

Living well on the way home - session 3

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'm afraid because time is short, we've had to skip over the second half of chapter 3, so do have a read of it at home. And we're going to have a look now at chapter 4, and thank you, Heidi, for reading. So we're going to skip over it, but just to note that Peter has been talking about suffering for being a Christian, and particularly Christ's suffering at the end of chapter 3, and he lands 3.22, reminding Christians that Jesus is in heaven now with all authority. So that's the context. Jesus is in heaven now with all authority, and everything is subjected to him. So I want us to think about one question in this final session this afternoon, and the question is this, and I haven't put it on your handout, but this would be the title of the question. Do we have the right expectations in life? Do we have the right expectations in life?

It's crucial that we do. Do we really live in the light of Jesus' victorious return? Peter wants Christians to remember that Jesus is coming back, and to live for him in the here and now.

I remember my expectations many moons ago when I entered my first job. I was all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and my expectations of that first job and the fulfilment that it would bring were way too high. In the Christian life, too, we can get this wrong. Take besetting sins.

Why am I still wrestling with the same old things? Quick to anger, for example. Well, perhaps my expectations have been too unrealistic. I should not expect plain sailing. I should expect to wrestle. Remember that I'm a very slow work in progress. We need to have the right expectations of anything in life, or we're going to be heading for a crack. On the plus side, if we do have the right expectations, then with his help, we can stand firm until he returns. So the three headings on your handout we have, have a look. Live for Jesus in the world and in the church. Suffering now glory later and entrust ourselves to God and godly leaders. So we're going to be looking at chapter five there. So first of all, live for Jesus in the world as he did. So verses one to six of four. Peter turns from talking about Christ's suffering to showing us what we're to do with our suffering. Let's look at verse one.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. He's again encouraging these Christians in their thinking. Arm yourselves like a soldier.

[3 : 0 7] There's a battle going on. He knows that Christians will suffer unjustly, as Jesus did. He's not saying at the end of verse one that we no longer sin, but rather that once we are his, we're no longer to live for human passions, verse two, but for the will of God. The suffering refines us so that we'll want to live more and more for God. Like in anything else in life, if we plan for something, arm our thinking, then change can happen. If we don't plan, then it won't. What's the saying?

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Here, Peter is helping his first century readers and us today to see that since Christ suffered, we too will suffer and will expect to suffer. How might we arm ourselves to think and live with this at the front of our minds? One way is to know it's coming.

Talk about it at home if you're able to. Talk about it with brothers and sisters at church, in your Bible study group. Pray about it. So Grace Church, we're to arm our thinking. In verses three and four, this covers the sort of behaviour people who don't know God indulge in. And I, for one, can very much identify with living for the things in this list, in verse three. Like those who don't belong to God. That means, that's Gentiles here. Verse four, non-Christians want Christians to join with their worldview, their thinking and behaviour. This is why they malign you when you don't join in. But one day, on that final day, verse five, those maligners will have to face Jesus the judge. So Grace Church, let's not worry when we're maligned. Verse six, this is really helping those who were concerned at the time about their brothers and sisters who had already died before Jesus' return. And as Jesus was raised, so all his followers, both then and now, will be. So we're not to worry individually or corporately when we're maligned by outsiders. We're to continue to arm our thinking.

To endure it. To pray about it. So we're to live for Jesus in the world as he himself did. We're to remember to have the right expectations.

All right, second point, or second sub-point. Live for Jesus and in the church. So verses seven to eleven. We kick off here with a very simple statement. Have a look at verse seven.

[5 : 57] The end of all things is at hand. Jesus is coming back. Peter wants his readers to remember this front and centre. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

We've had these ideas before in the letter. Be sober-minded, holy, obedient for the sake of your prayers, so that your relationship with the Father may not be hindered. We're to love and serve one another in the church family. As an encouragement note, we're not told to turn over a new leaf, are we?

