

First Sunday after Trinity Sunday

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Steven Griffin

[0 : 00] Always a blessing to get to speak to you. I know that, well, we're going through 1 Peter and it's a special privilege to go through 1 Peter together, whether we're here at Messiah West or downtown.

And I have a special love for 1 Peter as the Spanish Protestant reformers found it to be very dear to them, as they found themselves to be scattered exiles, very much like the folks that Peter is addressing there in Asia Minor.

And as they came to understand their calling as a royal priesthood. And these themes are really strong in those works that I've been privileged to study for some 15, 20 years now and to try to understand a lesser known aspect of the Spanish, of the Reformation.

And yet it happened and we give thanks to God for raising up people there in Spain just as he did in other parts of Europe. Are you looking for me to put on a Daniel voice or? Oh, okay.

Okay. Oh, okay, great. Well, we've prayed. The key verse that I want to focus on is 1 Peter 4.1.

[1 : 24] 1 Peter 5.1.

Down in the U.S. in the state of Kentucky. I occasionally listen to his briefing, he calls it, which he refers to as his daily analysis of news and events from a Christian worldview.

In Friday's episode, he made a fairly significant claim that May 30th, 2024, that is Thursday, will stand as a major turning point in U.S. history.

It was the day that a former president was convicted as a felon. And the actual charges are not my interest here.

What interested me was the claim of a very thoughtful Christian man, that we've witnessed a major turning point in American history, which might as well be world history in this day and age.

[2 : 51] One course I teach at Ryle Seminary and a couple of other places is church history. So you can imagine that I'm interested very much in the question of turning points.

When it comes to the history of Christianity, we can quite safely say that there have been some real turning points or decisive moments.

I don't know if you've seen this book by Mark Knoll, any of you, but it's a fantastic introduction to the history of Christianity that takes as its way of studying church history, specifically that, turning points, decisive moments in the history of Christianity.

Let me, technical move here, removing the little clip. For instance, think of the French Revolution, which was in 1789.

Thank you. It was a turning point, a turning point, because it led directly to this. And just about every sphere you can think of, the economy, the spiritual quest, life itself, history, human history, all these things were turned in on themselves.

[4 : 05] Meaning what? Well, we stopped thinking about these things in relation to God and His ways and started to think about them in relation to themselves.

They turned in on themselves. In that sense, the sexual revolution that I think I talked about when I was here in this spot last time was probably just a footnote to the French Revolution.

Why am I going into all this? Well, God's word to us this morning through Peter, as recorded in what we refer to as chapter 4, verses 1 to 11, is about a turning point and its significance.

And in fact, we're talking about the turning point in human history. But I don't want us to think about it in the abstract only, but instead to ask, what does the fact that Jesus suffered bodily 2,000 years ago change?

How does this fact change the way you and I live our lives today? Part 1. At this point, you're probably thinking, right, what we've signed up for this morning is an explanation of how Jesus is suffering, gives us an example to follow, and so we'll all go out and we'll try a little bit harder to do just that.

[5 : 31] Well, patterning our lives after Jesus' example is certainly part of the message, but it's not the core message. In fact, without the core message, without the new reality or the breakthrough that the core message points us to, attempting to imitate Jesus is an exercise in futility.

We won't have the power to do it. So, to the text. Since we're dealing in turning points this morning, we're naturally thinking about things in terms of a before and an after.

To start with the before part, we need to not start at the beginning, but we need to jump to verses 3 and 4. So, let's hear those again.

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 before. Who are the pagans that Peter's talking about?

[6 : 46] Well, some translations just say the nations, the people groups that the scattered Christians lived among there in Asia Minor.

And according to chapter 2 and verse 12, they're the mission field, because the Christians are to live exemplary lives among them in hopes for what?

Hopes that one day, through their witness, these pagans too will give glory to God, having, we must assume, embraced their witness and their example.

And what was their condition, being pagans? Well, it would be hard to believe that they spent every day, every single day of their lives in debauchery and drunkenness and gluttony, and I don't think Peter is necessarily trying to tell us that, because pagans can lead quite decent lives.

Hey, says the modern pagan in Ottawa, I don't cheat on my wife, I care for my family, I do my job, I'm a volunteer firefighter.

[7 : 55] But as we read on, we get to the heart of the matter, and it's idolatry. It's not these outward manifestations, it's the idolatry. In the first century, the orgies and the gluttony and the worship of idols, well, they were all at peace, they were all bound up together.

