

Since Christ Suffered in the Flesh...

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Date: 09 October 2016

[0:00] Amen. The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. So I have to be honest with you, as I was preparing for this sermon, and it occurred to me that in this sermon series, the same themes keep coming up over and over and over again.

Now, I was a little concerned about that for a moment, until I thought back on our text so far, and realized that the same themes keep coming up again and again in the text.

Yeah, funny how that works, isn't it? Yeah. So, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

Now, this list comes to us from our text in 1 Peter 4, but it could have just as easily come to us from some of the top news stories of the past week.

[1:23] This list is kind of the norm in the modern world. And seriously, it's looking pretty bad. Now, there was a time, I think, when people did this sort of thing secretly, but now it's done openly, and people are proud of that.

Now, whether secretly or openly is better, which is better than the other, is debatable. But we've clearly lost any sense of shame.

The parallels between the culture that Peter is describing and our own are actually pretty incredible, aren't they? Peter is talking, of course, about the pagan culture that is surrounding his heroes in the first century.

But let's ask ourselves, honestly, is 21st century Western culture really any different? Are we in a different place? No. It's a list of favorite cultural activities, isn't it?

Now, as we've been reminded through this 1 Peter series, some things never change. The parallels continue. So we've already seen the pagan culture then looked a lot like our pagan culture now.

[2:37] The call that Christians had then is still the same call. They were called not to live like that, and we are too. They were called to bear witness to Christ in a hostile culture, and we are too.

They were called to show the love of Christ to one another in a world that is so desperately in need of Christ's love. Show that love to one another, to a world that needs love.

And so are we. We're called to. Because then, of course, they knew that Jesus is Lord. And Peter is reminding them of that throughout this epistle.

And now we know that Jesus is still Lord. Jesus is still risen. Jesus is still reigning. Then, they knew that Jesus is coming again, and they knew that he would be coming soon.

Now, we know that the coming of Jesus is even nearer than it was then. We know that the things of this world, the things of this age will pass away.

[3:45] Peter encouraged his hearers to remember. And their calling is ours. The world they were in the midst of is the world that we are in the midst of, too.

But more importantly, more important than all of that, is that the same Jesus, the one that they knew as their Lord, is the same Jesus we know as our Lord.

And with that in mind, let's delve into our text for this morning. 1 Peter 4, beginning in verse 1. Now, think about this for a second.

Jesus, who knew no sin, took on flesh. For what reason? So he could suffer for us, right? So that in him, we could find forgiveness in his blood.

So if we are in him, we have suffered with him, we have died with him, we have risen with him, we share in his sufferings, and we share in his victory. Through his suffering, he has put away our sins forever.

[5:10] So we are forgiven, we are free, because Christ has fought victoriously against sin to the point of shedding his blood and dying. And he won that battle, didn't he?

So we are called to share in his sufferings, to fight against sin, not to fall back into the sinful behavior that Jesus has rescued us from, but to pursue holiness, because we have forgiveness

through the precious blood of the perfect Lamb of God.

Forgiveness through his suffering and death for us. So we have been redeemed with that price. His suffering and death for us, haven't we?

Now, we are called to live for him. To deny ourselves, and if need be, to suffer ridicule for the sake of his name, which we'll get to in a moment.

See our calling reflected in verse 2, where we see that we are called to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God.

[6:20] We are dead to sin, but alive to God. Unless that make us sound like a bunch of joy kills, here's the thing that the world doesn't get.

And here's the thing that we don't get, apart from being taught by the grace of the Holy Spirit. And that's this. Following our sinful passions is not freedom. It is bondage.

Sin enslaves us. It holds us captive. It keeps us prisoner. Keeps us from being what we were created to be. If we want to find true freedom, we find it in dying to sin.

And dying to what holds us prisoner, don't we? We find true freedom in only one place. And that is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The new life that we have in the Holy Spirit, that's where we find freedom.

To live for the will of God, as Peter instructs us to do, is to live for what is really the deepest desire of our hearts, isn't it? Saint Augustine of Hippo said, Our hearts were made for God.

[7:37] They are restless until they rest in Him. Living for the will of God is where we find true freedom and true joy. Where we find everlasting freedom and everlasting joy.

No doubt, that life is going to look different from the way that the world lives. The way that we see reflected in 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.

We get that list. The things, the sins, that are common in a pagan culture, and a fallen culture.

The things that draw us in and take us prisoner. Now, I am not expecting a show of hands here. In fact, I hope that I don't see one. But let me ask, have you ever been in bondage to any of these things?

