perhaps we've been a Christian a while, we know that we should expect suffering, but suffering never comes because we never step out of our comfort zone in the first place. We might be afraid to ask our colleagues what they think about Jesus because we might not know how to answer.

Or we don't voice the biblical view on sexuality or marriage or abortion because we fear treading in hot water with the diversity and inclusion group at work or at school.

[14:58] And perhaps we talk about the love of Jesus but leave out the warning of hell because it's unpopular. Now, suffering in our comfort zones are like two separate circles in a Venn diagram, never crossing each other.

And the temptation is to stay in the circle of comfort and avoid stepping out. Stepping out of our comfort zone is uncomfortable. Rico Tice calls this the pain barrier, but we really, we just need to take that first step.

And when suffering comes, the question we should ask isn't, Lord, why is this happening to me? But it's, Lord, how can I use this for your glory? In light of Jesus' return, don't be surprised by suffering.

Expect it. And in light of Jesus' return, serve one another while suffering. That's my second point. Serve one another while suffering. Now look with me at verse seven.

The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins.

[16:11] Show hospitality to one another without grumbling as each has received a gift. Use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace. Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. If we're to win the worship of the world for God, we're to live distinctively in our everyday conduct in private and with one another.

Now one area of our lives is in prayer and Peter calls for Christians to be sober-minded for the sake of our prayers. Now sober-minded is a thread in the letter that's also mentioned in chapter 1 verse 13 and chapter 5 verse 8 and it stands diametrically opposed to the worldly living that's mentioned here in chapter 4 verse 3 i.e. living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

And in the context of 1 Peter, a sober mind is a righteous mind that's aligned to God's will. And it's the qualification of effective prayers. The more we saturate our mind in God's word and live with his priorities, the less we become distracted by worldly priorities and more effective our prayers will be. Do we want effective prayers? Well, binge on the Bible, not Netflix. Focus on the things of God, not on the things of men. Anchor our outlook to our glorious imperishable inheritance, not in the things of this world that will inevitably perish.

[18:04] And we're also to love one another with our whole heart. Verse 8, above all, keep loving one another earnestly. Love covers a multitude of sins.

Now, Peter, it doesn't mean that if we sin, as long as we sort of show love to others, it will somehow sort of balance out. But I think maybe unity within the body of Christ may have been on Peter's mind here.

And Simon may touch on that next week as well. In chapter 2, Christians are built up into a spiritual house to form a new people for God, and we're to love and honour each other.

And in chapter 3, verse 8, Peter exhorts us to have unity of mind and be humble with one another. when the church is pressured to conform to the world, our personal views on certain issues may start to divide a church.

The temptation, then, is to perhaps draw lines between us and people different to us. And that's how sin creeps in. And that's the opposite of loving and honouring one another.

[19:07] Now, we must approach each other with love. Christians are fundamentally one family. And it's not always to live alongside family, but we must love each other.

And another way to live distinctively is through hospitality. Hospitality can be particularly costly for those first century Christians who were left with very limited means.

And it's easy to see how grumbling may perhaps arise. And Peter's command seems particularly harsh under those circumstances. But it's part of distinctive living. Loving others through doing good while rejoicing in suffering.

So God gets the glory. Now, in the July-August issue of the Barnabas Aid, this one covers over here, in Burkina Faso, in the midst of famine and Islamist violence, it writes, a group of Christians shared some of their food with Muslim relatives.

30 of the Muslims were so impressed with what they saw of Christian love that they too decided to follow Christ. One of the new converts explained, when Christians love you, they really love you and show it.

[20:25] If I have a choice, I will only be a Christian. Isn't that wonderful? Aren't those the conversion rates that we dream of? our circumstances may be vastly different, but we can still practice hospitality.

And the more we live out Christ's love in practical ways, the more others may be drawn to Christ. Why not look out for new opportunities for hosting? A great way to show our love for others and for the Lord Jesus is to host those in need, such as perhaps people from Ukraine or elsewhere.

A couple of Christians I know have already done that, and it's a wonderful example of sacrificial hospitality. Peter also calls us to use our God-given gifts, not to serve ourselves, but to serve others.

In verse 10, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace. The world conditions us to believe that people are either givers or takers.

I don't know if you've heard of that sort of term, but Peter says all Christians are givers, givers of our gifts, which are from God anyway. Whether our gifts are in music or finances or teaching or pastoring, leading, admin, or even something as simple as carrying a winsome smile, we can all use our gifts to serve others one way or another.

[21 : 54] If we think we can do something to help others, don't hesitate, just do it. If we see a gap in the rotor, fill it. It doesn't even necessarily have to be an official church activity either.

Most first century churches were house churches with little or no organizational structure. And don't be afraid to try something new. I never saw myself preaching, and in a way it's quite funny even now.

And if you told me five years ago I'd be preaching, I wouldn't have believed you. I'm not saying I have a gift for preaching, you're the better judge of that. But it all started by trying something new. If those first century persecuted Christians who had so little were commanded to give, how much more ought we be giving our time, our energy, our resources, our lives?

Now we may never experience the same degree of suffering, but if I may be so bold, here are some suggestions for sacrificial service. Now why not hold back on that major purchase, not because of our concern over the cost of living, but so that we may give more to church or to our mission partner?

[23 : 08] How about focusing less on our children's academic success, so they may be more active in Christian things? Now for us phone addicts, how about deleting that game or social media app, suffer the withdrawal symptom, and use that newfound time to read one-to-one with a friend?

