

## 1 Peter 4:1–6

### Introduction

Last week, we saw what the Lordship of Christ really means, and the key to truly, in our hearts, sanctifying Christ as Lord. We must be diligently believing and meditating on the infinite saving value of His suffering and death (“in the flesh”), and so also the infinite saving power of the resurrection life (“the life in the Spirit”) that He now lives. Now Peter turns to exhort us and encourage us in light of these realities and in light of the Lordship of Christ.

#### I. 1 Peter 4:1a — Since therefore **Christ suffered in the flesh**...

Isn't there a sense in which these words come as a bit of a shock? Peter's reaching all the way back, here, to what he said five verses earlier, in chapter three verse eighteen:

- 1 Peter 3:18 — **Christ also suffered** once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, **being put to death in the flesh**...

Now he picks up again, five verses later: “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh...” And yet in between—in the last four verses, what has Peter been emphasizing? He's been emphasizing not Christ's existence in the flesh (in the realm of weakness, and frailty, and mortality, and death), but rather His new life and existence that He has now in the Spirit (in the realm of immortality, and power, and glory). And the more we begin to grasp this life lived wholly in the realm of the supernatural and all-powerful Spirit of God (as we did last week), the more it's a mystery to us that **this** Christ should have ever truly and really existed “in the flesh” – that He could have ever *really* suffered and endured actual *death*.

It's a good thing for us to embrace this as a mystery and to rejoice in this as a mystery. But there can always be that part of us that's in danger of rejecting this mystery because it simply doesn't make sense to our human way of thinking. Now, we may think we have no problem with this. But if we thought about it long enough, and hard enough, and honestly enough, we would. At the very least, if Christ's former life in the flesh isn't a mystery to us, then I wonder if we've truly comprehended the power of the life that Christ now lives in the Spirit. Think of John's vision of Christ in Revelation chapter one:

- Revelation 1:12–17a — Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

Is it not a mystery to us, then, and even an offense to our human way of thinking, to hear what this “one like a son of man” says to John who lay at His feet like a dead man?

- Revelation 1:17b–18 — But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and **the living one. I died**, and behold I am alive forevermore.

How could *this* “**living one**” have ever died? Well, He had to have existed once Himself in an entirely different realm – in the realm of the flesh.

We all at least have *room* in our thinking for a “theology of glory.” But the question is: once we’ve really grasped this theology of glory, will there still be room in it for the suffering and the death that is actually the prerequisite to that glory? Do we embrace as a very real mystery the fact that this Christ who lives now wholly in the realm of immortality and power and glory, and is in heaven at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him—that this Christ really and truly existed in the flesh – that this Christ even suffered and was even put to death in the flesh? It’s this mystery that Peter emphasizes now as he reaches all the way back to verse 18, past all the theology of Christ’s resurrection glory, and picks up again with the theme of Christ “in the flesh.” “Since therefore [**this!?!]** Christ suffered in the flesh...”

But why would Peter want to do this? Why return now – after all the glory of Christ in the Spirit – to the suffering and death of Christ in the flesh? The answer is so very, very simple. It’s because all of us, here, are still living... in the flesh, in the realm of weakness, and frailty, and mortality, and death. So, Peter writes:

**II. 1 Peter 4:1b** — Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same resolve<sup>1</sup>...

What was the resolve that Christ had? It wasn’t a resolve *simply* to suffer – as though His goal was to go out and find suffering. But it was a resolve to always choose suffering rather than compromise. It was a resolve to choose persecution and mistreatment even to the point of death rather than to sin and reject His calling and His relationship with His Father. (cf. Jobes) Sometimes we might forget that it was Christ’s true and real existence in the flesh—just like us—that required this “resolve” even for Him. This was the meaning of Christ being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. (cf. Mat. 4:1-11) On the one hand, Jesus didn’t have a sin nature like we do. On the other hand, Jesus did live in the realm of the flesh, with all its weakness, and limitations, and frailties. And so we know that the temptations Jesus faced were real. They were temptations to compromise and to sin in order to avoid suffering and the cross. And so every time Christ refused the devil’s temptation, what was He doing? He was **choosing** suffering **rather** than compromise – because in the end, it was going to be one or the other. He was **choosing** persecution even to the point of death **rather** than to sin and reject His calling and His relationship with His Father. Christ’s entire life was characterized by this choice and by this resolve so that He could say to His disciples in Luke twelve:

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hebrews 4:12 — The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and **intentions** of the heart. Jobes observes: “In the LXX Proverbs the noun *ennoia* [understanding] often refers to that mind-set or disposition that issues in right moral action (e.g., Prov. 2:11; 3:21; 16:22; 23:19). Therefore, Peter exhorts his readers to have the same resolve that characterized Christ.”