[8:50] It happens. People end up in bondage. Why? Here's the trouble we run into. We have hearts, we were created with hearts that have really deep desires.

Now, sin distorts what God created and called good. And it causes us to seek the fulfillment of our desires where we're not supposed to find the fulfillment of our desires.

So one theologian put it, our hearts have a God-shaped hole. If we are not finding our joy in the Lord, we are going to fill that with something, aren't we? Our hearts are going to drift.

We start looking for joy, for happiness, for peace in all the wrong places. We look for it in sexual sin, or in drunkenness, or in idolatry. Which, at the end of the day, idolatry is the worship of anything other than the true God.

And everyone worships something. So we are either worshipping the true God, or we are worshipping an idol. In our sinful state, we are so confused by the trickery of the devil that we look for joy, and for hope, and for happiness in every place, but in the place where it can actually be found.

[10:13] But, but Jesus has come. And that changed, changes everything, doesn't it?

He has suffered, set us free. He has fought on our behalf, and He emerged victorious. The Spirit has worked in our hearts and called us to faith in Christ, and now we know where true joy is found.

To the time where slavery and bondage to those things that keep us in darkness, that is past. The time for seeking joy in what can never satisfy our hearts is past.

The time for living as the world lives, the way that we used to live, is past, because Jesus has suffered, and He has died to save us, and we are united not only to His suffering and death, but we are united to His resurrection.

We find our freedom in serving God, in living in accordance with His perfect will, even if we meet resistance for doing that.

[11:30] And we will. The next couple of verses tell us. Verses 4 and 5. With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.

They will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. Why are they surprised, and why do they malign us? It's been said that misery loves company, right?

Yeah? No, the world thinks that we're weird, and we are. God calls strange people, and He calls His people to be strange.

The pattern of seeking satisfaction in sin is so staggeringly common to humanity that only those who have been cured of their blindness by the Holy Spirit can see the full effects and the full extent of our slavery.

The world doesn't see it. They might mock us. They might ridicule us. Teenagers, I'm looking at you, you in particular, will have to deal with this if you strive to follow Christ.

[12:48] And all of us are dealing with the reality of being mocked or ridiculed or misunderstood by a post-Christian culture that's remarkably similar to the pagan culture that Peter's hearers found themselves in.

But here's a stark reminder. Here's where Peter goes. Judgment is coming. The outcome of that judgment depends on this.

Have we repented and placed our faith in Jesus? Now, we might spend this life finding our pleasure in sin and mocking the servants of God, but the reality is that if we do, we will have to give account for that and face God's righteous wrath.

death. And that is sobering. judgment. But it should help us to remember that we don't have to fear those who would persecute us for our faith.

Judgment is coming. That idea gets carried over in verse 6 where we read, for this is why the gospel was preached even to those who were dead. That though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

[14:08] Now, as best I can tell, biblical scholars are divided over whether those who were dead, people referred to in this verse, refers to those who had heard the gospel preached in their lives and since died, or if it refers to those who heard Christ preach during his descent into hell.

Personally, I believe whatever the Bible means here. Regardless, of who those dead are, I think the main point still remains.

Judgment is coming. Each of us will be judged in the flesh. What does that mean? Each of us will face death, won't we?

The wages of sin. Our flesh, having been given over and corrupted by sin, will deteriorate till the day our bodies die and return to dust and await the resurrection.

That said, those who are in Christ will be alive and will live in the Spirit. This reality should remind us not to yield to the sinful desires of the flesh.

[15:27] Find our delight in the things which are passing away. the things of this world are absolutely, truly passing away.

We see that in verse 7. The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. The end of all things is at hand.

Now, in John Newton's classic hymn, Amazing Grace, which I can't help it quote often, we read in the final verse, the earth shall soon dissolve like snow, the sun forbear to shine, but God who called me here below will be forever mine.

This morning, if you are seeking your joy in the sinful things of this world that will pass away, I urge you to repent.

these things will come to an end. But we were created to find our eternal joy in our creator, our joy in God.

[16:35] Nothing else will satisfy us, nothing else will endure, nothing else can fulfill the deepest desires of our hearts. It just won't happen. Peter urges us in light of the end of the things of this present age to pursue self-control, to be sober-minded, not to indulge in the debauched desires of the flesh.

Because these things will disrupt our prayers. They will disrupt our relationship with God. They will distract us from where our hearts should be. Don't do it.

It leads to misery. Instead, what do we do? Well, we obviously love God, but as Peter tells us in verse 8, we also love each other. But we'll keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Let's be honest, if we are believers, we should be absolutely awestruck by the mercy, the forgiveness, the undeserved goodness we have received in Christ.

