

1Peter 4:1-3

Choosing to Suffer Rather than Sin

When we read the Bible's prophecies about the final days before the return of Christ and His judgment of wrath to come upon the earth, we see that they are described as perilous times with growing persecution, with evil growing worse and deception increasing.

And the natural response of our hearts is to be fearful, to desperately not want this time that we are entering into to be the last days described in the Bible.

We naturally wish that either things would go back to normal so we could finish living out our days in peace and comfort, and let some distant future generation be the last generation, or we wish the Lord would come today and take us out of here so we don't have to experience the perilous times.

That is natural thinking, and it leads to fear, but the Lord wants us, in preparation for whatever lies ahead, to stop thinking naturally, and to start thinking biblically, and to start trusting the Bible.

That change of mindset will set us free from fear and will fill us instead with all of God's grace which will empower us to joyfully and triumphantly face whatever trials may come.

God gives the grace and power to be able to face trials courageously and to respond to suffering with genuine joy.

The grace of God empowers you to truly, from the core of your being, count it all joy when you fall into various trials (James 1:2)

The grace of God empowered and protected Peter, so that the night before his scheduled execution he slept peacefully in his prison cell.

I am hearing pastors in the States and in Canada, who are standing firm for the very existence of their church, describing how their congregation has never before worshipped so passionately, or served others so joyfully, or given of all they have so gladly and generously.

I have heard these pastors say that they would never want to go back to the way things were when the church had no opposition.

And as, in comparatively small ways, we have had to take a stand this past year, though 2020 was the most challenging year ever in my experience, it was, and continues to be, the most fulfilling time of my ministry.

When we only think about times of trial, whether that be trial by sickness, or financial trial, or spiritual attack, or persecution, and try to imagine what it would be like to go through it, there is no empowering grace in your imagination, and you feel afraid.

But when you are actually facing the storm, and Jesus calls you to step out of the boat into the storm, all of the grace of God is present in that moment to empower you and to enable you to do what He calls you to do.

This is what we call the walk of faith. We can't see the enabling power, and we don't feel it, until we make that choice to step out and trust it.

Then we discover all the strength needed, and then we experience all the peace of mind needed to be able to triumphantly and joyfully go through whatever trial we are called to face.

Our Calling—What We Walk Toward

1Peter 3:18, *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust* [meaning He who had no sin, suffered as a substitute, taking the punishment for us who were unjust sinners.

Why did He do that? He was on a mission, described here in the second part of verse 18], ***that He might bring us to God.."***

In Luke's gospel, Jesus described the mission He was anointed to carry out.

Luke 4:18-19, *"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

There is a mission to accomplish—there is a task to be done.

Because the fulfilment of Bible prophecy indicates Jesus is likely to come soon and call us home, do not feel that there is no point in pursuing and education or planning for a future because Jesus may come before you get anything done.

Do not be discouraged thinking that that if Jesus is coming soon, there is nothing on this earth to look forward to.

The enemy wants you to believe that because the time is short you are being robbed of the chance to live a meaningful life.

What if the Lord calls us home in three years? Jesus had only three years from the start of His ministry, at about age 30, until the Father called Him home.

That was a short career—but what an impactful and fruitful career it was.

It is not the length of your life that gives it value, but how you live it. Don't waste a day of your life sitting around feeling ripped off or sorry for yourself.

But make sure you are pursuing God's calling, not the world's plans.

1Peter 4:1, “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...”

Jesus led the way, we are to follow in His steps, trusting that all the grace that enabled Him will also be available to us.

1Peter 4:1 says that we are to **arm ourselves also with the same mind**. This is military, combat terminology.

Jesus demonstrated for us a mindset and a resolve that allowed Him to set His face resolutely toward the cross.

The Bible here is teaching us that, once we embrace that same mindset, it will arm us with the spiritual weaponry that will give us victory over the power of sin.

But when that decision is made, “Yes Lord, I will walk down this path You have set before me,” then all of the grace of God is at our disposal, enabling us to do what God has given us.