If we're modern, more enlightened pagans, what do we worship? We worship an impersonal God, who kind of animates the whole flow of life, and whose nature and ways are impossible to know.

And either way, we're in darkness, because we remain slaves to our self-gratification, slaves to our own self-actualization.

We're only living in the moment, in fact. And in this sense, this living only in the moment, means that the turning points as an actual occurrence don't make sense to us.

They imply a before and an after, which aren't real. Well, why aren't they real? Well, because everything gets collapsed into the present, where what guides my behavior is more of an intuition or a feeling.

[9 : 19] Some years back, there was a popular song that had this line, it can't be wrong if it feels so right. How do you think we can manage living with that philosophy?

That reminds me, for a couple of years, Stella and I were privileged to get to know, when we were living in Egypt, a man named Ashley Null. Apart from being well-known as a top Cranmer scholar, he's well-known for a piece of wisdom that he has articulated and is floating around out there.

And he said this, I think I heard him say it in person, what the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. What the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies.

Consider what this means for the before condition, when you and I were pagans, possibly very decent pagans, but living still without hope and without God in the world nonetheless.

As pagans, it makes good sense to say, I can live as I please because I love earthly pleasures. It makes good sense to say that whatever path you choose is right for you because we love the idea that we're masters of our own destiny.

[10 : 49] And it makes good sense to say that all reality is one because we've come to love what idea? That our deepest self is divine.

To complete the picture of our actual state in all of our confusion, we have to say that we're not just that, confused, but in a state of disobedience and under judgment.

And here you don't take my word for it, but you look with me at verses 5 and 6. But they will give an account. They will have to give account to him who's ready to judge the living and the dead.

And then there's this wonderful teaching that Peter gives us. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are 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.

Now, there's some debate about who the dead are and I don't think we need to get into that debate here because I think the point is this.

[12 : 04] As the gospel is proclaimed, whenever and wherever God chooses to send it, not only is life promised through the spirit, not only that, although that's the marvelous joy that comes through the gospel, but rebellion against the moral law that you and I know through nature and through human conscience is made plain.

The rebellion is made plain so that as Paul puts it in Romans 1, we are without excuse. Before we turn to part two of this three-part sermon, we might ask, how is a turning point even supposed to break into a system that makes them impossible?

Think about it. I mean, it's a system where there's nothing external to the system itself and where the only way to know anything is through your intuitions, through your feelings.

Use the force. Luke? Any Luke's here? No. Well, humanly speaking, it's impossible. Right?

And it takes a special act of God. It takes what Lewis called a grand miracle. And the author himself, if you love literature, I know there's a few here, the author himself has to put in an appearance in his book.

[13 : 35] The creator has to enter creation, but without collapsing himself into it. Part two. So back to our passage. Where do we see such a turning point?

Well, it's right at the beginning in verses one and two. Therefore, follow with me. Verse one. Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also 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. Brothers and sisters, at Messiah West, this is the turning point that creates a before and after in human history.

And as we'll see, it's not just a historical before and after, although it's no less than that. It involves a personal before and after.

Let's camp out on the historical side first. That's over here, you guys. Historical side. What does it mean to say that Jesus suffered in the body, in his body?

[14 : 51] Well, the answer actually is there plainly five verses earlier that we heard last Sunday. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, and here's the key, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.

That's 3 verse 18. For Jesus to suffer in the body didn't just mean that he experienced pain. A surface reading might make us think that.

It means, you need the whole context, it means here that he died, and that by his death, sinners can be made right with God. Satan and his team have been dying to get that turning point removed from history.

They'd like us to hear the words, move along, nothing to see here. Recall how Satan tried to derail things when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness.

And we can help Satan and his team to get that message out by massaging or dropping one part or another of what Peter says here, Christ suffered once for sins.

[16 : 17] Here's how we've managed to do that. Maybe you can think of other ways that we've managed to do it, but I came up with at least three ways. we've proposed the idea that Jesus didn't die since God would not let his prophet undergo such an indignity.

Someone else had to die in his place. Or we've said Jesus didn't die for sins. God being God would not need for that to happen.

Or we've said whatever happened, it doesn't really matter because what happens in history is an illusion. Suffering isn't real. With any of these, we can retain a form of godliness, something, a kind of spirituality that will compel others, but we're still without a savior.

