

Resilient Hope // Armed & Ready

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Grace Chapel
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For the past several weeks, we have been walking through 1 Peter. We asked the question...What does it look like to live like exiles? It looks like not marrying ourselves to the culture or being aloof but instead living like we are just passing through to eternity. What does it look like to live faithfully in a world that is going crazy while also knowing that this place is not our home?

Today, 1 Peter returns to the topic of suffering. This short epistle written by the Apostle Peter references suffering as its main theme throughout the book. 1 Peter, in fact, uses the word “suffering” more than any other book in the Bible. This epistle, written around 64 A.D., is being sent to the Christians who were enduring unspeakable hardships under the hands of the tyrannical dictator “Nero” who had falsely blamed the Christians at the time for causing a fire in Rome. When this letter was written Christians were being accused falsely, executed, and even were burned at the stake to light the roadways into Rome. Peter does not paint a rosy picture of what it looks like to follow Jesus, but instead, invites us to live in an entirely new way with a completely new vision— not to avoid pain, or check out in the midst of it, but to thrive as exiles in a hostile world.

1 Peter 4:1-11, “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, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³ For 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. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ 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. ⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as 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.”

In a world that often encourages selfish ambitions and worldly comfort, the call of Christ is to take up our cross and follow Him.

As we dive into this text today, let's reflect on three key actions we must take as disciples of Jesus:

1. Arm yourself
2. Swim Upstream
3. Keep the end in mind

1. Arm yourself!

1 Peter 4:1-2 ESV, "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, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God."

If we, as Christians, are to thrive in times of difficulty and suffering, we must have the resilience and the courage to approach our lives in a completely different way than the rest of the world does. The first directive from Peter is to "arm yourself with the same attitude as Christ." What does this mean?

What was the mindset of Christ? In **Hebrews 12** we are told, "For the joy set before Him, Christ endured the cross!" What was the joy set before Him? The joy that was set before Him was for us! His joy was knowing that his death and resurrection would glorify God, would set us free, and give us access to eternal life. Christ died for us! His joy was knowing that His suffering would accomplish the salvation of the world. He did not just grit His teeth and suffer. He looked beyond the cross to us, and the salvation of the world! How can we arm ourselves with the same way of thinking? To arm yourself with the mind of Christ is to focus, like He did, on the joy that was set before Him. To set your mind on those we love. Not on the suffering, not on the injustices, not on the lusts of this world, but rather on the goal. To honor God and love those around us. We must learn to trust that God is accomplishing things for others and in us when we suffer trials. Arming ourselves with the mind of Christ means adopting the same attitude that Christ had. He didn't view suffering as something to avoid, but as something that could deepen His dependence on God, and so He pressed through it for us. To arm yourself with the same attitude of Jesus is to recognize that in the face of difficulty, we don't succumb to sin, but rather we align ourselves with God's will. As we arm ourselves, we are choosing to do the same thing that Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asked God if there was any other way but then traded His will for God's will. Peter says that when we

suffer, we are “done with sin.” That doesn’t mean that we don’t still sin. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but when we make mistakes, we still press on nonetheless knowing that suffering has purposes that we don’t always understand. Often, when things are the worst in our lives, it can be some of the times when we feel the closest to God as we depend on Him with desperation. When we suffer, it’s tempting to ask the wrong questions.

Sometimes we suffer from no fault of our own. It’s just life. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. Sometimes we suffer because of the stupid decisions that we make. Then we suffer the consequences, and we must deal with the reality that we are reaping exactly what we have sown. Sometimes the battle is spiritual. It is the direct result of the enemy wreaking havoc on our lives. Don’t forget that we have an enemy, and we need to prepare for the reality that there are spiritual forces that oppose us.

Regardless of why we are suffering, just remember that we are at war! As Christians, we must be **arming ourselves** daily with the mind of Christ. Whether we are dealing with consequences, the reality of a fallen world, or the direct attack of the enemy, we must learn how to view suffering as an opportunity to grow even more dependent on God to walk us through the fire.

2. Swim upstream

1 Peter 4:3-5 ESV, “³For 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. ⁴**With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;** ⁵but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

Jesus is calling us to go the opposite way than the world. The world, the flesh, and the devil are all pulling against us. We are constantly being pulled into self-absorption and prideful living, but Jesus is calling us to go the opposite way than the world is pulling us.

Peter is calling us to swim upstream, apart from the flow of ordinary life and the momentum of this world, knowing we are going to face trials, struggles, and difficulties in our journey. The world is pulling us one direction, and it would be easy to just float downstream with the momentum of the world, but Jesus calls us to swim against the flow to a purpose that is greater than we can imagine. The invitation of Christ is to an uneasy journey where there are enemies and pressure pulling us to what is easy. But

we must set our course for home, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us, and be willing to take up our own cross and follow after Him.

1 Peter 4:6 ESV, “⁶For 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.”

What does that mean exactly? How did Jesus preach to the dead? There is some theological debate about the meaning of this verse.

