

# 1 Peter 4:1-6 “Sin or Suffering? Self or Savior?”

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

That song and some others that we've sung already this morning are laying out for us the essence of this morning's sermon.

There's a distinct choice there, right? All this world or Jesus? I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold or houses or lands or fame or applause.

Jesus himself was faced with a pretty dramatic choice like this, wasn't he? There he was in the garden.

Was it going to be his own path? Or was it going to be God's path? He's in agony. The sufferings of the cross are looming before him.

[ 1 : 09 ] The abandonment of his friends is a present reality. The anxiety of his spirit is so intense. He's sweating drops of blood.

Father, he prays. If there's another way that avoids this terrible suffering ahead of me, I would like that. I don't relish the thought of drinking the cup of your wrath.

That's a lot of physical and emotional energy arguing for going his own way. And yet his spirit trusts his father.

He decides suffering is better than sin. Submitting to God's will better than serving his own.

Not my will, but yours be done. It's not an easy choice, right? But Jesus chooses to stand in our place as Peter has told us, once for all, for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

[ 2 : 33 ] Now, this morning, Peter says, that choice is to shape your lives too. Not just his, our lives.

As those united to Jesus, following Jesus, living as his people in this world, this choice is to shape our lives. 1 Peter chapter 4. Let's see what this means for us in these first six verses.

God's holy word, always and unfailingly the best thing to shape our lives. 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.

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.

[ 3 : 42 ] 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.

Father, we give you thanks for your word, and we ask for that spirit to teach us this morning, and more than that, to give us Jesus, to show us him, to so work in our hearts that we would want more and more and more of Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Peter has given us some hard passages to understand recently, hasn't he?

This passage is easier to understand. Good news. It's just harder to live. You know, I think those may be the worst kind of passages in some ways.

[ 5 : 04 ] I can't plead ignorance, and neither can you. I've decided to approach this text a little differently today.

First, I'm just going to walk through it briefly, so that we're on the same page about what it means. And then, talk for a little bit about what it means in our lives, for us specifically.

So, first, what's the message of these verses? Again, it's in the context of suffering, right? Specifically, suffering as God's people.

Peter's already pointed out that suffering brings opportunity to share our hope, right? That suffering with Jesus means we will also celebrate Jesus' victory with him.

And now, this passage highlights the choice that we've been talking about. The threat of suffering presents a life-shaping choice between your sin and your Savior.

[ 6 : 08 ] Listen, verse 1. Since, therefore, Christ suffered in the flesh, heading to and on the cross, right?

Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. Jesus evaluated, was it going to be his way or God's way? Disobedience with comfort or obedience with suffering?

And he chose obedience to God with suffering. He chose that to be the best way. So now, you have real spiritual warfare that you are engaged in every day, so you need to take up that same mindset with you.

When I must choose sin or suffering, I suffer. When I must choose myself or my Savior, Jesus. Every time, Jesus. Now, that may sound simple, right? Hey, you're in church, you know? Sin or Jesus? Which one's right? But we need to acknowledge our default mindset is avoid suffering, right?

[ 7 : 30 ] Anybody else? I don't like it at all. My comfort, my ease, my success, my pleasure, whatever it is, that needs to be pursued at all costs.

That's the way I'm used to thinking. So this life-shaping choice is no simple matter. When was the last time you chose to suffer?

That happens to you. You don't pick that, right? But choose suffering over sin, Peter says, 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.

Do you hear the choice between self and Savior, sin and suffering? This verse is not saying that if you have ever suffered, then you will never sin again.

That's not what it's saying. Rather, if you are willing, like Jesus, to choose painful suffering in order to follow God's will, you're making a break with sin.

[ 8 : 47 ] You're turning your back on sin and saying, I'm going this way and you're breaking from sin. You're setting your life on a course to pursue God's priorities and His plan for you over your own selfish passions.

Now, we all know suffering can drive us to turn in rebellion from God, to turn our back on Him and to turn to self. It's, I don't want anything to do with Him anymore. This hurts too much.

But the one choosing to suffer for Jesus has determined the path of Jesus is more worthwhile than the path of sin.

And listen, Peter says, whether you've been living for yourself nine years or 39 years or 99 years walking in this direction, that's quite enough.

the self-indulgence, the unbridled pursuit of pleasure, food, drink, sex, material possessions, being your own authority, whatever it is, enough of that!

[ 9 : 53 ] You've got something so much better! Of course, others around you won't understand that you do. They'll be surprised, right?

That you're not just carried along this overwhelming current of me-ism, of self-indulgent living because what they will say could possibly be better for you than whatever you want or whoever you want to be.