But let's face a challenge we often hear head on. We may be ready to accept that Jesus suffered and that his suffering is real, but why did someone have to die for sinners to be forgiven?

Have you heard that question? I'm sure you have in one way or another. But think of what's embedded in the question. It's like insisting that if God wants to speak to me, he needs to do it directly rather than send someone to tell me what he wants to tell me.

[17 : 48] The truth is, God could forgive directly if he chose, just as he could, if he chose, put everything right in an instant.

The fact that Scripture teaches consistently that he died what we call a substitutionary death, which we get from phrases like, for sins, the just for the unjust, invites us first and foremost to receive the means of salvation he provides, simply because the sovereign God has chosen to provide it that way.

If we start there, just as a disciple does when he hears Jesus' words, come follow me, we'll begin to marvel at the way he chose to reconcile the world to himself, precisely through Jesus, precisely in the way that he did.

Consider Hebrews 2, 9-10. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

- [19 : 18] God's means in God's time. What we see here is this, that God's purpose is to reconcile us to himself not directly, but in and through his son's offering of himself in our place.
- His purpose is to deal with sin and death not directly, but through the death that conquered death. And by the same principle we can say this, God's purpose is to cleanse us not directly, but by his word.
- Remember what Jesus said to his disciples in John 15, 3. You're clean by what? By the word that I have spoken to you.
- The wonder of this truth, the truth that God uses means that he sees fit to use, and I'm not talking about apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. I'm saying with the work of the Holy Spirit.
- But he uses these means, reminds us that salvation comes from him. We receive it as we look to him and not into our hearts or into our own resources that we might contribute.
- [20 : 34] We don't decide which garments we're to wear to the feast. And this brings me now to this side, to the personal, to the personal aspect of the before and after that Jesus' death brings about.
- To the change it brings to your life and to mine. It's there in verses 1 and 2, which I'll read again with a different emphasis. Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also 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. What's Peter doing here? He's putting Jesus' suffering death side by side with the suffering of believers, of those who, through the grace and mercy of their baptism, have died to sin so that they are free to serve God.
- Now, what's the point of putting them side by side like this? Well, clearly the command to imitate Jesus is part of it, as I mentioned earlier, but there's a much stronger link between Jesus' suffering death and our own suffering for his sake.
- And Peter uses, for that stronger link, he uses the word participation. participation. In next week's passage, we'll hear Peter say, Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.
- [22 : 22] The wonder of this is that as you and I surrender our lives to God, what's he do? He includes us in the turning point.
- That third hymn we sang made this point for me. But we're included in the turning point. That's how Paul saw it when he said, and here we're talking about a man who persecuted the Christians.
- He said, I've been crucified with Christ. That's what he's getting at. We're included in the turning point. We're drawn into it.
- I no longer live, says Paul, but Christ lives in me. It's not that Paul is gone, but that there's this participation in Christ's life that Paul is speaking of and that Peter is pointing us to.
- Well, what's the theology of sharing in Christ's sufferings? I'm sure that books, I know that books and books and books have been written about it.
- [23 : 27] How should we understand it? The point is not, I think, that Jesus' suffering death is somehow extended or prolonged, if you like, in the suffering and death of his people.
- Rather, it's that through his once and for all death on the cross, we who receive him by faith are included in his death and resurrection.
- That's a different thing. Our lives are taken up into his so that we can say that sin no longer reigns in our lives because Jesus does.

And we can say, by the same token, our death is taken up into his so that his victory over death is also ours.

Now, I don't know how you hear that, but to my ear, this message of being included in Christ by faith, or as the theologians speak about it, union with Christ by the Spirit, is a word of real comfort.

[24 : 39] And it's not as though it's a truth or a reality only for people on this side of the cross. Why? Well, the Israelites who settled in the promised land, there were some who never knew Egypt, but yet they could still consider themselves part of the Exodus saying, God brought us out of Egypt.

And that's how they reminded themselves and embraced God's promise, his faithfulness, and they took comfort in it. God brought us into the promised land, so too he will one day bring us into the promised new creation.

We can be sure of that, and we can take hold of that promise and experience the joy that comes with taking hold of it.

And once that happens, we can't help but share it with others. There's a strong missionary theme. It's a subtle one, but it's a strong one in 1 Peter.