Are you awestruck this morning? If you are, then you know that you're called to show mercy to others, as mercy has been shown to you.

[17:59] Now, the world misunderstands love, treats it as a passing feeling, something that can come, something that can go, something that depends on the worthiness of the beloved, something that is in some measure linked to selfish gain.

is that the kind of love that we have received in Christ? No. The love we're called to show each other is patient and kind.

It doesn't insist on its own way. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs and insists on the truth. That's the kind of love Peter is talking about.

That's the kind of love that we have received in Jesus. Forgiven in Christ, knowing God's mercy in Christ, we are called to show love and mercy to our brothers and sisters.

Sometimes that's easier said than done. We can really annoy each other, can't we? Yeah. I see nods.

[19:09] We're still called to show love and mercy to each other. Well, how do we live that out? First, as verse 9 tells us, we show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Now, in Scripture, we fairly often get the charge not to grumble, be irritable with each other. Why is that? Well, let's be real. The sinners, we're a bunch of cranks, aren't we?

We are so easily irritated. It should be our joy to care for each other, shouldn't it? But all too often, we treat it as a burden.

So if you find yourself making that casserole for the church potluck, please try not to be cranky about it. But more seriously, count it as a privilege to serve your brother and your sister, because it is.

The gifts, the spiritual gifts that we have received, hospitality being one of them, have been given to us, not so that we can use them for our own gain or to serve ourselves, to draw attention to ourselves, right?

[20:17] But to use them to serve others. That's what we see in verse 10. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

God has given us varied grace, different gifts. Why? So each member of the body of Christ can use them to serve each other and build one another up.

Now, if we don't, as individuals, have every single spiritual gift, and none of us do that I'm aware of, it must mean that we need each other, right?

That's why we were given what Peter calls varied grace. Now, the gifts that God has given us, like the salvation that we have received in Christ, are given to us by God's grace alone.

Our spiritual gifts are gifts of grace, not something we've worked up in ourselves, not something we've been given for self-promotion, not something that we've been given for selfish gain. No.

[21:31] we've been given them, certainly, to serve each other, but ultimately, to glorify God with the gifts that he has given us.

That's what verse 11 tells us. Whoever speaks is one who speaks oracles of God. Whoever serves is 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. Not about us, is it? The gifts we have, really all the good things that we have, have been given to us as gifts of grace by God, so that God in Christ might be glorified in and through our lives.

Isn't that an amazing gift, an amazing calling that we have been given? We, who were in bondage to sin, just like the Gentiles that Peter mentioned in verse 3.

We weren't righteous. We didn't deserve grace and mercy. We didn't pursue God. What we did pursue was sinful passion and lawless idolatry. so what did God do?

[22:49] He sent his only son to suffer in the flesh for our salvation, to die, to set us free from captivity and death through his death on the cross in our place, to set us free through the victory of his resurrection.

That's what God did. And then, by his spirit, he called us to salvation through faith in Christ. we who sinned, who rebel, who are God's enemies.

Now, by God's grace, we are called, as Peter reminded us earlier, to love what is good, reject the way of our former condition, the way that the world around us still lives, exercising self-control and society loving each other, glorifying and serving the God who loved us and redeemed us.

We, who were wretched, who were blind, who were lost, who pursued sinful passions and idolatry, we, even us, have been washed in the blood of Jesus and have been transformed by the

sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

Praise God. And now, because of what God has done for us in Jesus, we have gone from rebels and enemies to not only servants of God, but to being sons and daughters.

[24 : 25] But we live in a world that's still in bondage, don't we? Peter's hearers lived in a world that at its core is the same as our own. Peter reminds us that Christ is coming again.

the evil of the present age which we have been called out from, which we have been redeemed from, will come to an end. And if we've suffered for the sake of Christ, we will be vindicated.

And we've already received a foretaste. And if the foretaste is this amazing, can't wait for the fulfillment. We've received a foretaste of the eternal joy that will be ours.

in the relationship that we have with Jesus right now. We've already received a pledge of eternal life and the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts.

So, we have every cause to hope and certain confidence. We can seek to glorify God, to love one another, and to reach out to those who are lost, who are still in bondage, like we were, because we are certain of victory.

[25 : 35] Jesus is coming again. The end of all things of this world is at hand. Jesus will reign forever and ever.

In everything, God will be glorified in Jesus Christ. So, be of good cheer, brothers and sisters. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen.