

A Call to Arms
Our Identity in Christ
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Bible Text: 1 Peter 4:1-6
Preached on: Sunday, March 3, 2024

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1 Peter chapter 4, moving into a new chapter of 1 Peter, the epistle, and we're looking at the first six verses this morning, 1 Peter 4:1 to 6. The title of the message is "A Call to Arms." A Call to Arms. We've noted that in previous messages, we've looked at the epistle of Peter that he writes to believers who are in an environment that is hostile to their faith. They, in the first century, he's writing around 63 AD, church is barely 30 years old, and as it's gone out throughout the Mediterranean world, there's been great success for the gospel, first among Jews and then lessening more and more among Jews and more and more Gentiles coming to faith. Paul's missionary journeys have taken him all over Asia Minor and Greece, even to Rome. Peter also, the other apostles have made their way around the Mediterranean world, but everywhere they go, as the gospel goes forward, they encounter what Jesus promised that they would, that light, they're the light of the world but men hate light because they love their darkness, and that they would be persecuted for their faith, and they're experiencing that. They're experiencing cultural animosity, social rejection, and even political persecution, which is about to break out less than a year after this letter is written in Rome, emanating from Rome a great period of persecution. So, suffering for righteousness is a clear and present danger for those to whom he writes. They're already experiencing it in ways and they're about to experience even the suffering of physical pain. Some will be martyred in the coming persecution. And so Peter writes to prepare them for that. We've seen that in so many messages. He is trying to make that really clear in this book, and we come to this next passage where he really issues a call to arms. He says, "You're at war, and you need to prepare for war." And so we'll see that in this passage.

1 Peter 4, verses 1 to 6.

1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. 4 In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they

malign you; 5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we ask now as we come to Your word that You would open the eyes of our hearts. We know that truth is revealed. Your Spirit must make these things known to us. We pray that You would grant us that Your word would go forth and accomplish its purpose in each of our hearts, that believers would be built up and encouraged, unbelievers, Lord, might be drawn to saving grace of Christ through Your word. We pray most of all that Jesus Christ would be exalted and high and lifted up in our hearts and our lives. We pray this in His name, amen.

So a call to arms. The key verb in this entire paragraph, verses 1 to 6, is the verb "arm yourselves." In fact, that's the first point in the outline. There's three points this morning and the first point is an emphatic command, an emphatic command. The command is arm yourselves. Arm yourselves. It is a command. It's an imperative. It is not a suggestion. This is the one imperative in this section and so it's the main verb that dominates the entire section. He wants them to arm themselves. It's in the middle voice. Middle voice, the voice in grammar is the relationship of the subject to the verb. That's voice. An active voice verb means that the subject is doing the action of the verb. He's acting, the subject is acting the action of the verb. Passive voice, the subject is receiving the action of the verb. An active voice would be the boy hit the ball. The boy hit, he's doing the action. Passive would be the boy was hit by the ball. He's receiving the action. This is a middle voice verb, which means the subject is both the doer and the receiver of the action. He does the action and he receives it and it's there in the form of the particular verb here. The idea is you are to do the action of taking up arms and in so doing, you're arming yourself.

So it's really an emphatic way of saying this. In fact, it's even more emphatic in the original because Peter adds a word that's really unnecessary in Greek language, and that is the pronoun "you." Actually, in this particular case, it's the same way in English. If I give an instruction to my son, "Hey, take out the trash." I don't have to say "you take out the trash," right? Although sometimes he might be confused about that and I'd say, "Well, if I'm looking at you, I was talking to you, right?" But I don't have to add the word "you." Well, in the imperative, that's the case. It's an assumed, it's a second person verb, and it's already there in the verb. "You" plural, "arm yourselves." That's what's there in the middle voice verb. But Peter adds a pronoun, the second person plural pronoun "you," that is "you" plural, he adds that to draw out even more the emphasis of his command. He's saying, "You yourselves, arm yourselves." It's as strong as he could say this and he uses the word of armory or it's a military image. The verb here is a word that is derived from the word for weapon. He's saying, "Take up your weapons. You yourselves take up your weapons to defend yourselves." It's the language of battle and warfare.