Right? I mean, this just makes sense. How could anything else be better for you than you? We buy that lie every day, don't we? You're weird, Christian.

don't be surprised when you don't fit in. In fact, they will malign you. At least mocking with their words, if not attacking you with their actions.

You should expect to be strange because you are a stranger in this world. It's not your home. If you're following Jesus' path, the world in which you live is not your home.

[ 11 : 08 ] So when people malign you, verse 5, remember, they will be called to account. There is a judge for all of us.

No one maligns anyone made in God's image without God noticing. sin. So, the good news of Jesus has been preached to everyone.

Even those who are now dead, it was preached to them in their lifetimes because God's judgment is real and we need to be saved from it. So that even though we will still die in this mortal life, we might have the hope of living forever because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

You see the choice set before us though in this passage? Follow the path of Jesus and suffer or go with the flow of everyone else around you and avoid some of that suffering, maybe a lot of it, and just go along.

Live for yourself. The choice is described well in Moses' life in Hebrews chapter 11. By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

[ 12 : 44 ] He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt for he was looking to the reward. You see the choice that he had?

Choose suffering with God over pleasure with sin. Reproach, that means shame and people maligning you. Reproach with Jesus over treasures in this world.

The threat of suffering for following Jesus gives you that choice. Do you see that? Will I shape my life along my Savior's path or down my own path?

Peter is calling us to prepare to suffer for following Jesus. But I think if I'm honest and for many of us in our world we're still thinking something a little bit less dramatic of a choice.

Maybe I can have my cake and eat it too. I don't really have to choose do I? I mean I've been able to claim Jesus and live pretty comfortably for myself.

[ 13 : 57 ] I've been doing that a long time pastor. It's not that hard. You can get away with it. Can't I just manage this dynamic? You know keep them both happy. I'll even lead my kids to believe that they can have and do whatever they want so that they don't view Jesus as costly and reject him.

I don't want that to happen. I bet that was only a tough choice in Peter's day. Not anymore. The problem is it's not just back then is it?

This is actually the normal way for Jesus' followers. God's people through history have been living this difficult choice life or death even at the highest level as they follow in the footsteps of their suffering Savior.

This is what it means to follow Jesus. Just think with me for a few minutes this morning. It wasn't just Moses and then Jesus of course facing this choice.

Many of Jesus' own 12 disciples were imprisoned for speaking of his name and told to stop. Many of them are killed for their commitment to him but they choose to cling to Jesus rather than their own lives, right?

[ 15 : 26 ] Many of the Christians receiving this letter as you know will soon face martyrdom at the hands of Nero. They're going to face lions in the Colosseum.

They're going to be burned as torches for Nero's parties. They don't know that yet. Or there is another way.

They could renounce Jesus publicly, quit following his way and they could enjoy their lives. they could live several more years perhaps.

Tempting you got to say. I mean think about the people they loved. Fast forwarding to 1527 George Carpenter was facing execution in Munich Germany because he refused to deny Christ.

As they took him away on his final day a friend came up to him and thought he could appeal to him with one final request to save his life. Think of your wife and children he said.

[ 16 : 40 ] Give up Jesus to keep them. It's a powerful appeal and a crucial choice. Carpenter responded my wife and my children are so dearly beloved unto me that they cannot be bought from me for all the riches and possessions of the Duke of Bavaria.

but for the love of my Lord God I will willingly forsake them. We read a heart wrenching account 150 years later in Scotland of the two Margaret's two of many women who faced death as covenanters in Scotland for refusing to acknowledge the king as head of the church over Christ.

Jesus alone would direct their worship and their lives. Margaret McLachlan a widow aged 70 and Margaret Wilson a farmer's daughter aged 18 were condemned together to drown in the sea outside Wigtown.

They tied the elder Margaret to a stake further out at sea thinking that as she died first they could still spare the younger one and perhaps not look quite as cruel as she watched the one that she looked up to and respected struggle and drown they thought she'll back off.