- Luke 12:50 — I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!

And then, at the very end of Christ's life in the flesh, we hear Him praying in the garden:

- Luke 22:42–44 — “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Christ wasn't “auto-programmed” for suffering. How could we ever say such a thing when we know that He lived and existed “in the flesh” – just like we do? And so the Bible says that it was through Christ's sufferings that He “learned obedience.”

- Hebrews 5:7–8 — **In the days of his flesh**, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, **he learned obedience through what he suffered**.

Christ was never *disobedient*, but it was necessary for Him to *grow* in His resolve and in his obedience to the Father through each test and through each temptation and throughout the entire course of His life until the final “crisis” of the cross. And so Paul says in Philippians 2:8 that:

- Philippians 2:8 — ...he humbled himself by *becoming obedient to the point of death*, even death on a cross.

Are you seeing how our salvation truly does depend on the real obedience of Christ – on His conscious, daily resolve to choose suffering rather than sin and compromise? Maybe now we can understand Peter's application here for us:

**III. 1 Peter 4:1c–2** — Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same resolve, **for *whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with 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.***

What Peter's emphasizing is the fact that all of us here are still living every day in the realm of the flesh. We are all still living in an existence characterized only by weakness, and frailty, and mortality, and death. And it's this fact that makes it absolutely necessary for us to arm ourselves with the same resolve that Christ had when He Himself was also living in the flesh – just—like—us. Remember that just because Jesus wasn't prone to sin like we are doesn't mean His temptations were any less real or any less powerful than ours will ever be. And so once again, we have in the sufferings of Christ in the flesh a model and a wonderful encouragement for us as we live still in the flesh.

We're not called to go out looking for suffering (cf. 1 Pet. 3:13-17), but we are called to have the daily conscious resolve—or mindset—that we will always choose suffering rather than compromise – that we will always choose persecution and mistreatment, even if it should be to the point of death, rather than to sin. Peter says that the one who *has* (already) suffered in the

flesh has finished with sin. In other words, the person who's already suffered for righteousness' sake has clearly demonstrated the genuineness of his resolve to choose that suffering rather than sin. But I wonder if we could say, too, that the one who hasn't yet suffered, but who has still truly armed himself with Christ's resolve—that this person, too, has finished with 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. Think about it: What does the true willingness to suffer have to do with the pursuit of human passions? What does the pursuit of human lusts and desires have to do with the resolve to always choose pain and suffering, if necessary, in the pursuit of God's will? And, of course, the answer is that these two things have nothing at all in common. Therefore, the person who has armed himself with this resolve must be the one who is living a life wholly weaned from human lusts and passions, and a life wholly set apart to the will of God.

This isn't to say that we can attain sinless perfection in this life. Neither is this a special, super-spiritual, super-elite class of Christians. Peter's simply describing again the holy life that we're all called to live. What is this holy life? It's a life characterized by the resolve that Christ displayed all throughout his life in the flesh – the resolve that led Him in the end to the cross. It's a life lived no longer for human passions, but truly and only for the will of God – which is the life we see so beautifully and so perfectly modeled for us in the one who said:

- John 4:34; 5:30 (cf. 6:38) — My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work... I can do nothing on my own... I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me...

And then we remember again what Jesus prayed in the garden:

- Luke 22:42 — Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, **not** my will, but **yours**, be done.