So that's the title of "A Call to Arms." That's the imperative in the passage and everything else relates to this. The word picture here is there is an imminent attack. The enemy army is just over the horizon and the alarm is sounded. and all of the villagers are to gather together and arm themselves to be ready for an attack. That's the force and emphasis of this command. It's an emphatic and urgent command. A question that we also need to ask is, arm yourselves how? Are we supposed to go out and buy guns? Are we supposed to get swords? For them, they would have gotten swords, right, or a spear. How were they supposed to do that? No, he's not talking about physical weapons. He explains what we are to arm ourselves with there in that verse. He says, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose." It's a mental arming. Like the word here that's used here with the same purpose, the NIV translates as "same attitude." The ESV says "arm yourselves with the same way of thinking." The King James says "the same mind." It's a word for mind, the word nous, but this particular word, there are several words for mind and thinking in the New Testament, this particular word puts emphasis, though it's on the intellect, it's closely related to the will. Nous sees the mind as the faculty of judgment and decision, and so this word is translated in Hebrews 4:12 as the intentions of the heart, the purposes and intentions of the heart. It's an intellectual determination, decision. It's not just thinking, he's calling them to a frame of mind, to a resolution, as it were. Be resolved. Make this mental resolution, the same resolution that Christ had.

The same resolution that Christ had. What is the resolution that Christ had? Well, context tells us Christ was willing to suffer for doing good. That's what we've been talking about in this section. In fact, the immediate preceding verses are key, and we know that because we see the first word in our Bibles is the word "Therefore." Therefore, it's calling us to look back at what's just come before. "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose." And so he's just, in the previous five verses, verses 18 to 22, he's invited us to look at Christ and how he suffered for doing good, his great suffering for righteousness, the ultimate example of someone who was only doing righteousness, yet suffered for it, and what Peter unpacked for us in those verses was the great good that came out of it. And here he says arm yourselves with the same mind. He's saying, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same mind." He's saying, if you're a Christian, you are called to follow Christ in his way of life, in his willingness to suffer for righteousness. This is what we sign up for. He's saying that we are to embrace suffering for righteousness as a way of life, as a part of our calling.

This is what it means to be a Christian and he's saying you need to arm yourself. You see, the attacks are coming, but the attacks are spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and you have to gird the loins of your mind to be ready to withstand those attacks. How do you do that? You set your mind to embrace suffering for righteousness. This is what I'm called to. This is what you're called to. And establishing that and embracing that on the front end allows you then to stand. He's saying, listen, it's coming. It's already here, but it's certainly coming. More opposition is coming. And how do you prepare for that? You need to arm yourselves, arm yourselves with a mental determination that this is what the Scripture has called us to. Jesus said, "If they hated Me, they will hate you but follow Me."

The apostles make this clear a number of places. On Wednesday nights, we've been looking at the epistle of the Philippians, and I want to read a couple verses from Philippians. Paul makes this same point that Peter's making, that it's just part and parcel of the Christian life to suffer for righteousness, and it's a good thing. He says in Philippians 1:29, writing to the believers there in Macedonia, in the town of Philippi, he says, "For to you," Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." It's been granted to you to suffer for his sake. Interesting word translated "granted" here. It's actually the same word as, it's a verbal form of the word grace, charis. And so he's saying that suffering is a grace gift from God, that suffering for Christ is an expression of God's grace toward you. It's not just that he's going to give you the grace to endure it, the suffering itself is a part of the gift of grace. How we love the grace of God. Unmerited favor. God's kindness to us, irrespective of our condition. Nothing in us merits his grace. His grace is his love and affection and his kindness and one of the ways he expresses that according to Philippians 1:29 is by granting us the grace of suffering.

He goes on in the same letter, chapter 3, verse 10, Paul is talking about his own experiences and sufferings and he says, "This is what my purpose in life is," Philippians 3:10, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. Many people will say amen to that, boy, just more power. But the power comes through the suffering and the fellowship of his suffering, and I love that the fellowship of his suffering, that to suffer for Christ is to experience a deeper intimacy with Christ. That's why it's a grace gift. It draws you into communion with Jesus if you love him and you respond appropriately to the suffering. It's an opportunity to know him more. We're going to see later in this chapter, he's going to say, the spirit of glory and of God rests on you when you suffer and are reviled for his names sake. It's as if Jesus wants to draw near to his people, especially when they're suffering for his names sake.