As the waves crashed and the elder Margaret struggled for air they scornfully asked the younger one what do you think of her now? Think said the 18 year old I see Christ wrestling there getting angry at this foolish young girl they decided to make the choice easier they would put her under the waves to stop her reciting of Romans 8 nothing can separate me from the love of God and they put her under and they would pull her up gasping for air to give her what seemed at this point an easy choice swear allegiance to the king and breathe freely or refuse and go back under time and time again she chose Jesus until she spoke her final words Christians have continued to suffer in our country in case you didn't think that was a reality many many we could cite over the years producing songs like give me

[ 19 : 33 ] Jesus Martin Luther King Jr. could have chosen a safer path and avoided suffering to enjoy fame and family that was increasing this is what he said in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech he saw the choice we're talking about and that he chose to suffer with the oppressed even if it cost him his life and then he concluded most of these people the ones he's identifying with will never make the headline and their names will not appear in who's who yet when years have rolled past and when the blazing light of truth is focused on this marvelous age in which we live men and women will know and children will be taught that we have a finer land a better people a more noble civilization because these humble children of God were willing to suffer for righteousness sake he chose

Jesus and suffering and he gave up his life Elizabeth Elliot you thought I was through with stories didn't you Elizabeth Elliot didn't give up her life she did lose her husband Jim who famously died in 1956 at the hands of the Auca people in Ecuador she chose to encourage him to go share Jesus even in the face of suffering in fact he died and a few years later she took her young daughter Valerie back to the same tribe with the same potential risk of suffering because she wanted to share the hope of Jesus with them no matter the cost she later wrote of suffering the deepest things that I have learned in my own life have come from the deepest suffering and out of the deepest waters and the hottest fires have come the deepest things

I know about God people who say such things in the words of Hebrews 11 make it clear they're seeking a homeland if they'd been thinking of that land from which they had gone out they would have had opportunity to return but as it is they desire a better country that is a heavenly one therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city they sought and God promises to those who suffer as they follow Jesus in obedient suffering a better city this is the way of God's people over here person after person in country after country y'all there are books upon books you could read of God's people following Jesus and suffering time fails me to share of those who for their choice to stand with Jesus have been disowned by their family so many of my friends in India rejected by friends passed over for promotions left out of the in crowd uninvited to parties mocked on social media see it doesn't have to be a life or death choice today to be a significant one

Peter says to people not yet facing that life or death choice start arming yourselves with this way of thinking start now choosing to live costly obedience to Jesus and the small choices that will shape your life to be headed this direction to break from sin to leave it behind to leave behind selfish indulgence living for me and to follow God's will and what he wants think about Jesus Jesus big choice in the garden that we talked about was rooted in a smaller choice in the wilderness when Satan tempted him to be king of the whole world without the suffering and Jesus said no it was rooted in a smaller choice on the road when Peter pleaded with

Jesus to take the path of a conquering king rather than a suffering servant and Jesus said no such a path is of Satan he recognized it didn't he we have many many small choices already to choose the path of our savior over ourselves suffering with God over pleasures with sin I want you to think this morning of small choices in your life maybe even ones you'll make this afternoon it may be when you're tired at the end of the day and your kids are arguing disrespectfully and you came home just wanting a moment of peace and you could explode they are they are attacking the very thing you long for or you could choose to suffer the pain of swallowing your own plan to engage with the patience of Christ it may be the small choice of what to do with the unexpected bonus check when your eyes start getting big and the list of things you'd like to indulge in is long and think of what all this could do or will you commit to seek first his kingdom now with some of this income because he says eternal investments are worth making even when we suffer the loss of things we'd really like to have here it may be the small choice to overeat gluttonously because you're seeking

comfort and a little bit more food or alcohol and this is what's going to get me through  
[ 26 : 03 ] I'll find my comfort there rather than in Christ's love it may be the small choice to choose your wife over the woman on the screen night after night after night in faithfulness to God's direction even when she is really frustrating you this passage warns us bigger choices follow those smaller ones and they tend to follow the same path maybe the small choice to refrain from a gossip fest and feel and seem to your friends like the outsider like you don't even belong and say I'm going to suffer that hurt to obey God's commands about my words and maybe the small choice of the Sabbath that God has given you as a gift in which to enjoy him and rest and relish him as your true treasure but man you've learned that your business can really benefit can make a little bit more if you work through

Sunday you've seen that your kids can really excel in their activities a little bit more if they play through Sunday so many choices that we face day in and day out to train our hearts to long and live not for human passions but for the will of God he's the one who made us and loves us young people I'd like to try to have a youth moment but every time I do I start crying so it makes it really tough this is for those of you who used to come sit on the steps up here when we have a children's moment but I want you to know how much I love you is that I'm not going to ask you now to come sit on the stairs okay I just want you to listen you can stay right where you are and I know that's important to you but so many times you already face these choices and

