

## *After Easter*

1 Peter 4:1-6

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We turn in God's Word again to the Book of 1 Peter as we are advancing towards the end of this letter. What will take place over the next few weeks after this series of verses—we will then turn to the next section, which begins at verse seven, and because there is a lot happening there, we will take one verse at a time. And so this morning we are preparing for those sets of verses by making a turn, and that is: what does it mean after Easter for us to live as Christians? Peter tells us beginning in 1 Peter 4:1, and I'll be reading to verse six. Hear now God's Holy Word.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. 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. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. [ESV]

This is the God's Word. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me again?

Now, Heavenly Father, we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit and by your presence with us, we ask that you would open our eyes and our hearts to be able to respond to what it means to live after Easter, after the Resurrection. What does it mean to follow you as disciples of Christ in this world? We pray you would give us that wisdom, but that you would give us great grace, big grace, to enable us to follow. In the matchless and mighty name of Christ we pray. Amen.

Last Saturday in the commentary portion of *The Wall Street Journal*, you might be surprised to find a rather important article written by a Jesuit priest, James Martin. The article is entitled "The Challenge of Easter," and you're welcome to go and look it up. I highly recommend it. I'll be reading from portions of it this morning as we begin this passage. This is the way he begins. He said:

When was the last time you felt stressed out by Easter? So much Easter shopping to do, so many Easter cards to write, so many Easter gatherings to attend. Not to mention the endless stream of Easter commercials on television and online, the nearly unavoidable Easter-themed movies and all those tacky Easter sweaters that you're forced to wear every spring. And don't forget the travails of setting up the annual Easter tree and stringing Easter lights on your house. Every year you lament how overly commercialized Easter has become. Can the holiday get any more money-oriented? You feel that way every year, don't you?

Of course you don't.

That is because Easter has stubbornly resisted the kind of commercialization, commodification, and general crassification that long ago swallowed up the celebration of Christmas, at least in the U.S.

He says there is a reason why this has not happened; it's because, he says, it has a "subversive religious message: Christ is risen."

If you don't believe in the Resurrection, you can go on living your life while perhaps admiring Jesus the man, appreciating his example and even putting into practice some of his teachings. At the same time, you can set aside those teachings that you disagree with or that make you uncomfortable—say, forgiving your enemies, praying for your persecutors, living simply or helping the poor. You can set them aside because he's just another teacher. A great one, to be sure, but just one of many.

However, if you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, however, everything changes. In that case, you cannot set aside any of his teachings. Because a person who rises from the grave, who demonstrates his power over death and who has definitively proven his divine authority needs to be listened to. What that person says demands a response.

In short, the Resurrection makes a claim on you.

That was written in *The Wall Street Journal*—a defense of the Resurrection. But more importantly than a defense of the Resurrection, something far more subversive. He wasn't going through any machinations of trying to prove the historicity of the resurrection of Christ. No, his call was actually to Christians, and his message is simply this: if we believe—and we do—that Jesus really was raised from the dead, then his Resurrection stakes and makes a claim on every one of us who believe. This is the implication of what Peter was getting at when he begins this passage, "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God."

What Peter is saying—that everything that he just talked about that we looked at last week, the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ, lays a claim on us who believe. So therefore, the question becomes the so-what of after Easter. What are the claims of Easter? What are the claims of a dead and risen Savior on our behalf? You see it in your outline. It's twofold. First, it's a cruciform life. Secondly, life after life.

First, a cruciform life. What do I mean by cruciform. There are two things which are absolutely inescapable when it comes to the gospel message of Christ. These two things are inescapable, and yet oftentimes we only highlight one side of this. That when we say—or when I say that Peter is calling us to a cruciform life, I mean this: that, yes, Christ died a substitutionary atonement. Meaning Christ, God and man, fully God, fully man, yet without sin, died in our place, bore the burden of our offense, of our offense of sin against God. To reconcile us to himself, Jesus died in our place in a way we cannot. And yet if we believe in Christ, we die. That means Christ's death is substitutionary, in our place, but it is also something else. And this is the side that often doesn't receive as much attention, but Peter won't let us avoid it, and that is—Christ's death and his resurrection is also exemplary. Meaning we follow in his footsteps.

Therefore, our lives take on a cruciform pattern. This is what Peter is getting at when he talks about, "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." What in the world does he mean? He's already talked about the substitutionary side of the death of Christ and his resurrection—of how we died with Christ and we were raised with him. Now he turns to how Christ's death and resurrection is an example for us that we are to follow. I'll put it this way. First he says to us in verses one and two that we are to arm ourselves, that the cruciform life means we take seriously this call of arming ourselves.

Now, he uses this phrase of “arming ourselves with the same thinking” or the same attitude, the same perspective, and then he turns to suffering in the flesh. And he says, “Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” What does he mean? Does he mean that if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and his death for you, and you trust in him by faith, that somehow you are done with sin, or sin is ceased? That somehow the Christian is therefore perfected in this life? No, that is not what he means. What he means is, he’s calling us to arms as a military group of people, of men and women, that we recognize as our Savior who suffered and was without sin, he still suffered in the flesh. He suffered temptation, yet he was without sin. He suffered insult, yet he did not respond. He suffered to the point of death, though he did not deserve it.

So therefore, as those who are called to follow in the way of Christ, the cruciform life means that we carry the same mindset as Christ as we look at sin. Sin no longer has dominion, meaning it is no longer our master, meaning it no longer leads to death. We believe in one who has been raised from death, and so will we. Therefore, if we believe in Christ and follow with him, we’re to arm ourselves with the thinking: sin no longer has the power of death over me. Therefore, the life I live in this flesh means I am to fight against it with everything that I have, enabled by God’s grace and the presence of his Spirit through the promise of Christ. We are to struggle against sin. That means we are to live in the way we used to live—that the gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation, yes. But it is also the same power by which we change in the way we live now. The gospel enables us to come to terms with the presence of sin, yes. But also, that though sin is still present, it is to be fought again, struggled against.

Do you struggle against sin in your life? Now, Peter here lists sins as he thinks about—he says we’re to live the rest of the time in the flesh “no longer for human passions, but for the will of God.” And then he names a number of them which were common and celebrated among the Gentiles with whom these recipients of the letter lived. And he says, “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,” debauchery—and it’s very easy to say, “Well, is that all that he’s talking about?” The reality is, every one of those sins has a sin beneath it. And all sin is a form of idolatry, of not worshipping Christ but worshipping something else that will give us what we so yearn for. And so the issue of having a cruciform life, of arming ourselves and our minds, of fighting against sin, is to fight against these kinds of sins as we are tempted with them, but also recognizing that we go beneath them. There’s sin beneath the sin. “Oh, I deserve this. I’ve worked hard. Just one little thing will help me get through the day.”

But here’s the good news. If you’re struggling with and fighting against particular temptations and failing, and yet you’re still struggling—the good news is, if you’re still struggling, that means you are by God’s grace arming your mind with the same idea as Christ suffering against the presence of sin. But here’s the question. If you find yourself listening to what I’m saying and you say, “Well, not really. I profess Christ, but I’m not necessarily—there’s nothing I can think of that I’m really struggling against.” There’s something we need to consider. If you are not struggling against sin—be it pride or selfishness or rudeness or self-centeredness or any of these sins—if you find yourself not struggling with these things, let’s consider a couple of things.

First, if you’re not struggling, it might mean that you’ve given into sin, and therefore your heart is hardened and you’ve deceived yourself that what you’re doing is not sin at all. And the Lord perhaps is allowing you, during this season, to go on in your sin, that you might eventually find that it’s empty. If you’re not struggling, it might be—I’m saying it might be—that you’ve given into it, and it no longer pricks your conscience.

But there’s another, perhaps, option. That if you’re not struggling with sin, it might be somewhere that you believe you’re outside the diagnosis of the gospel—that somehow it means that your gospel isn’t big enough. It might mean that you think of the gospel as something that you believe in as a set of doctrines back then, but it’s not something that enables you to walk in your life in a daily way. Because I can assure you that as you allow the gospel to have power over you and submit yourself to it each and

every day, one of the very things is going to be clear: it's not going to take very long before you find yourself going, "Oh, I just responded in a way that is not loving or kind or humble or gentle."

To help us get at what perhaps might be a set of questions that might enlighten us to the struggle, consider these questions from one whose name is Dr. Paul Tripp as he writes these series of questions in a devotional. He says:

Why are you and I devastated when our weakness, sin, and failure are pointed out? Why do we find confrontation and rebuke painful even when they are done in love? Why do we want to believe that we are in the good class of sinners? Why do we want to believe that we are deprived, but not depraved? Or that we are depraved, but not totally? Why do we find comfort in pointing to people who appear to be worse sinners than we are? Why do we make up self-atoning revisions of our own history? Why do we erect self-justifying arguments for what we have said or done? [Or perhaps what we have not said and should have, or what we didn't do but should have?] Why do we turn the tables when someone points out a wrong, making sure that they know that we know that we're not the only sinner in the room? Why do we line up all the good things we've done as a counter-balance for the wrong that is being highlighted? Why is this all so hard to accept?

That though Christ is victorious over sin and death and has been raised to life, and we follow in his way, why do we find it so hard to accept that while sin no longer has dominion over those who are in Christ, it is still present, still waging a war against us, and we somehow feel that we can accomplish it by putting our arms back in our boxes and sitting on the couch waiting for glory? If anyone has told you or led you to believe that the Christian life is to be fought sitting in the back seat or on the couch, and not really hard, painful work going against the deep sinews of sinful patterns of responses, attitudes, and ways of being, then they have lied to you.