We can share this with others. We can share it with others who are used to living only in the now and who think of the past as simply gone and the future as radically open and who therefore despair when the now starts to look meaningless.

[26 : 03] And there's a real evangelistic opportunity there. As we do speak with neighbors, friends, and colleagues, as God gives us the opportunity, I think it's important to acknowledge that we will necessarily have a before and an after story to tell.

I say that even as someone who was raised by godly parents and who knew of God's grace as long as I can remember in the home. In my case, at some point, I started down the path of thinking in essentially pagan ways in search of what I thought might be a more respectable form of Christianity than the one I had grown up with there in some slums in Mexico City.

And disregarding what I had learned of how devastating sin is, I came close to trusting in an idea instead of a person. and that idea was something that goes by the name of a kind of Christ principle.

As soon as you take the historical and you make a principle out of it, you're going to run into some big snags. And I did. Because I started thinking that there's this Christ principle that teaches whereby I could say that God is at work in a saving way in all the religions.

To cut to the chase, I needed my mind to be renewed. I needed to repent of idolatry, of trying to make God in my own image, of thinking that I could improve on the simple story of God's redemption in and through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

[27 : 46] I promised a part three and you'll get one because as long as Jesus hasn't come back, we'll need one. That's because while we're God's redeemed people, regenerated by His mercy into a living hope, as we learned back in chapter one, and included in Christ so that we already have a foretaste of the eternal kingdom, we're still on this side of the new creation.

To borrow something from Martin Luther, God is still at work helping us get used to our justification. That's what sanctification is.

getting used to our new clothing, if you like. So God has instructions for us for the rest of the journey. Let's hear them.

In verse seven, he starts with these words, the end of all things is near. That's not an instruction, that's a preface. And I think we should pause at that preface for just a second and remind ourselves that whether we're first century Christians or 21st century Christians, our task is the same, to think, to behave, to worship, to work in the light of Jesus' return.

So still in verse seven, let's hear the instructions. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.

[29 : 18] Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

If anyone speaks, he must do so as if speaking 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 glory and power forever and ever. Amen. What's implied here when we read a passage, we say, why is he saying it the way he's saying it?

Well, what's implied here is that as long as we're pilgrims, we're going to struggle in some key areas. You and I, we're going to be able to tick all these boxes.

Yep, done that. And let's look at three main areas briefly. The first is in the area of our mental habits. That's why Peter says, be alert and of sober mind, reminding us that if we're distracted, if we're not watching and waiting, we're going to find it very hard to commune with God, to hear his voice, to pray.

[30 : 38] The second area is in our care for one another within the Christian family, within the body of Christ. Our default setting is to look out for ourselves.

This is part of our, in part, part of our, of our self-reliance culture, which is not universal, by the way. But anyway, it encourages it in some ways to look out for ourselves, to make life secure and as predictable as possible for ourselves and for our families.

And with that, we're not naturally alert to those around us who could use our friendship and our hospitality. And we offer, carry resentment in our hearts towards other Christians.

But as we remember where God has brought us and ask him to help us see others with compassion, I believe we can learn something of what it means for love to cover a multitude of sins.

I think God has been good. He's given us examples of how he's turned people around so they've learned to forgive and to get on. The third area we struggle in is ministry.

[31 : 50] Whether we're, and we're all in ministry, whether we're called to preach and teach or to serve in some other way. There will be more to come about this in chapter 5, but here, Peter's point is this, as you use your gifts, don't forget the giver.

Don't forget the source. If God has given you an ability to put words together so that others can be edified through your writing, through your explaining, through your preaching, through your teaching, he wants you to teach what he has revealed in his word and not pass off your own ideas as brilliant as they may be as though they were his.

In the same way, if God's given you an ability to serve in practical ways for building up the church also, he wants you to serve in his power.

That's what the text says. When you and I focus on the gifts rather than the giver or we expect things from others in return, we show that we're actually relying on our own strength.

We're running on our own steam. Well, Peter ends the passage by telling us why all these instructions are good and right and it's so that all the glory will go to God.

[33 : 11] So let me just conclude and also to encourage how we might pray about these things. As we think of the moment we're living through in human history, a fascinating moment, as we ask for wisdom to discern what time it is and to know where and when and how our obedience fits into God's purposes, may the turning point that we've considered here this morning, may the cross be our foundation and hope and may the Holy Spirit fill us with strength to endure as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.