I want you to know that the suffering you face is real even the things that seem small you're in friend groups where daily you have the choice to make fun of others or be made fun of and it's one or the other malign or be maligned watch that movie or stay home alone go indulge in something illegal or immoral at that party or feel left out FOMO that's fear of missing out is a real thing for adults and for young people I want you all to know I've spent this won't surprise you perhaps but many nights in my younger years alone yeah sure pastor well you're kind of nerdy like that doesn't make it easy I spent sometimes feeling a sense of self righteousness like I was better than those kids who wouldn't invite me to their party because they didn't want me making them feel guilty about the things they were indulging in sometimes I remember feeling left out I didn't feel anything good about me I felt uncool I felt foolish for not recognizing all of the apparently wonderful things that I should be enjoying how much fun I could be having and that is a tough place to be you're in that spot a lot I want to tell you from my own experience that following Jesus is worth it that the pleasures of sin are not ultimately fulfilling the way they sometimes sound but I want you to hear it more importantly from God's word listen the time past is enough you may think you haven't passed a lot of time yet he doesn't give a number of years he doesn't say not well let me try a few more things first and just see hey

Peter I haven't gotten to go to college yet that's the time when I get to do all of these things and live for myself and then afterwards I'll follow Jesus no that is the way of comfort and self it is not the way of Jesus listen to me it is never too early to agree with God that the time past is enough of living for self it is not too early you don't have to try real hard to find yourself on this path swept away in this flood of debauchery Peter says there is an active enemy there is plenty of people telling you to be who you want to be and find yourself and do what feels good to you and if you just drift along if you just say

[ 31 : 42 ] I don't want to make this choice you will drift along in that flood through middle school and through high school and through college and that's the way the current goes if you're just floating along you'll get washed away in that that's why I'm wanting to talk to you this morning and say arm yourselves today already now arm yourselves for that war that you're finding yourself in with the thinking of Jesus suffering painful obedience even is actually better and that may seem really weird part of why it seems weird is the parties seem so important and the adults sometimes they're just telling you that what Christianity means this path of Jesus is just make sure you keep quiet and don't step out of line that's what it means to be over here no parties over here that's a lie being in relationship with

Jesus walking on this path is actually where true life is now you can experience it now knowing his love for you a life free from the pressure of performance and and listen parties forever you think I'm kidding I'm not kidding on the authority of God's word if you're afraid of missing out on any of this you're going to get unending parties you don't have to go home at curfew where you're dressed perfectly and so you never have to feel self conscious where the conversation lifts your heart rather than discourages you where there's food and drink like you've never tasted here there are

celebrations that are unrivaled in joy you're all celebrating the same thing together God promises a better city to you an eternal home a life full and joyful you can trust him listen struggling for life now unending hurt hurt hurt for a little while now in this life and unending love and life and it's not up to you to make it happen the pressure's not on you it's given to you give me

Jesus every time it's not easy young people you are likely to face more life or death choices than your parents or your grandparents right now God is calling you with every choice that you make for self or savior to make a choice that is going to shape the course of your life make choices now that shape your life to choose your savior rather than yourself he is so worth it end of youth moment and time to wrap up maybe maybe you're thinking as we read this I've made some bad choices maybe some small ones maybe some bigger ones whatever this passage is honest and clear about the judgment coming for those choosing their own way over

Jesus' way but way more than that it highlights that there is a savior who has come to bring hope for all who trust in him see because of Jesus' choice to suffer that's where this whole passage start since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh because he made that choice I was able to say to the young people it's never too early to say I'd rather have Jesus it's also I could say to you never too late whatever that's it you say I've lived 85 years living for myself that's okay that's enough it's never too late to say I'd rather have Jesus today today you can say the time past is enough of living for myself today is the day of salvation the good news of Jesus has been preached to you so that you may not face the judgment of God but rather live with him the way

God lives so you also preach that good news to others that they might know the life that Jesus offers to them it may at times be silence that is the safest way to avoid suffering right you know this silence about the good news of Jesus silence about the hope that you have in him not you not about the hope of Jesus not anymore choose even to suffer rather than to be silent about a king so gracious a friend so faithful a God who is so glorious Jesus suffered Jesus was maligned Jesus gave his life not so that you might pursue your own passions and pleasures and comforts and avoid all that suffering but so that you might live with God and find in him true life unending joy purposeful suffering life that lasts the fulfilling life that you long for a choice before us this morning my own way of endless seeking my savior's way of endless celebrating give me

[ 38 : 18 ] Jesus let's pray Jesus so help us that you would be more precious to us than all the treasures of this world help us by your spirit to know that's where life is found help us even in our small choices to find you as the one our soul longs for meet us fulfill us comfort us we ask in your name amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://southwood.org) to of that all we had so