

## 1 Peter 4 (1-2) – Armed with the Mind of Christ

Today is Mother's Day, it is also Ascension Sunday, it is also our Missionary Sunday, and it is also graduation time. And graduation always invites a question. What do you plan to do with the rest of your life? Now I'm not just asking the graduates this year. This is a question we should all ask ourselves. I'm asking you. What do you plan to do with the rest of your life?

Now if you know your Bible, or even if you are just looking at this text, you can see that God's desire is for you to live your life for His will. So you could easily say, yes, my plan is to live the rest of my life for the will of God. But Peter shows us how that is set in motion, and one crucial way in how that is developed in the life of a disciple. It is a decision, yes, a mindset, yes, a purpose, yes. But there is a process that involves much more than a college education or special training in a trade. This is about spirituality, and Peter is talking about an important way that maturity, sanctification, growing in grace, drawing near to God, breaking patterns of sin, living for the will of God, however you label it, whatever facet you are looking at, there is a crucial element in how this happens. And it is a way that many people don't realize.

Peter is applying what he said in 1 Peter 3:18-22. And he isn't turning the lesson he just taught into principles for personal fulfillment. He isn't teaching us about how to tap into divine power so that we might be healthy, wealthy, influential, popular, prominent, or successful. He isn't teaching self-empowerment. He's teaching self-denial. He's teaching the way of the cross.

*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh* – Peter has taught about how Jesus overcame the eternal effects of sin for us. Now he applies that truth to overcoming personal sin in this life. He shows how suffering and persecution can purify us and prepare us to do God's will. In Colossians 1:24, the Apostle Paul says, “*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church*”. Paul wasn't saying that Jesus' sacrifice wasn't enough. Paul was modeling Jesus, and saying that God's purpose is that the afflictions of Jesus which purchased your salvation be imitated and demonstrated in the spread of that salvation.

Looking back to 3:18-22, Peter says remember that Christ gained His greatest victory at the time of His greatest suffering. When Jesus was being unjustly killed on the cross, He was triumphing over sin, and death, and hell, and He was gaining the ultimate authority seated at the right hand of God. Peter's point is that your moments of suffering can bring you great triumph. Specifically, they can bring you victory over sin and a closer walk with God.

*arm yourselves* – Peter uses the imagery of battle, and the NT often pictures the Christian life in terms of battle, conflict, discipline, and warfare (cf. Romans 13:12 / 2 Corinthians 10:4 / Ephesians 6:13 / 1 Thessalonians 5:8 / 1 Timothy 1:18). For example, 2 Timothy 2:3 says, “*Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*” Peter is addressing believers as “soldiers in suffering”, and with God's authority, he is commanding God's soldiers to take up a weapon.

*with the same way of thinking* – Peter says the weapon is Jesus' mindset. Philippians 2:5-8 and Hebrews 12:1-3 refer to this same mindset. To be able to glorify God in the midst of unjust suffering, you will have to think like He did about it. And we know how Jesus thought about it.

Doing the will of God was always foremost in His mind, regardless of the cost (cf. Hebrews 5:8). Jesus was willing to die to fulfill God's will, and He knew that even in death He would triumph. So arming yourself *with the same way of thinking* means that you are to follow Christ even to the death. It is a gritty mindset that says I live to do the will of God no matter where it leads me, and no matter what it costs me, because God will cause me to triumph through it.

This purposeful perspective will require determination, discipline, and perseverance. To spiritually prosper while suffering persecution requires an enduring effort that begins with the mind. Yes, it is hard work, but it is relying on grace. You see, growing in grace is not opposed to effort. Grace is opposed to merit. In other words, grace is meant to give you a determined mentality, not an entitlement mentality. You see it through no matter what it looks like. You don't turn from God because you think you deserve better. When you suffer unjustly for doing what is right, it is that very suffering which can produce your greatest spiritual triumph, just like it was for Jesus, so you are to arm yourself with that same purpose.

**Matthew 16:21-26** – taking up your cross means being willing to die for the sake of Christ. Many might say that they are willing to suffer a physical death. But they seem unwilling to suffer a social death, a relational death, or a financial death. People might even deny themselves for the sake of others, but will they deny themselves for the sake of Christ? You must be willing, not only to die as a martyr, but also to lose your life in this world. You must be willing to lose your respect, your standing, your position, your popularity, your health, your wealth, your influence, and your success, on account of following Him. But the blessings far outweigh the burdens. That's the point that Peter is making. No matter what it costs it will be more than worth it.

**Luke 14:26-27** – you are not a disciple of Jesus if you do not bear your own cross. And you will not be able to bear your cross if you do not place Christ above your family or yourself. A disciple loves Christ more than anything, no matter what it costs in proving that. Revelation 12:10-11 says, *“And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”* People know part of that text, but they seem to miss the last part. If you live out and out for Christ, the tests will come. And you have to make up your mind beforehand, as well as having to keep your mind focused on this in those moments of trial.

If you are persecuted, you can just deny your faith. Or you can try and avoid it in the first place by just playing nice and compromising your professed belief in the name of not offending someone or in the name of “reaching” someone. But if you live in a godly way it will cause people to ask questions. And it isn't as if you are always looking to invite conflict, it is that you sometimes cannot avoid conflict. You aren't living to be offensive or looking to offend people. But if you are going to be faithful to Jesus, you are going to suffer for His sake. Otherwise, you are denying Christ. Jesus calls you to suffer with Him, for His sake, and He will be with you. Remember that this is the same Peter who denied Jesus three times when he felt the pressure of persecution the night before Jesus was crucified. He had been bold earlier in the garden when the troops came to arrest Jesus, but now he cowered in the face of a servant girl who questioned his allegiance. So he knows what it feels like, and he says not to give in to that fear.