So it's an opportunity. So back to 1 Peter chapter 4, Peter is saying arm yourselves with this mindset, embrace suffering for righteousness as a way of life, as a part of your calling. This is the emphatic command. We have to do it. Now, he's so gracious to not only give us an emphatic command, but he gives us inducements or reasoning with us about the benefit of it. The second point is a dramatic outcome, a dramatic outcome. He tells us what suffering for righteousness does at the end of the verse. He had said, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh," verse 1, "arm yourselves also with the same purpose because," because, "he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." The context, he's talking not just about any suffering, although I think there's value in most suffering and there can always be value, as you submit to God, he can do it. But here he's talking about particularly suffering for righteousness' sake. That's the context. When we do good and suffer for it, he's saying there's something powerful about suffering for righteousness' sake and it has a dramatic impact and it leads to a dramatic outcome, a decisive break with sin.

The language is strong, "he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." The word translated "ceased" here is a verb which is used 15 times in the New Testament, most often in Luke and Acts. So it's a favorite word of Luke who wrote both of those books and it pictures stopping, halting, ending something, but particularly the context it's used in, it speaks of stoppage or a halt to something, frenetic activity. It's something strong going on that is halted. For instance, Luke 8:24, Luke describes the miracle of Jesus on the Sea of Galilee when the storm has come upon the sea, he was asleep in the boat, the disciples wake him up and it says the winds are blowing, the waves are surging, and he speaks a word and it ceases in the same word here. It stops. So the storm immediately stops and everything's calm. The word is used a couple of times in Acts of extraordinary frantic activity, Acts 20 verse 1, after the astounding persecution of Paul in Ephesus. In Acts 19, you read a story, there's so much Luke describes the setting basically with things like this, that remember Paul and his companions, they heal and they're ministering and some people became upset with them and they get the crowd of people stirred up by saying that Paul is attacking Artemis of the Ephesians, the local goddess. And so they stir up a crowd and a mob and you know how mob mentality takes over, and they're enraged, and these words, they're raging at Paul and his companions. They fill up the stadium there. Somehow this mob goes into the stadium there in Ephesus and there are people trying to speak to them and calm them down and explain, "Hey, we're preaching a gospel." They won't let Paul go in. They're worried that he's going to be killed because he gets beaten everywhere he goes and so they protect him outside. They keep him outside. And someone else addresses the crowd and the crowd, and they're just trying to have a reasoned, you know, explanation, "Hey, we're preaching a message here about Jesus." The crowd starts chanting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians," in unison, and the text says they went on like that for two hours. Can you imagine what kind of spirit and rage is going on, what kind of demonic influence is happening in this massive crowd?

Well, in chapter 20 verse 1 says, "After the uproar ceased," same word, that surging and just overflow and just of ungodly emotion, it came to an end, and so this is the word he uses here, a decisive break with sin that suffering, "he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." I think there's a double meaning here. In one sense, if you suffer in the flesh as Jesus suffered, that is you die, well, one of the good things about dying in the Lord is you have ceased from sin. Never sin again. That's the best thing about it. Never sin again. But he's not just saying that because look at what verse 2 says. He says there's a dramatic ceasing from sin so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. There's something about suffering for righteousness that brings something dramatic in your sanctification. It doesn't mean that you never sin again because we know that we do, but he's saying that suffering for righteousness has incredible power to take you to another level in your sanctification. It provides a kind of clarity, soul-changing clarity that leads you to be able to put off sin and he's saying, listen, look at the benefit if you suffer for righteousness. It is an incredible opportunity. You have fellowship with Christ in the moment and you have the opportunity for a dramatic blessing in your battle with sin. It's going to continue till you die or until Jesus comes back, but there's something about suffering for righteousness that propels the believer forward.

You think about that and suffering and just the power of suffering, there's so many passages of Scripture that teach this point. You think about Jesus in John 15 when he says, "I'm the vine, you are the branches. Every branch in Me that bears fruit," what happens? The Father prunes it so that it will bear more fruit. Pruning leads to more fruit. When there is no fruit, the branches are thrown into the fire. But the branches that bear fruit, God's going to use suffering to make us more fruitful.

It also clarifies whether or not someone's salvation is genuine. This is one of the things, because suffering does not always lead to good fruit. Suffering can be the means by which false faith is made evident. Remember Jesus' parable of the soils, the parable of the sower and the seed. The proclamation of the gospel is like a man who went out to sow and he sowed seed and it fell on four different types of soil. And one of the soils was actually that looked like the initial returns were the most promising, the rocky soil, the seed came up quickly and it looks like life is there, but it says when the sun rises in the heat of the day, because it has no depth of earth, because it was in rocky soil, that is a thin layer of dirt on top of rock, it can't get the depth of root. It's not a genuine conversion. Therefore, when tribulation arises, that's the heat of the day, Jesus explains, as he explains to his disciples the meaning of the parable, they fall away. It's not genuine faith. And so suffering can bring out in unbelievers more and more bitterness and anger and evil, but believers who cling to Christ can become more and more fruitful.

