

It's TIME to live for God

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[0:00] Good morning, everybody. Thanks for joining us. I am stuck in the past. Lots of things about modern life make me realise how much my head and my heart are stuck in a time that's long since gone and probably won't ever come back. Serious things like shifts in our culture, but also less serious things like wishing my body was young and indestructible again.

I can't go on like this. I need to be clear about the times. Remember when we started 1 Peter, I said it was the cure for spiritual jet lag for Christians who are trapped in two time zones.

We belong to a future home, but we're stuck in the here and now. There is a tension. We need to be clear about which time zone we are living in. And that is Peter's point today. He brings back lots of familiar themes, suffering, doing good, judgment, loving each other. They're familiar themes we've seen in this series, but today Peter puts a clock against them so we're clear about what time it is.

So look at chapter 4 verse 2. Don't live the rest of their earthly lives in the present. Verse 3. You've spent enough time in the past. Verse 5. They will have to give an account to him.

That's future. Verse 7. The end of all things is near. It is the end times. And actually Peter has bookended this whole letter with time. So chapter 1 verse 6 when we first started. 1 verse 6 at the very beginning. Peter said, In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you've had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. That's the beginning. At the very end, 5 verse 10, And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while. You see, our Christian calling is a future to rejoice in, a glorious home. But until then, they're suffering for a little while. And Peter's aim is that we're clear about which time zone we are living in. As far as God is concerned, we need to get a good watch so we're not stuck in the past.

[2:36] I've got a good watch. At least I think it's a good watch. But the problem is, this watch, it loses five minutes every month. So I'm usually quite late for things. And so to compensate, what I did was, I set it forward five minutes, so I'll be on time. But that never works. Because I know up here, I know that it's five minutes ahead. And so I allow myself five minutes of compensation. But the real problem happens when this watch starts gradually, quietly slowing down over the month. And so here I am allowing five minutes of extra lag time. All the while, I'm now getting even later than regular.

See, it's ironic that my watch, setting my watch ahead, has actually made me later. Peter says, when it comes to your Christian life, get yourself a proper working watch, so that you're clear about the times. And so we're at point one from the handout, and we're at verse one in chapter four.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done 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. In verse one, Peter says to arm yourselves with the same attitude. That is battle language. The regular Christian life will feel like a fight.

We'll need to arm ourselves with Jesus' mind. We'll need an attitude that was prepared to suffer now, because we're living for the will of God. Verse one, whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.

You see, there was a pivotal time in our lives, a landmark moment when we were done with sin. It might have been when we first became Christians, but verse one says it was when we suffered in the body. In other words, when living for God became costly, when we started being insulted for our faith or losing friends on account of Jesus. That's the point that marked a decisive break from sin in our lives.

[5:02] You see, once upon a time, verse three, we used to live in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry, much like the people of Noah's time, which Mark read to us from Genesis. And thinking back to all my years in the office and in the bars, none of these behaviors would have been out of place. I was trying to figure out what all these behaviors have in common, and I think it's a lack of self-control. They're all about losing yourself, allowing the flesh to take over. In other words, they're the opposite of arming our minds with Christ. You see, once upon a time, we used to live like this, but now we're done with sin. Verse three, for you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do. Peter says, time's up on that behavior. Verse two, do not leave the rest of your earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. But the problem is that that lifestyle stands out and gets noticed. Verse four, they are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless wild living, and they heap abuse on you. I can remember back to times in the office of Friday night drinks with the colleagues when everyone was annoyed that I ordered a lemonade.

A Christian mate of mine was ostracized from all the other blokes in the office because he didn't want to join in their dirty emails that were going around. A Christian friend, she was regularly teased by her buddies. Are you going to bring your best mate Jesus along with you today?

You see, even though these exclusions and insults, even though they're not exactly Daniel and the lion's den, they do still have the same effect. They might still frighten us from living for the will of God. Low level slander might worry us into living like the pagans do. Peter says that we're done with sin. Time's up on that behavior. We've spent enough time in the past living like the world.

And even though we may have to suffer like Jesus now, Peter says, check your watches. It's only for a little while because look at what's coming our way. This is our next point.

Verses five and six are about judgment day. It's the big thing on God's calendar. The big thing that's coming our way for non-Christians. This is a warning. They will be judged for their reckless and wild living or the flood of wild living. A reference to Genesis where God judged wild living with a flood. But also they'll be judged for all the ways they have persecuted God's people.

[8:29] Verse five, they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. Verse five is a future day when the abuse of Christians will be exposed. When Jesus will ask them to give an account to please explain. See, if you're not a Christian listening today, this warning is as real as it gets. You'll be judged by Jesus if you hurt his people.

He does win in the end. And so please repent and join us instead. But for Christians, judgment day is a motivation. Verse, he says, because every time Peter gives a command about suffering and submission, he ties it to God's judgment. So servants keep submitting because you're mindful of God. Endure through suffering. It's a gracious thing in the sight of God.

Wives, a gentle and quiet spirit. It's of greater worth in God's sight. Whenever Peter gives a command about submission and suffering, he ties it to God's opinion, God's verdict. You see, judgment day is our time for justice when God will right all the wrongs of this place. And while that is encouraging and motivating, I do struggle with that because here is the pushback. Is Peter saying that if we suffer unjustly now, we shouldn't defend ourselves? Surely God doesn't want his people to be doormats that are trampled on. And my initial reaction is, yeah, that's right. Go to your workplace HR, go to the courts, demand your justice. But I just can't find that in this letter. Look with me at chapter 2, verse 19.

2, verse 19. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.

It's his verdict. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and injure it? But if you suffer for doing good and injure it, this is commendable before God.

[10:57] You see, if you're like me and you've got a strong sense of justice, the temptation is to push back. Peter can't really be saying to endure suffering without defending yourself now.

But that's the example of Jesus in 2, verse 21. 2, verse 21. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

Verse 23. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

It's the same idea. You see, it's not that Jesus suffered, but that he never went after them instead. Even while he was in their courts, he didn't seek justice from men.

Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. You see, if we forget that judgment day is when our justice comes, that that is when God will right the wrongs, if we forget these things, then we'll try and right the wrongs ourselves in this place.

[12:18] But if we check our watches, we'll be clear that our suffering is just a little while. If we know God's calendar, we'll be content to wait for him to right the wrongs.

Because verse 5, on judgment day, that's when our enemies will have to give an account. Verse 6, that is when we will be vindicated.

Verse 6. For this is the reason the gospel was preached, even to those who are now dead, so that though they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live to God in regard to the spirit.

Verse 6 isn't about ministering to dead people to get them out of purgatory or anything like that. Verse 6 is about our vindication. You see, one day all Christians, so us today, those who have already died, one day all Christians will be considered those who are now dead.

One day we'll all be presently dead. But in the future judgment day, we'll all be living in regard to the spirit.

[13:28] We'll all be vindicated. Now we're judged according to human standards. What is the world's verdict? That Christians are strange and weird.

We suffer without fighting back. We submit without going after them. We're called boring because we don't join in their reckless living.

And we like to talk about Jesus. The world's verdict is that we're weird and strange and boring. But God's verdict is that we're doing good.

And all of verse 6, it's just an echo to what happened to Jesus in chapter 3. He was put to death in regard to his body, but was vindicated when God made him alive in the spirit.

They judged Jesus according to human standards. A blasphemer, they said. He was the stone the builders rejected. But God's verdict? He made him alive.

[14:32] Made him the cornerstone. Judgment day is the big moment coming our way. It's when we finally get our justice, when God rights the wrongs.

But it's also when we get vindication. When all our suffering in the body was seen to be good. When we'll be made alive again.

Peter says, check your watches. The time for evil desires is past. Judgment and vindication are coming. And so, with what time there is left, he says, to get on and love one another.

This is point 3. Verse 7. The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind, so that you may pray.

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. I wonder what you would do if you had five healthy years left.

[15:36] What would make it onto your bucket list? Possibly travel and seeing loved ones? Maybe some crazy experiences like skydiving or seeing a great show.

Most likely, getting your affairs in order. Peter says, the end of all things is near. It's the end times. And so, with the time that is left, he says, the church is to get on and love each other deeply.

He says, love in a way that covers a multitude of sins. It's not that love forgives sins. That's Jesus' job. But I think he's saying, in the dynamic of human relationships, love has the power to cover over or go further than all the ways that we wrong one another.

Peter says, to be alert and of sober mind, so that we may pray. That means to gird up our minds about where we're going, about what time it is.

Gird up our minds. Put our most serious, sober efforts into loving one another. And he gives some ways to do this.

[16:49] Verse 9, Peter says, to offer hospitality, which sounds pretty easy, actually, offering hospitality. But it's hospitality without grumbling.

And that's where it gets difficult. Because it's easy to complain when you're looking after other people. It's easy to do it through gritted teeth or with a bit of gossip.

A love without grumbling. That will require a superhuman effort. We'll need to be alert and of sober minds.

Prayerful. Peter says, it's just a little while longer. Verse 10 to 12, they're about using our gifts. The gifts are in two categories, speaking and serving.

I think the speaking gifts are Bible teaching and what I'm calling Bible encouragement. And that's because of verse 11. As one who speaks the very words of God.

[17:50] And so, as far as Bible teaching is concerned, if you or someone you know feels that you have Bible teaching gifts, then please do consider full-time paid gospel ministry.

It will mean a massive life change. You'll need to speak to Andrew or Mark or myself. You'll need lots of prayer as well. If not full-time ministry, then what about leading a Bible group or volunteering in the kids' church on Sundays?

We've been praying for more leaders. If you have a Bible teaching, speaking gift, please make yourself known. We have training sessions. We'd love to put you together with other leaders and walk with you on that journey.

But it will be costly. It will mean less time at work or with your family. Leading might cost your ego. Remember, our gifts are for others.

In God's strength and for his glory, leading isn't for big egos. Full-time Bible ministry, that's very costly. People will say that you're crazy, that you're giving up a career or financial security.

[19:08] They might say that you're too old to begin. But those are just the judgments according to human standards. Peter says time is almost up. The end of all things is near.

Our most serious, alert, sober efforts should be about loving the church. That's Bible teaching.

The other gift I'm calling is Bible encouragement. That's similar to a few weeks ago when we speak an encouraging word from the scripture. And again, that's not about quoting chapters and verses at one another.

But I need you to speak to me about the times. I need you to tell me that even Jesus suffered for doing good. I need you to remind me that my justice is coming on judgment day.

Keep speaking to me until I'm totally clear about the times. And I'm not stuck in the past. That is, all that is speaking gifts.

[20:15] The other gift is serving. Verse 11. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength that God provides. A few weeks ago, I talked about all the serving that happens in this church.

Well, since then, here's another example. There's a young couple from 1030 Doncaster who recently had twins, their first children, twins, born prematurely.

And already there have been conference calls about how to serve them better. Already their fridge is so stocked full of food, they can't take any more. There's lots of loving service in this church.

But may I suggest one more? Until we're all back together again, could you please ring some people? Could you think about the people you used to sit around, when we used to sit around in church, and call them up?

Ask them how they're going. How they're finding the online church. If you need someone's details and they're not private, I can give you their phone number.

[21:24] Those are just a couple of ways to serve. But any way that you feel led to serve. Peter says, with what time there is left, get busy with loving the church.

He says, check your watches. The end of all things is near. And so don't conform to your old way of life. A judgment is coming. There's just a little while to go.

Get on and love each other deeply. Verse 11. So that in all things, God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

And that seems to be what God deserves. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. Let me pray. Father God, thank you that you have rescued us in Jesus from our old way of life.

Thank you that we are done with sin. And thank you, Father, that there is a judgment day coming. When all the wrongs will be righted.

[22:31] When we will be vindicated for all our suffering. And in the meantime, Father, would we put our most serious efforts into loving the church. Into speaking Bible words of encouragement to one another.

Going into full-time ministry. Or just serving one another in many ways. Please, Father, help us to be clear about the times.

Help us to persevere just for a little while longer. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.