But verse eleven to do this by the strength that God supplies. And this will also be noticed by outsiders around us. What about verse eight? Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. This is very striking. It's the second time he's used earnestly, you've probably noticed. There's a feeling of very deep love here. Supernatural love even. When we feel let down or disappointed with a brother or sister, we're above all to keep on loving. We should expect relationships in this life to be difficult. We're sinners living with other sinners. But we're to keep remembering Jesus so we can continue to love his people with the help that he supplies. I try and think a little bit like, how would Jesus see this person? Or how would he love this person in this situation? So I think we're to expect corporate life to be tricky and forewarned is forearmed. Verses nine and ten. Among the brotherhood of believers, we're called to show hospitality without grumbling. This is something we're told to wrestle with. And the word grumbling is supposed to remind us of the Israelites in the desert grumbling about God as he rescued them from Egypt.

We can very easily see this grumbling in ourselves, I think. Speaking personally, I know I definitely can. Verse 10. As each has a gift, we're to use it. And there are many gifts. The key here is to use them to serve one another. That might be encouraging one another to keep remembering what Jesus has done for us. And there's a very important and much underrated ministry. The ministry of just turning up.

When you're really tired from a day at work, from a day with the kids, from a day serving, when you're feeling lonely or overwhelmed or in a panic, the fact that you choose to meet with brothers and sisters at a midweek Bible study, or a Sunday lunch, or a weekend away, or go for a walk together in the park, say, to pray. These choices are all crucial. All these things are beautiful in God's sight.

[9 : 17] Jesus rescued us from something for something, but we do have to choose to do it. Thankfully and crucially, though, in verse 11, as it promises, he will help us by the strength that he, God, supplies.

Verse 11. Peter finishes here with a prayer, giving all glory to God. He can't help himself. He wants every gift given to God's people to be used for his glory. Jesus is coming back and will reign forever.

So Christians are to love one another in the light of that. So what would it look like to keep on loving one another earnestly at Grace Church Dulwich? And that's just something to ponder, to discuss amongst ourselves, and to pray about. So we're to have the right expectations in the light of Jesus' return, and live for Jesus in the world and in the church while we wait for his glorious return.

Point two on the handout. Suffering now, glory later, and this is verses 12 to 19. Verse 12, did you spot? Again, beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you.

The suffering Christians are to remember they're beloved of God. They'll face fiery trials, suffering unjustly, but they're being refined like gold. They're not to be surprised. Instead, they're to have the right expectations. Remembering that Jesus suffered in this way, they can even rejoice, verse 13. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. Does this remind you perhaps of chapter 1? In 1, verse 6, it said, in this you rejoice, talking of our future inheritance, or chapter 1, verse 8, and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, talking of salvation. We can be joyful now because we know we have a sure inheritance, and we will see it fully when his glory is revealed on that final day. By contrast, imagine a triathlete, training day in, day out, swimming, biking, running. She hopes for the gold medal, of course, but it's far from assured. Many things could go wrong. Unlike that athlete, the Christian is fully, totally assured. The Christian can rejoice because Jesus will return. God's refining his people through suffering. Let's look at verses 14, 15, and 16 together. Verse 14. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and God rests upon you. He's reassuring them in their thinking. In fact, he says, you're like God's people in the Old Testament, when God's spirit went with them and rested on them. Think back to Exodus again. And verse 15. But let none of you suffer, and then there's a list. Here, Peter's contrasting the suffering which is deserved when we sin.

[12 : 59] He's at page to show that it's suffering as a Christian, verses 14 and 16, that brings God glory. Keep going, Christian, when you're insulted. And verse 16. Don't be ashamed.

Peter now brings judgment into the equation. And there's two things going on here. On a straightforward level, God chooses his people, so they are safe. On another level, God is also refining his people.

So the gold we saw in chapter 1, verse 17. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

And this is alluding to Ezekiel 9, where God's people were marked out to be saved. But there's some refining going on along the way. Look at the second half of verse 17.

And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel? And next, Peter goes on to quote from Proverbs 11.

[14 : 06] If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Christians are saved. By contrast, clearly the ungodly and the sinner will not be saved.

Now these verses are not easy, particularly for those of us with loved ones who are not yet saved. But they're also a warning, a direct warning to those who are not yet saved, and a spur to Christians to tell our friends and loved ones about Jesus.

We know Peter is at pains to reassure his first century Christians. So finally, verse 19, he says, Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

This is almost a summary of the whole letter. Suffering Christians are to entrust their souls to their faithful creator while doing good. Just like Jesus did, as we were reminded in 2 and verse 23.

This verse here acts as a bridge into chapter 5. So we'll come back to that in a moment. What does this passage imply for me, for us as a church family?