Peter had said actually in chapter 1 verses 6 and 7 that the reason he brings various trials into your life, 1:6, "In this you greatly rejoice," 1 Peter 1:6, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." It's the proving of your faith. It's the proving of the genuineness of your faith as taking metal through fire purifies and purges impurities out and shows the genuineness of the gold or the silver. This is what happens in suffering.

So it leads to a decisive break with sin. An emphatic command, arm yourselves, a dramatic outcome, a decisive break with sin, and then we're going to spend most of our time on the third point, an eye-opening process. An eye-opening process. There's a sense in which the logic of Peter is basically to say what to do, arm yourselves with a mindset that says, "I'm willing to suffer for Christ, this is what I've signed up for." What to do, starts with "what," then he says "why." God's going to use it in your life. He's not only going to glorify his name, here he says, he's going to use it in your life to purify your faith. And then he goes from "what, why," to "how." How does this work out? How is it that it purifies our faith? I think that's the logic of Peter in how this passage unfolds and what he's going to do is share with us that suffering brings clarity. It's an eye-opening process. Suffering especially for righteousness' sake brings a stunning clarity to life. Suddenly we see things as they truly are and the mirage, the mist, the darkness that has blinded us is removed. Suffering for righteousness sheds light. It distills, it clarifies. And we're going to see four subpoints here that he talks about in this passage. How it clarifies, and in clarifying helps us to see a dramatic growth in grace.

First of all, 3A, first subpoint under an eye-opening process, suffering clarifies the purpose of life. Verse 2, "he who has suffered in the flesh," verse 1, "has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." How does it help you cease from sin? It shows you that the purpose of life is not the pleasures of men, but to do the will of God. There's something about suffering for righteousness' sake that gives the clarity that sin is just not what it promises. It does not deliver. It is an empty and evil deception and suffering makes that clear, that basically here in the text, there's really just two ways to live. It makes a contrast. You can live the rest of your time in the flesh either for the lusts of men or for the will of God. It's those two choices. The lusts of men or the will of God. Do you live for the pleasures of life or do you live for the will of God? It doesn't mean that you can't experience pleasure, but do you live for pleasure or do you live to do the will of God? Suffering provides clarity that says life is not doing what pleases me, but doing what pleases the Lord. This is life.

The phrase "the lusts of men" in verse 2, strong word which means controlling desires, pleasures. It's translated "passions" by the ESV. The passions of men, the things that stir the human heart, that motivating force is going after pleasure, this is the normal way unbelievers live. This is how they live. They're slaves to their passions and their pleasures, but the believer has been born again and now has a new principle of life in him, and it is to do the will of God and he finds that that is life. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 9, we make it our ambition, whether at home or absent from the body, to be pleasing to him, to please the Lord. Peter is saying suffering makes this more clear that we belong to the Lord and that the purpose of life is not to do the things that unbelievers do. The strong desires, the bodily desire, sex, food, drink, money, pleasure, to experience pleasure is not the purpose of life. The purpose of life is to know God and to do his will. That's life. And suffering clarifies that because it unmasks the shallowness of sin, the emptiness, the vanity. Something about aging in the Lord isn't there that helps you to see the vanity of life. It's just not what it's cracked up to be. You can see why the writer of Ecclesiastes is as discouraged as he is as he looks at living for pleasure. All is vanity. He went at life with everything he could and he found that it all adds up to nothing. Emptiness, vanity, suffering helps you see that because the body in physical suffering, in emotional suffering is broken down and we see that it's wasting away.

So it clarifies the purpose of life. It's an eye-opening process because A) it clarifies the purpose of life. B) it clarifies the shortness of time. It clarifies the shortness of time. Back to 1 Peter 4 and verse 2, he uses the word "time" twice in those two verses, verse 2 and verse 3, "so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles." The phrase "the rest of the time in the flesh" in verse 2. The rest of the time, a word which pictures the remainder after a lot has been used up. The rest. You started out with a certain amount and a lot is used up and now you just have the rest. It's picturing the shortness. Look how much is already gone. What are you going to do with the rest of your time?