The longer we spend with the power of the gospel that is Christ on Good Friday, and the beauty and power of grace that is Easter Sunday—the longer we wrestle with it, the more we see just how deep-seated is our rebellion. And if we see that rebellion, that is a beautiful thing, because that begins to mean that the gospel is big enough to highlight just how sinful I am, but just how great is his grace. Grace is in the struggle, but we're missing the grace if we're not struggling. Are you struggling? Have you armed your minds with the same attitude—that this is a cruciform life following in the steps of our Savior?

There's another way in which it is a cruciform life, and that is persecution. Now, I want to be careful here in highlighting what he means by persecution. It's hinted at here, but it's easy to miss. He says in verse four, "With respect to this," meaning with respect to the way you used to live and the ways of life around us, "With respect to this they," meaning the Gentiles surrounding his hearers, but also the culture surrounding any Christians in any day, "With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

A couple of the things that we need to talk about with regard to this kind of persecution. The kind of persecution he's talking about here is being socially ostracized because you refuse to follow in the patterns of life that are common among those around you who do not believe. The reason why need to talk about this is because oftentimes in the west we tend to think about persecution as being in jail or being beheaded or losing your life for the sake of Christ.

But persecution comes in many forms. But we must be careful when we think about this. The reason why we need to be careful is—one reason, the author Russell Moore, scholar, pastor, in a book called *Onward* which our pastoral staff and administrative team are reading together—he says this:

We ought to be careful not to fume about such things. [That is, about the way in which the world responds to Christians.] We ought not fume about such things, as though we are a protected class of victims. We ought to see that our culture is less and less connected with the roots of basic knowledge about Christianity. Many, especially, in the culture-making wing of American life, see Christmas the same way they see Hanukkah. They know about Menorahs and dreidels, but not about the Maccabean fight. That ought not to make us outraged but to prompt us to see how our neighbors see us—sometimes more in terms of our trivialities than in terms of the depths of meaning of Incarnation, blood atonement, and the kingdom of Christ. This means we need to spend more time engaging our neighbors with the sort of news that shocks angels and redirects stargazers and knocks sheep-herders to the ground. That will seem strange, and that's all the better, because it is strange. An Incarnation safe enough to sell beer and barbecue grills is a gospel too safe to make blessings flow, far as the curse is found. Not everything that offends us should offend us, and not everything that offends us is persecution.

Oftentimes, it's just incredible misunderstanding, and we ought to assume that the world does not understand the Christian faith. Otherwise, we will think, "Well, where have you been?" as if believing in Jesus coming in the flesh and being raised from death to life is something that should just come naturally to everyone. It doesn't. And oftentimes people ask questions and even ridicule, not because they're persecuting us—they just don't understand. And we need to be careful about what is and what isn't persecution.

But what is persecution is when perhaps you don't receive an invitation, because your mere testimony of your faith makes others uncomfortable—not because of the way you do it, but because of what they know you believe. There is such a thing as being socially ostracized. It happened here, and it is happening in the United States and will increasingly happen. But we ought not to think it strange, as if, as Moore says, we're some special class of victims. The reality is, our New Testament authors wrote their letters from jail, y'all. And if they while in jail wrote us letters that we cling to, we pray about, we study and memorize—if they can write those kind of letters from jail and they can say we think it a blessing that we're persecuted for the name of Christ, that would be a completely different mindset for us and how we respond to persecution.

It's not that we go around saying, "Oh, people just don't like me because of Jesus." That's not what I mean. It means that when we are socially ostracized, when we're not invited to those parties, when people don't want to talk to us by the water cooler about what we believe, we don't go, "Woe is me." We say, "Lord, give me grace, and I pray for those who think I'm strange, odd, or stupid because I believe in you. Help me to love them as you love me." Bless those who persecute you, Jesus said. But the reality is that the cruciform life means struggling against sin, but also recognizing that persecution comes to those who fight and follow Christ.

But there is this last part, this life after life. Because, you see, verses one through five seem relatively clear. He's calling us to follow Christ, to fight against temptation and the presence of sin, calling us to be aware that we're going to be socially ostracized if we refuse to participate in the sinful idolatry of the world around us. Because we, too, once used to do these things. But then he comes to verse six. Now, I will tell you, this is the second time in two chapters where Peter gives us a phrasing that is at times very inscrutable and whole books have been written because of verse six. Dissertations have been attained because of verse six. So let's look at this together, because what he's calling us to—that after Easter, it isn't just living a cruciform life. It means looking toward life after life. And this flows with being socially ostracized. You'll see what I mean. Verse six:

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. [ESV]

Now, that's the ESV rendering. And I apologize to be—I don't mean for this to be a Sunday school class, but sometimes you just have to do it—let me compare with you what is actually a better rendering of that verse. Rarely does the NIV get it better than the ESV, but this is one place where it does. Because if you get this wrong, you're going to believe that there is a second chance for those after they die to come to Christ. Because this is one verse that is cited for that argument. This is what the NIV says in verse six:

For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. [NIV 1984]

Now, there are a couple of things that happen when this verse is read out of context. One of those is believed that when people die, there is an opportunity when Christ comes to have a second chance to respond to Jesus Christ and come to faith. There is no evidence in the totality of Scripture that that is a possibility. But you take this verse out of context, you can do so. Not only out of context of this chapter, but out of context from its historical context.