“... for he who has suffered in the flesh [meaning, he/she who has deliberately chosen to obey God, knowing full well that the choice they are making could result in suffering] **has ceased from sin...”**

Meaning he/she who has demonstrated, by their choice to suffer rather than sin, that they are through with, or done with, that sin—they are weaponized with the same grace of God which empowers them for victory over that sin—that sin has then lost its grip on them.

When Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus, it was because he sought to avoid rejection and suffering, so he chose to sin.

But later, we read in Acts chapters 4 and 5, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, choose differently, he chose to preach the gospel knowing he could be beaten for it, when arrested, he boldly said to the authorities, *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

That same mind that was in Christ, armed Peter so that he could triumph over the fear of man that had previously crippled him.

Our Past—What We Walk Away From

1Peter 4:1b-2, “...for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.”

This passage is very similar to what Paul taught Timothy, in **2Timothy 2:3-4**, *“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”*

Because we are foreigners living temporarily in this kingdom ruled by darkness, we, who belong to the kingdom of light, are here on assignment, this world is not our home, we therefore live with a completely different focus and different set of priorities than the local residents have.

For them, this world is all that they have to live for; this is as good as it will ever get for them; they have nothing better to look forward to, so they desperately try to get all the pleasure they possibly can out of the things in this world.

Verse two means, we have made a purposeful and intentional choice to follow after Jesus Christ, our commanding officer, and to let Him direct our steps, rather than to pursue the lusts of those from this kingdom.

We are here to set the captives in this kingdom of darkness free from those things, not to entangle ourselves with the same bondage.

Look again at verse 2, “... **that he** [he who has chosen to follow Jesus, rather than sin, even if it means suffering] **no longer** [that means we once did live this way, before we came to Jesus, but no longer] **should live the rest of his time in the flesh**

[(Peter uses the term “flesh” differently than Paul does. Peter uses it to mean our temporary natural lives.) What Peter is saying here is, with what few days we may have left in this life, we should no longer waste them living...] **for the lusts of men, but** [instead living for/ pursuing] **the will of God.”**

The will of God, meaning the mission of God; or the calling of God.

As we live in this kingdom that is not our home, we must be careful that we don’t plan and live our lives the way the people of this world plan and live their lives.

Jesus taught us that we are to have a radically different focus and priority.

Matthew 6:24-36, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*

²⁵ *“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*

²⁸ *“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹ and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

³¹ *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”*

1Peter 4:3, “For we have spent [wasted] enough of our past lifetime [before we trusted Jesus] in doing the will of the Gentiles [referring to unbelievers]—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness [excessive drinking], revelries [excessive eating and drinking], drinking parties [wild, drunken parties], and abominable idolatries [false beliefs about God—substituting all kinds of things that we looked to for getting our needs met, other than God alone].”

These are all behaviors of people who have no sense of anything worth living for, other than to try to suck as much pleasure as they can out of the temporary pleasures of this world.

They have a short-term mindset described in **Ecclesiastes 8:15**, “...a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry...”

Life for them is meaningless, and the future has no hope to look forward to but to grow older and weaker and then to die.

And death scares them because they don’t know what it will bring.

But in contrast, we have been given an eternal purpose, and all that we do while on this mission—all that is done in faith and obedience to our King, is laying up for us treasure in our homeland—treasure that will bring us glory, joy and satisfaction for all of eternity.

And we will live in an exciting relationship with our King whose presence fills us with fullness of joy and deeply satisfying pleasure forevermore.

And there, in our homeland, when this mission is over, there will be no pain, nor sadness, no suffering, no growing old, no disappointment and no failure.

In our homeland there is no sin, it is perfect paradise. These are all promises of God, who cannot lie—promises that He has put into writing.

So, when we begin to understand who we are, and why we are here, and where we are going, those things the people of this world pursue begin to lose their attraction to us. We are called to so much more than this.

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