For some of us, we may have no attraction at all to a life like this. But for all who've been born again, there is an attraction to this life of holiness, even though it absolutely requires the resolve to suffer rather than to sin. And the attraction for us, now, is the fact that this is the life our Savior lived. Now if there's always a growing attraction for us in this life that Christ lived, how can there not also be a growing revulsion to the life that chooses human passions rather than the will of God? Peter goes on to write:

**IV. 1 Peter 4:3** — 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.

The first thing we need to know, here, is that Peter is writing from the perspective of the Christian. He talks about the "Gentiles," which assumes that he and his readers—and all of us—are not Gentiles, but rather God's holy covenant people. And so it's from that vantage point – it's from this perspective of God's holy, covenant people – that Peter's describing what "the Gentiles" want to do. The Gentiles wouldn't have described themselves as "Gentiles," and neither would the Gentiles have wanted to say that they were "living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry." In fact, that last phrase ("lawless idolatry") is a phrase the Gentiles would hardly have known the meaning of because "idolatry"

wasn't even a word they used. But for Peter, those who aren't true worshipers of the only true God (that's all Gentiles) are by definition idolaters, and therefore they're all, at some level, living in lawless idolatry. And from our perspective as Christians, always associated with this idolatry—with this worship of false gods—is the pursuit of human passions rather than the will of God.

So what Peter's doing here is just describing these human passions that are common to all Gentiles (and that *were* common to all of us before Christ) in their grossest, basest, and most flagrant forms. We can't read this verse and think that just so long as we avoid these excesses of idolatry, or these extremes of human passions, then we must be living for the will of God. That's not Peter's point. Instead, his point is just to paint the starkest contrast possible between the life that we now live wholly for the will of God and the life that we used to live wholly for human passions. (See Achtemeier, p.p. 282-285; footnotes 113 & 122) Paul paints the same picture for us in 2 Corinthians chapter 6:

- 2 Corinthians 6:14–16 — What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?

We all need to share in these “either/or,” “black and white” perspectives. There's a sense in which we all need to learn to see things not in “grays” but in “absolutes.” We need to have a real sense of the vastness of the gulf between living for human passions (as the Gentiles do) and living truly for the will of God. In this way, our unaffected revulsion to the one (the life lived for human passions), and our genuine attraction to the other (the life lived for the will of God) will be stronger and deeper, and so we'll truly be fortified in our “resolve” to always choose suffering rather than compromise – to always choose persecution and pain—and even death—rather than any form or kind of sin.

Can we all agree wholeheartedly with Peter when he says to us—“The time that is past suffices [is more than enough!] for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.” When you hear what the Gentiles want to do (which is what we all were) described in terms like these, do you feel yourself being even more powerfully drawn and attracted to that life that's lived wholly for the will of God – after the pattern of Christ our Savior? But now Peter goes on to remind us why this deep attraction and this strong resolve is so necessary.

**V. 1 Peter 4:4** — With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you...

Notice how Peter keeps on using this extreme, excessive language. His point is this, how can lives that are really lived for the will of God not stand out in contrast to the Gentiles with their idolatry and their pursuit of human passions? Certainly, for the Christians in Asia Minor, it was impossible not to. In the world of Asia Minor, customs and practices associated with idolatry were a part of almost every aspect of living – in the home and family, in the workplace, in government, and even in the recreational and just the social parts of life. And so the result of all this was that it forced Christians to withdraw almost completely from just the normal, expected,

everyday activities of life (not just those cultural activities that involved actual immorality and drunkenness). But what happens when Christians withdraw like this – when they live their lives no longer for human passions but wholly and truly for the will of God? How are they going to be perceived? They’ll be seen as aloof, and strange, and maybe even secretive and suspicious – in the words of one writer in Peter’s day, as even “haters of humanity.” (Tacitus; quoted in Schreiner; cf. Achtemeier; Davids)

We might not be living in the culture of Asia Minor, but are things really so different in our time 2000 years later? Just because we always do the things that even the world admits to be good doesn’t mean that we won’t be perceived as strange – and even extremists. So as long as the world is surprised that we don’t live like them—as long as they find it strange that we should be so withdrawn and set apart—there will always be the prospect of being mistreated for righteousness’ sake – of being persecuted precisely because we’re living the rest of our time in the flesh no longer for human passions but always and only for the will of God.