The second way it's misunderstood is, "Well, we just don't know what he's saying." But there is evidence here of what he means when we first consider one of the big issues for why Christians were ostracized in this culture to which Peter is writing. You see, in the previous verse, he says, "Gentiles think it odd that you do not participate in the same kind of activities that they do." And one of the ways that they sought to ostracize Christians is this: Christians died. And to the remaining living Christians, non-Christians at the time would say, "You see? They're dead. What you're saying about life after life is not true. They suffered. They've been judged. You say we're going to be? They've been judged. So why do you even bother with any of that? Come, party with us." It was their version of saying YOLO: you only live once. That's the idea.

And so the problem for many Christians in that day, and even some for today, is that in the reality of death in the physical body was a problem for Christians because they preached the resurrection of Christ. So if Christ has been raised from the dead, why are Christians dying? This was a problem for those who were receiving Peter's letter. So Peter was trying to encourage them, and he was encouraging them by reminding them, phrasing it this way: "For this is the reason the gospel was preached to those that you knew when they were alive. Because now that they're dead," he says, "so that, yes, they are judged as all men are," meaning we still have the presence of physical death, so they are judged according to men in regard to the body, "but they are now alive according to God in regard to the spirit." Meaning, yes, their physical bodies are in the grave, but their spirits are alive because of the Holy Spirit, and they are with God. He's pointing to the resurrection that all believers will experience, that life is after life—after this one. This goes all the way back to the beginning of his letter when he said, "You've been called to a living Hope." That though, yes, we still die in the flesh, thanks be to God in Christ, we are with the Lord in spirit. And when Christ comes again, our bodies will be raised, as Paul says, from the grave.

His point is that I recognize that physical death is a problem for you, he's saying. And yes, you receive abuse and criticism and questions as to why you don't participate in the ways of the world. Because you see, Christians still die. He says, "I know this." But here's the beauty. That because those who were with you and believed and received the gospel—though they are now dead, they are alive in the spirit with God. Therefore, the end of the story is life and not death, even though the presence of physical death is still with us.

I'll close with this. There was an old letter, though it's not included in the Scriptures. It's called the Wisdom of Solomon. It's part of the Apocrypha. Many scholars point out that there's an incredible parallel

to what is a portion that is written in the Wisdom of Solomon and what Peter is saying. The Wisdom of Solomon says this:

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy. [Wisdom 3:1-7]

Meaning, they were found to be in Christ. The world looks at it and says, "See? What a disaster." But the hope of the resurrection is that at the end of the story is life and not death, hope and not bitterness. I go back to Father James Martin. At the end of the article, he says these words:

The Easter story is both appalling and astonishing. Easter is not as easy to digest as Christmas is. It is harder to tame. Anyone can be born, but not everyone can rise from the dead. Yet the Easter story, essential as it is for Christian belief, can be a confusing one, even for believers.

What difference does Easter make in the life of the Christian? The message of Easter is, all at once, easy to understand, radical, subversive and life-changing. Easter means that nothing is impossible with God. Moreover, that life triumphs over death. Love triumphs over hatred. Hope triumphs over despair. And that suffering is not the last word. Easter says, above all, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

By walking out of the tomb on Easter Sunday, Jesus declared something life-changing. Something subversive. Something that cannot be overcome by commercialism. It is a message that refuses to be tamed. The resurrection says not only that Christ has the power of life over death, but something even more subversive. The resurrection says, "Listen. Our Christ, our Savior, is alive, and he means to make you in his image as you struggle against sin, as you look to the hope of life after this life. Our Savior reigns." Amen? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we want to thank you. We want to thank you that though we're in this room and this gospel has been preached, I want to thank you that the gospel was preached in the heart of a newspaper. I want to thank you that millions of people, perhaps thousands, who knows, have read that article. We want to thank you that there is life and abundant life after Easter. And this life is enabled by your grace to arm ourselves with the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, to struggle against sin, to know that your grace is enough to enable us to see victory. But that victory will be realized fully at the resurrection. And though sin is still present, though death is still present, Lord, I pray you would give us an undying hope, an unwavering faith, as a gift. Because our Savior reigns. And that that means we ought to listen. Help us to hear. In Jesus' name. Amen.