[15 : 29] It's challenged me not to be surprised, to have the right expectations. It goes further. I'm to rejoice in the sense that if I'm suffering, say verbally as a Christian, then I must be doing something right.

Don't get me wrong, we're not to court trouble. We're to entrust ourselves to our faithful father as we carry on. This will affect how we think, how we speak.

We can encourage each other. It will affect what we do. We keep on meeting together. It will affect our praying. It will impact how we feel.

We can have great deep down joy knowing our final destination. So Christians are to remember that Jesus showed a pattern of suffering now, glory later, and we're to expect it.

It's normal. It's even something that kind of proves the genuineness of our faith. Now you might be thinking, well I don't suffer much.

[16 : 38] Brothers and sisters in other parts of the world, now they really suffer. And there's truth in that. But much of the suffering in this letter is verbal.

They were being maligned, insulted. And that's what we encounter today. I mean just a few examples. You don't need me to tell you. But just a few examples with our extended family.

At the school gate. Over dinner with our neighbours. At the sports club. In office banter. And corporately we'll be wanting to encourage each other to remember this as we reach out to those around us.

We want others to have the joy that we have. So we're to arm our thinking in the light of Jesus' return. Suffering now.

Glory later. Let's get back to the text. Back to verse 19. And then we're going to look very briefly at chapter 5. Which we didn't read. So it's point 3.

[17 : 39] Entrust ourselves to God and godly leaders. Verse 19. We're told to entrust ourselves to God. He is powerful. He is faithful.

He is our creator. We can and indeed must entrust ourselves to him. And so Peter turns to help us see what that looks like.

He wants us to entrust ourselves to God's church leaders. So let's have a look at verses 1 to 4.

And I call that under shepherds. Verse 1. So I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ.

As well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. Shepherd the flock of God. Peter has only one instruction to church elders, church leaders.

[18 : 37] Shepherd the flock. They're to lead. Verse 2. Not under compulsion but willingly as God would have you. Also they're not to do it for shameful gain.

But eagerly. Not domineering. And verse 4. Peter knows that those in positions of pastoral authority must be servants.

If they are then there's a victor's crown of glory waiting for them. Like in the Roman Olympic Games. So elders are to lead until Jesus returns.

Humbly in line with his will. What about the rest of us? So let's look at 5 to 11. Verse 5. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility. The rest of us are to submit to our elders. Be humble. Verse 6.

[19 : 44] Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God. So that at the proper time he may exalt you. Humble yourselves now. And when he comes again, he will lift us up.

We're to pray to, did you see? Verse 7. Casting all your anxieties on him. Because he cares for you. Our heavenly Father, he cares for his people.

What a wonderful thing for us all to remember. So let's be praying. We're told verses 8 and 9. Be sober-minded. Be watchful.

Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion. Seeking someone to devour. Resist him. The devil is real. He's seeking to take us away from our faithful God.

Resist him by entrusting yourselves to godly church leaders. And he comforts us. Verse 10. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

[20 : 56] We have eternal glory in Christ. How great is that? Now submitting isn't glamorous. It isn't fashionable. But we follow a great saviour who fully submitted to his Father.

So whether we're a Sunday class leader, a Bible study leader, whoever we are, we're all to submit to our church elders, wait for the return of the chief shepherd, humbly go about our business of praying, living for him and making Jesus known.

To go on wrestling with besetting sins in our own lives. I know I struggle in various areas of self-control. And that will be a corporate witness to those around us too.

And all for his glory. So to sum up, we're to have the right expectations in this life. Jesus is coming back. Meanwhile, let's live for Jesus in the world and in the church.

And to close, stand firm. Verse 12. Jesus is coming back. Have a look at the middle of verse 12. I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.

[22 : 16] Stand firm in it. We're to stand firm. We're to have the right expectations in life. Realistic ones. And our perspective is, Jesus will return.

So we can rejoice in that. Remember back to chapter 1, Our inheritance that we have. It's imperishable, undefied and unfading.

In this you rejoice and rejoice with joy. There's so much to be thankful for. Jesus is coming back. He will help us to stand firm. To stand firm when we're being maligned.

When we're serving the church family. Even when it's hard. What's our part? Well, to entrust our souls to our faithful creator. While doing good.

And to stand firm.