Jesus explains everything on the cross. Jesus is on the cross, and He looks to the man on His right and says,

Luke 23:43, “And He said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be **with Me in paradise.**’”

Jesus died and was buried in the tomb for three days. The question is... where did Jesus go? Where is this paradise?

This passage in 1 Peter seems to describe that Jesus did indeed go to a place described as “Hades.” Hades, which is a Greek word, means “the place of the dead.” In some places this word is inaccurately interpreted as “hell,” but the meaning of the word seems to be more general than this. Hades is the place where our souls go when we die while we await judgment day. The clearest explanation in scripture of this place is found in Luke chapter 16:19-30. Here, Jesus describes Hades in a story. In the story, He mentions that there are two places with a gulf between them. On one side is a place of torment, and on the other, is a place described as “Abraham’s bosom” or “the place of the righteous.” Between the two there is a gulf that cannot be passed. So, it seems, Jesus went to “the place of blessing” and preached the gospel there.

This preaching to those who are dead was not the offer of a second chance, but the completion of the salvation of those who had been faithful to God that lived before Christ. In doing this, Jesus fulfilled the promise that He would “*proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound*” (Isa 61:1 and Luk 4:18).

There is a lot of speculation about what all this means about the afterlife, the return of Christ, and judgment. Some have even speculated about a place that Catholics termed purgatory – a place where people “work off” their sin. There is nothing in the Bible that ever describes such a place. Remember, that Christ said on the cross before He died,

“It is finished!” There is no biblical support for such a place of earning your way to heaven. The Bible is quite clear on the point that we are saved by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:8-9, “⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

So, this place, described by Jesus in Luke 16 is simply an example to remind us that Jesus has indeed defeated death, and made a way for everyone, dying once and for all. Jesus has made a way for the living and the dead so that we all might live a new life. He continues in verse 7 with a strong reminder that we should keep in mind. Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.

1 Peter 4:7, “⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be self-controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers.”

4. Keep the end in mind

When we keep the end of the world in the front of our minds we can (through God’s grace) live a completely new way – using the gifts and talents that He has given us to glorify God.

1 Peter 4:8-11, “⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as 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.”

We visited my wife’s family in Ohio this weekend and my nephew ran a 10K race on Thanksgiving morning in Cincinnati. When we were talking about the race it reminded me of a video I had seen recently. In the video, the leading runner in a race slowed down right at the end of a race, pumping his fist in celebration, and then out of his blind spot came another runner passing him at the last possible second. He ends up losing the race in the final stretch. He got his focus off the finish line for just a few seconds, and it cost him the race. Isn’t this a parable for us today?

There are a thousand things that can get our focus off track. We can forget that our eternal destiny is just around the corner and rather than staying focused, being sober minded, and finishing the race that Christ has set out for us, we can get distracted by

the crowds, by the glory, by the weariness we feel, and forget that the finish line is just ahead.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWa9iYYPYF4>

Christ fixed His eyes beyond the finish line! He did not just bear with the suffering. He ran beyond the finish line! He went further than the finish line by even descending into death itself to set the captives free!

This is exactly why Peter encourages us to live each day with the end in mind. Why? The "end of all things is at hand" refers to the return of Christ and the final fulfillment of God's kingdom. Jesus is coming back. Soon. It could happen today! Knowing that our time here is limited shapes how we live our lives. If you think the finish line is far off somewhere out there, it becomes easy to distract and discourage you. When the devil can't distract you with sin, he goes after your complacency. But if you believe, you are in the final stretch, nearing the end, it can help you finish strong. Church, Christ is coming soon! Let's finish strong! Peter emphasizes two key attitudes here in the final part of the passage: alertness and love. We are called to be "alert and of sober mind"—not distracted by the fleeting pleasures of this world but focused instead on the eternal finish line. Living with the end in mind means seeking God's will and loving others deeply, not being distracted before we finish the race.

Notice how Peter calls us to take what we have and use what we have been given all for the glory of Christ. Whatever we have been given (whatever gifts, talents, passions, or blessing) by keeping the end in mind we can finish strong. Using every ounce of our effort and energy, every bit of our ability, to take what God has given us to the very end of the race for the glory of God.

Are you living with the end in mind? Are you focused on things that truly matter for eternity? Every day brings us closer to the return of our Savior. The end of all things is near! So, we want to live radically different lives—lives that are armed with the mind of Christ, lives that swim against the current, and lives that are focused on the return of Christ! Jesus is coming back soon!

1. How might we be **armed with the mind of Christ**, prepared for whatever comes your way?
2. Are you being distracted by the temptations of this world? What does it take to **swim upstream in the world today**?
3. Have you lost focus? Have you been lulled into complacency? How can we **keep the end in mind**? What can we do to keep the finish line in the forefront of our minds?

Resources

Hades: <https://www.gotquestions.org/sheol-hades-hell.html>

Purgatory: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MOx3_PjFjc