And then he emphasizes it even more with verse 3, "For the time already past is sufficient." Time already past. The verb here that he translates "past" is a verb which means to pass away. It's time is passing away is the picture. The image is like you pass by someone, you pass and then they're gone. You pass by. Time is passing by, he says, and the time that you've already devoted to sin is enough. It's more than enough. You've given all you need to give to that cause, that's what Peter is saying. It is ridiculous for the Christian to think he needs to dabble in sin in any way. All that you've done already is more than enough, sufficient.

He's emphasizing that life is short and there's something about suffering that makes that so incredibly clear. When we suffer, we tend to be able to convince ourselves, and it's interesting, you know, you think about when you're a young person, I was talking to somebody the other day about this, and they said we were talking about when we were young men, you know, teenagers even, you're thinking about, I remember thinking when I was 12 or 13, it hit me that I was going to be 35 years old when the year 2000 came. And I was like 12. I'm like, "Man, that is old. 35, my life will be over." You just have no concept of time, and you feel like you're going to live forever in a way. You're so young, and yet how quickly you become old. And those of us who are older, we know, it doesn't just seem like, I mean, you know, 20 years ago was yesterday. How fleeting is time.

You turn back in your Bible, it's a couple of pages to James chapter 4. James is right before 1 Peter. When he's exhorting us to not boast in what we know about the future because we don't know really anything about the future, he says in verse 14, "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." Referencing Proverbs 27:1. Your life is a vapor. Think about, you go outside on a cold morning and you breathe and you can see your breath. You see it and then you don't. That's your life. It's here and it's gone and there's something about suffering that awakens you to that reality. Life is short, time is precious. What am I going to do with the rest of my time? It clarifies that.

So it clarifies not only the purpose of life and clarifies secondly, B) the shortness of time. C) it clarifies the nature of sin. This is the most emphatic part of this passage. It's actually kind of striking how Peter deals with the issue of sin. He actually talks about it to a level that makes us uncomfortable if you really read the words that he's saying here. He's clarifying the nature of sin. He says that suffering does this. "For the time already is past," verse 3, "for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles." He's already talked about the lusts of men in verse 2, now he says the desire of the Gentiles. This is a word which means the will or the purposeful desire. It pictures another word that speaks about intent. They intend to live for their desires. And you used to live according to their intention, you were doing, as it were, he's saying, you used to do the Gentiles' will.

But he doesn't leave it there. He says look what it looks like when you did the Gentiles' will, and many believers can look at this in their own past and say, "Yes, that's what I was." Look what he says. He puts six words, he piles word upon word to speak about the ugliness of sin. He is unmasking sin for us. The purposeful desire of the Gentiles, verse 3, "having pursued a course of sensuality," literally having gone after, having run after,

having chased after these things. This is what the Gentiles do. This is what you used to do and he pictures here again, a greedy running after.

Six things. Sensuality. This speaks of all of the lusts of the flesh. Lust, again another word to speak about the driving passions that motivate people. Drunkenness, literally here the bubbling up of wine, overflowing wine. So these people are running after sensuality, lust, drunkenness, carousing, literally orgies, drinking parties, abominable idolatries. Why does he pile these words up? He wants us to see how ugly sin is. We can think we can window shop with sin as a believer, but it leads to this. This is the path, this is the course. "Just a little bit of sin," the believer thinks. No, this is where it leads. And Peter's saying that suffering brings clarity like that, it unmask sin. And you see that really sin, the lust of the flesh, these things that we used to live for, if we give ourselves to them, it's like you're caught up in a torrent, you're caught up in the current that sweeps you away into more and more wickedness and ugliness, and he's not afraid to put it out and put it before our eyes and say, "Do you want to live like this?" He says one of the beautiful things about suffering is it shows you, because Satan puts a veneer over that. He hides it. He entices you to sin, and it looks like not that big a deal, but suffering unmasks it and you see what it really is. This is wickedness. This is ugliness. I cannot abide it. My God cannot abide me living like this. I can't go there.