“With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery,” Peter says, “and they malign you...” And now we see Peter’s true concern – that somehow this specter of being maligned, and slandered, and persecuted, and mistreated – of even just being perceived as social misfits and outcasts – might cause us to question whether it’s really **worth it** to daily choose this discomfort and pain rather than to ever compromise in any way with sin. To live “in the flesh” means that we grow weary, that we’re weak and frail, that the temptations to sin are real. And so for Peter, it’s this simple reality that makes it absolutely necessary for all of us to arm ourselves with the same resolve that Christ had when He Himself was also living in the flesh – just—like—us. It’s to **this** end, that we might arm ourselves with **this** resolve, that Peter goes on to write in verse 5:

**VI. 1 Peter 4:5** — ...but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Brothers and sisters, one of the most basic and most fundamental doctrines of Christianity is the reality of the final judgment where all human beings without any exception—both those who have died and those who are still living—will stand before God and be called to give an account to God. That might be one of the most basic doctrines of Christianity, but I think maybe it’s one of the doctrines most neglected by Christians—by us—to our very real detriment and hurt.

If we really believe in the reality of this final judgment, then won’t we be strengthened to arm ourselves with this “resolve” that Peter is calling us to in these verses? The point here has nothing to do with being spiteful or vengeful. Peter’s just reminding us that to live the rest of our time in the flesh for the will of God – that to be fully resolved to choose suffering rather than sin – will always be worth it in the end. The truth of the matter, **we know**, is that all those who live for human passions, and who malign those who don’t, will one day be called to account before the one who is “ready,” even now, to judge the living and the dead.

Peter says “ready” because from his perspective, the judgment isn’t far off. Because we’re living already in the last days, Peter sees—and he wants us to see—that the end of all things is already “at hand.” (cf. 4:7) It’s not something remote, and far off, and shadowy, but something

immanent, and real, and vivid that's always set before our eyes. But maybe Peter also says "ready" because the Judge that he has in mind is Christ, who lives now no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit, and who sits now at God's right hand – "ready" to return as the final Judge over all the world.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us arm ourselves during the rest of our time in the flesh with the same resolve that Christ Himself had when He was in the flesh – just like us. If this is the "negative" side of Peter's comfort and encouragement, then verse six is the "positive" side.

**VII. 1 Peter 4:6** — For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged **in the flesh** according to men, they might live **in the Spirit** according to God.

Does this language sound really, *really* familiar to you now? Ten verses earlier, in chapter three verse 18, Peter wrote:

➤ **1 Peter 3:18** — For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God, being **put to death in the flesh** but **made alive in the Spirit**.

Peter's focus this morning has been on the first half of this equation. His focus has been on Christ's suffering and our call to arm ourselves with the same resolve since we, too, are still in the flesh just as Christ was once in the flesh. But now we see a wonderful and amazing thing. What about all the Christians in Asia Minor who chose suffering rather than compromise and have already died? What about all the Christians throughout the last 2000 years who lived not for human passions but for the will of God, and have now already experienced the ultimate consequence of living in the flesh—who've already died, just the same as everyone dies? What about the world's conclusion that this must mean our lot is the same as everyone else's and so, therefore, "what did we gain from all our 'resolve' to choose suffering rather than sin?" Brothers and sisters, we *must* have an answer to this dilemma, not for the sake of answering the world, but rather for the sake of answering the weakness and the frailty of our own flesh.

Peter answers: "This is why the gospel was preached even to those who are [now] dead, that **though judged in the flesh according to men, they might live in the Spirit according to God.**" Or, we could say, "that though judged in the flesh from a merely human perspective, they might live in the Spirit according to the final verdict and decision of God." Human appearances, as powerful as they might seem to us who are still in the flesh, are not what is ultimate. And so now Peter reminds us that there are two sides to the coming judgment. There's death; but for us, there will be life. There's condemnation; but for us who are living the rest of our time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God, what will there be? God will cause us to share in the everlasting, resurrection power and glory of the life that Christ Himself is now living. In other words, we will not *just* be raised to life again; instead, we will be raised *with Christ* to a life that is no longer "in the flesh" at all, but to a life wholly and completely in the *Spirit*. **THIS** is **WHY** the Gospel was preached not only to those who are now dead, but **THIS** is **WHY** the Gospel was preached—and is even now being preached—to us, that even though we may one day be judged in the flesh by all outward human appearances, we will, on the final day of judgment, be raised to share in the everlasting, resurrection power and glory of the life that Christ Himself now lives.

**Therefore**, brothers and sisters, “since... Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same resolve, **for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with 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.**”