Are you willing to take up your cross? Will you deny yourself the things that you want to do, and instead obey the commands of God as an act of worship? Will you set your heart on that which pleases God, or are you going to live for that which pleases your flesh? Will you live for the approval of God, or for the acceptance of people? The principle of spiritual life is self-denial. If you find it difficult to obey God, your problem isn't that you simply lack the right motivation; it is that you refuse to surrender control of your life to God, and you try to find some way to please God without setting the flesh aside. Your cross to carry is not the sin itself; it is giving it up and having to feel the pain. It means you don't live to please yourself or others. It means that when you live for God but are persecuted for it, you don't attack the attackers, retaliate against the revilers, or strike back at the scorners. You suffer, but through it you have victory over sin and a closer walk with God.

*for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin* – This speaks of Jesus, in a sense, as well as you. Simply put, Jesus was killed, and so He ceased from sin. So if you are killed, you will cease from sin. Now of course, Jesus never sinned. But He suffered the wrath of God against sin in your place, and now that once for all sacrifice is finished. He suffered the worst evil that sinful people could do to Him. But now He is done with it. By His death Christ was freed from this sinful world and the sinful people who persecuted Him. It is the same for believers.

Living people still have sin in their lives. As a Christian, your sin is forgiven, but it has not yet been expelled. You are now involved in a lifelong struggle against the desires of the sinful nature. The only way you completely cease from sin is when you are dead. So even if you have to die for the faith, you will get the greatest reward, the ultimate triumph. You'll be free from sin; free from your personal sin, and free from having to deal with this sinful world. You can actually look forward to death, because it frees you from sin. This is what Paul was talking about in Philippians 1:21-23 – *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”*

You know who is armed with this mindset because it is demonstrated in their life. They will not be sinless, but they will sin less, because they are going the way of the cross, they are taking up the weapon, they are thinking the same way as Jesus did about suffering under persecution. And they do suffer, because they live in such a way that the world cannot deny it, and so they are persecuted for it. They suffer because in the midst of this they don't turn to sin, but turn to God, and feel the death of their flesh. They are willing to suffer socially, relationally, or financially. They deny themselves for the sake of Christ. They are not only willing to die as a martyr, but to lose their life in this world. They are willing to be rejected, ridiculed, and reviled. They may lose respect, standing, position, popularity, health, wealth, influence, and success on account of following Him. But when they do, they consider it worth it.

Listen to Paul again in Philippians 3:8 – *“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”* Many believers are defeated in their battle against sin because they refuse to sacrifice anything in the battle. They only want victory if it comes easily to them. But Jesus called you to have the kind of attitude that would sacrifice in the battle against sin (Matthew 5:29-30).

*so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.* This is the fruit of keeping the right mindset in the midst of suffering. You will be more like Christ. Arm yourself with His mindset, and when suffering comes, hold on, because God will cause you to grow stronger and grow closer through it. The closer to Him the less you sin.

You need to suffer the death of your flesh, to put away those old passions which try and tempt you. And God can use unjust suffering as an effective way to accomplish that. Through that pain you can be aimed towards God's purpose. It can intensify your intimacy with Christ. It can starve your sinful desires to retaliate, and in the process weaken other sorts of sin that you might be tempted to retreat into in the face of the pain. And in your battle against sin, it glorifies God.

People who are armed with the mindset of Jesus aren't sinless, but they are aimed that way. They are being energized by the will of God instead of human passions. If your destination is heaven, then your destiny is holiness. You were once driven by the direction of the world, the designs of the devil, and the desires of our sinful nature, but God saved you and now you can live for His will (Ephesians 2:1-4). You just have to keep the right mindset. Not so as to revel in your own righteousness, not so as to enrich yourself, not so as to pump up your pride, but so as to live for the will of God, as a steadfast witness, a holy, hopeful life in a hostile world. And this is a witness, not only to the unbelieving world, but to believers as well, including your own self.

When you suffer for doing right, and yet you keep on obeying God in spite of the suffering, you make a clear break from the dominating power of sin. You choose suffering because you know that if you don't, you will choose sin. You prove that your bondage to sin has been broken. Your mindset is that Christ is worth suffering for. You live out that conviction when the choice comes between suffering and sin; and in your suffering sin will be defeated and you will be triumphant. This is what is described in vs.2. You suffer for what's right, a sign that you have renounced sinful human desires and embraced the will of God as a higher value. So for the sake of righteousness and freedom from sin, for the sake of Christ, arm yourselves with His purpose.

Jesus said deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. In other words, you give up your desires, you feel the pain of not exercising your passions, and you follow the desires of Christ instead. And so when you suffer for His sake, He lives through you. Galatians 2:20 says, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Looking at vs.1-2 backwards can help you to understand the goal and how to get there. As a Christian, you are to live your life for the will of God instead of human desires. In order to do that you will have to stop the domination of sin in your life. To do that you must suffer in the flesh. And to do that requires a certain mindset, the same one that Jesus had. So looking at it forwards, you first arm yourself with the mindset of Christ. That mindset leads to steadfastness in suffering. Then as you suffer, you will be crucifying your passions. Then instead of living for those passions, you will live out the will of God.

The right time to do the right thing is right now. So I ask you again. What do you plan to do with the rest of your life? If your goal is to live for the will of God, then your plan should be to arm yourself with the mind of Christ.