He sums it up in verse 4. He's piled those terms on top of one another, and then he still adds another statement in verse 4. "In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation." The NIV translates that "reckless wild living, run into the same reckless wild living." The ESV says don't run in the same "flood of debauchery." I mean, see how strong his language is to unmask sin. It pictures uncontrolled, unbridled, like a flood of water that you can't hold back, an avalanche crashing down upon you that you cannot stop. To play with sin is to invite that avalanche, to invite that flood and Peter says, listen, when you're suffering for righteousness, what's happening is you're living the life like we've been talking about in 1 Peter, you're conforming your will and your life to the word of God. Unbelievers see you, they're going this way and they look at you and they think you're crazy, they think you're evil, you're doing harm to humanity, like it's a crime against humanity to live for God. They feel that way, they really do, and they're rushing after their sin and their evil and you, he says, and now what really helps you to see the reality of it is when they malign you in the process. There's something about when we don't do what they do and you can try to sort of be, you know, we're trying to be loving to unbelievers, right? You don't try to be just intentionally offensive every time you can. That's not very wise and that's not godly. But you live for Christ and that's going to bring offense, and when it does bring offense and they malign you, what happens is there's a sense in which the rushing of their hearts comes out now at you and it's in their venting of their animosity against God that comes rushing out beyond.

You know, one of the things that we see as Christians is the longer you walk with the Lord, you encounter people who hate you with a disproportionate amount of hatred. I mean, you're like thinking if, "You know, why are you so bothered by what I believe?" It doesn't make sense. It really doesn't, it's irrational. It's irrational that they hate us. They

say they think we're backward and we're, you know, like prehistoric kind of people in our thinking, but why does it bother them so much? So we're over here being silly and foolish if they just believe that, why are they so upset about it? Why are they so angry about it? Why are they so hate-filled about it? It's because they know in their heart of hearts that we have found the true God that they must answer to and they hate him, and it causes a rushing out of their rage against him, and when you experience that, listen, when you experience that in some measure from an unbeliever who's attacking you, what happens is sin's being unmasked. Whatever temptation that you might have had by that old friendship is unmasked. "No, I don't want to go that way." That's what he's saying. They malign you. They heap abuse on you, one translation says. When they heap abuse on you because you're living for God, you see that sin is this rushing against God, this rushing toward evil, and it's clearly seen for what it is.

So it's clarified the purpose of life, it's clarified the shortness of time, it's clarified the nature of sin, and then the fourth subpoint, 3D) it clarifies the nearness of judgment. "But they will give account," verse 5, "they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." They malign you, they hate you, you see the rushing out of those impulses that cause them running after sensuality are now, those impulses are now at you with some kind of either verbal sort of violence, emotional violence. I'm not talking about physical violence, sometimes it can be that, but a lot of times just the emotional hostility.

It's clarified the nature of sin, and you see that, and he says, remember in those moments, "they will have to give an account to Him who is ready." I love that, he's ready. Judgment is imminent, you see that? It's like, Christ is the one who's going to judge the living and the dead. God gave proof of it by raising him from the dead, Paul says in Acts 17. He's ready to judge. He's not over there busy thinking about other things and he's going to get around to it one day. No, he's saying when you're experiencing persecution, when you're experiencing hostility, know that Jesus is ready to judge which means that you can leave vengeance to him. "Vengeance is Mine, I'll repay," says the Lord, and it also means that you can pray for that person's soul because you don't want them to experience that. But if they don't repent, they will.

He's ready to judge the living and the dead, and that leads him to make this statement that at first glance is a little bit confusing. Verse 6, "For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God." Peter's dealing with a false teaching of the day that Paul deals with in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, which concerned what about believers who have died? Have they somehow missed out on the kingdom? This was the idea that was going around. There were a lot of, you know, the church is new, they don't have their whole New Testament yet because it takes time for all the epistles to get gathered together and there's a lot of false teaching going on too. Satan is a counterfeiter and whenever God brings truth, he brings a counterfeit. And so one of the things, the false teaching was that if you died before Christ came back, somehow you were going to be a second tier citizen in the kingdom. You wanted to be here. The idea was Jesus' return is imminent. It's going to happen soon, and we need to stay here until he does. And that's why Paul says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, "I don't want you to be

ignorant about those who've fallen asleep." And he's going to say, they're going to come with Christ when he comes. It's not that they're left out. See, people were thinking they're somehow left out, you can't die before Christ comes back, and Peter's apparently dealing with something of the same question. Believers are wondering what about believers who have already died? And that's what I think he's saying here in verse 6, "For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead." It was preached to them when they were alive but now they're dead. They heard the gospel, it transformed them, but they still died.