What about giving up some of our precious evenings to host dinner, or to see the sacrifice, or that they could see the sacrifice you're making and marvel at the cross in your life?

Or will we consider dialing down our working hours, suffer the pay cut, but use the time for Christian ministry? I'm sure you can think of many others.

in light of Jesus' return, expect suffering, and serve one another despite the costs. Thirdly, rejoice in suffering.

Rejoice in suffering. Now look with me at verse 13. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

[24 : 15] If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or as a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. Now there are two major pillars of themes in 1 Peter.

The first is suffering for Jesus, and the other is winning glory for Jesus. And these two pillars are bound together and made inseparable only by the Lord Jesus at the cross.

The point of both his greatest suffering and his greatest glorification. And for those who trust in Jesus, as we suffer, we share in his suffering and we also share in his glory.

Our suffering not only shapes us according to Christ's image, but also wins the worship of the world for him. this is our glorious privilege. Now in John Piper's book, 21 Servants of Sovereign Joy, he writes, God really means for the body of Christ, the church, to experience some of the sufferings Jesus experienced, so that when we proclaim the cross as the way to life, people will see the marks of the cross in us and feel the love of the cross from us.

[25 : 37] Our calling is to make the afflictions of Christ real for people by the afflictions we experience and bring them the message of salvation. We are to keep on rejoicing, not in spite of suffering, but because of it.

This is how spiritual exiles live and bring glory to Jesus. Now the American missionary, Jim Elliott, you may have heard the story already, sorry for that.

Jim Elliott was determined to bring the gospel to the Orcas tribe in Ecuador, previously unreached by the gospel. Now in the 8th of January 1956, he and four other missionaries arrived full of zeal for sharing the good news, only to be killed almost immediately by local warriors with spears.

Now by all worldly accounts, this was a tragedy. Yet before his death, Jim famously quoted, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

And he also wrote in his diary, Grieve not then, if your sons seem to desert you, but rejoice rather, seeing the will of God done gladly.

[26 : 54] Jim Elliott knew the costs, yet he rejoiced in his privilege of sharing Christ's sufferings and was willing to die for the gospel. Now I'm conscious that some of us might currently be living through the type of suffering talked about in 1 Peter 4, and much of this might be particularly raw.

Our suffering may be unjust, yet God isn't blind to our suffering. We may not know exactly what our suffering yields, but it is not in vain.

Living for Christ is not in vain. Christian suffering refines our faith and deepens our joy in the riches of Christ's love for us. Therefore, rejoice.

Rejoice. Well, so what? What does it mean for us? Well, Jesus' impending return also brings impending judgment.

So in light of Jesus' return, choose wisely. Choose wisely. Look with me at verse 17. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

[28 : 02] And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous are scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

God's judgment is the final determination of every human being who ever lived. And when Jesus returns, justice will come for both believers and non-believers. For his followers, he brings vindication of those who suffered for him.

And with it comes salvation, glory, eternal life. For those who reject him, he brings punishment, eternal darkness, and death.

There's no in-between, no gray middle line, no fence to sit on. Jim Elliot died leaving his wife and their ten-month-old daughter.

He never got to grow old with his wife. He never saw his daughter grow up. He missed out on so many things in life for the sake of the gospel, only to lose his life to the very people he tried to reach.

[29 : 05] But years later, it was through his pioneering actions and the servant-hearted perseverance of his wife, Elizabeth, that many from the tribe who speared her husband to death saw the love that they had for them.

They heard the gospel, and they themselves became Christians. Those who grasp the gospel, like those Christians in Bikina Faso and Jim and Elizabeth Elliot, they understood why suffering was necessary and lived distinctive lives so more could be drawn to Jesus and rejoiced in it.

And if we identify with that and live radically godly lives, even though in this life we suffer, we may rejoice because glory in God and life eternal awaits.

And friends, if you haven't yet put your trust in Jesus, can you see that the living hope Christians hold on to is so much more glorious and permanent and worthy of a joy than even the best this world has to offer?

And why not carefully consider the rhetorical questions in verse 17 and 18? Judgment will come for all. Are you prepared? And for those of us who follow Jesus, are we prepared to suffer well?

[30 : 26] 1 Peter 4 is a call for us to share the good news, not just through the way we, what we say, but especially through how we live our lives. So choose wisely.

Well, let me return to the opening question. Why should we suffer for Jesus? Well, it is necessary and it is for his glory. And how should we suffer? Well, in many ways, verse 19 is a key verse of the chapter and in many ways a key command of 1 Peter.

If you forget everything else today, let this be the thing to take away. Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

Are we wholeheartedly entrusting our souls to our faithful creator in all things, especially through suffering?

So if we're Christian, hold tight to the living hope we have in Jesus. Expect suffering.

[31 : 31] It is the normal Christian experience. Serve one another even in the midst of suffering and rejoice in suffering as we share in his suffering and in his glory.

This is the heart of Christian living. A radically distinctive godly living to win the worship of the world for God. Let me pray to close.

Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. O Lord, we thank you for your son, how he suffered, so that we may be brought from death to life.

Please, would you forgive us when we're unwilling to suffer for the gospel? Help us to joyfully entrust our souls to you and help us to hold tightly to the glorious inheritance that you have already laid for us and help us to endure the suffering that's thrown at us, whatever it is, for your son's glory. Amen.