Now think about it, in the early days of Christianity, you don't know what's going to happen. I mean, here we are in 2024, and we have some perspective, but if you were living in 63 AD, 30 years after Christ was raised from the dead, and he says he's coming back, they thought it could happen any time. And there were certain things that Jesus said that implied some decisive things were going to happen. Some of those things did in 70 AD, the destruction of Jerusalem. So you have all of that, and you have believers trying to make sense of their lives. "What's happening? Is Jesus coming back soon? What happens to those who have died who had believed? Did somehow, was their faith not genuine since they died?" And Paul and Peter are correcting it saying, "No, it's not about their faith not being genuine. No, they live in the spirit now."

That's his whole point. "For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God." What does he mean by judged in the flesh as men? To be judged in the flesh as men is to die physically. In every one of us, if Jesus doesn't come back, we're going to be judged in the flesh as men. You realize that part of death, the main reason for death is God's judgment upon sin. Physical death is an inescapable reality. Man dreams that he can escape it, but he cannot escape that any more than he can make the sun rise. He pretends that he can and it's folly and God laughs. And here he's saying, listen, everyone's going to experience the judgment in the flesh as men, but those who are believers that have died, that have experienced that judgment, you know what? They're living in the spirit according to the will of God. They're alive in his presence. He's saying what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 8, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

He's saying judgment is coming, judgment is coming, but your brothers and sisters who have died in the Lord are not judged. He's clarifying that point. He's saying, listen, you look, I want you to understand that suffering has a powerful impact on your life. That's why you have to prepare yourself for it. God's going to bring it to you because he loves you. And so he wants you to hear that command, arm yourselves with a mindset that says, I'm willing to suffer, know that it's going to produce something wonderful in your heart and how it's going to do that is through this clarifying process. Clarifying the purpose of life is to live for the will of God. Clarifying that time is precious and short. And clarifying that sin is exceedingly sinful, awful and ugly, and clarifying that God is going to judge. Even when we see people reject us, we see the will of God confirmed. Like I said earlier, why do they hate us so much? One of the things that it does is it confirms the truth of this book.

I remember watching, do you guys remember 20-some-odd years ago, you know, right after 9-11, some of you remember the Larry King show? And remember John MacArthur was on the Larry King show? America's trying to figure out what's happened with the Twin Towers and, you know, what's this mean for our lives? And so, everyone's asking questions and so, Larry King had on a host of religious leaders. He had on a Jewish rabbi, a Roman Catholic priest, John MacArthur representing evangelicals, he had on a Muslim cleric and also, I believe it was a guy representing kind of a Hinduism or New Age mindset. And all these guys disagreed with each other. I mean, think about how much the Muslim and the rabbi don't get along. And the Muslim doesn't get along with the new age guy either. But you know what you saw if you watched that happen, MacArthur just basically just states the gospel clearly and all of them unite together against him. It was unbelievable to watch it happen. Like, I mean, it's like the rabbi and the Muslim guy are best friends, it seems like. Why? Because the enemy of my enemy is my friend. If I have an enemy and he has an enemy, then that's my friend. And they all had an enemy, and it was the man that was preaching the true gospel and they united around that.

And it confirms the truth. This is the truth. Jesus Christ is Lord. He's coming back. He will judge the living and the dead. And he's called us to be faithful and to follow him and that means follow him in a life even of suffering, and as we do rejoice that he's using it for his purposes in our lives. He's making us hate sin and love him more. He's bringing incredible clarity that we so desperately need. And so we can rejoice. Like James says in James chapter 1, "Count it all joy, brethren, when you encounter various trials." Count it joy because something great's going to come through it. May the Lord help us be faithful to him, increasingly faithful, no matter what tomorrow brings, because if it brings that kind of suffering, that's good.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word. We're so thankful that You made these things clear to us. We're reminded of what Jesus said to the disciples on the night before He was crucified when He told them that they were going to suffer. He said, "I want you to remember this. So I told you this ahead of time so that when it happens, you will remember that I told you." You're so wise and so kind. Lord, make us people who love You with everything that we are to such a level that we're willing and glad to lift up Christ in whatever circumstances You bring. Help us embrace suffering for righteousness. Help us to cease from sin. Help us hate it. Help us walk in holiness and help us provoke one another to love and good works. Let's encourage each other. Lord, help us. And Father, keep letting us see what is true and real and may it be true, what Paul said, that as the outer man is decaying through suffering, the inner man is being renewed and as we set our eyes on not on the things which are visible, but the things which are invisible, that we might treasure our Savior more. We pray in His name, Amen.