

Prepared for Battle

14 - 1 Peter: A New World & A New Way
Sunday, 02 Dec 2012

Text: 1 Peter 4:1-6

Intro: In our last passage Peter exhorts us to be prepared to share the hope we have in Jesus. In today's passage he calls us to be prepared in another way—be prepared to suffer. Peter teaches us that the Christian life is not always easy, rather it's a battle. We are in a war and we need to prepare for the pain of war.

1) Christ armed himself to suffer in order to do the Father's will. We, also, are to arm ourselves with the same purpose and attitude.

- As Christians we constantly fall into the trap that the Christian life means **no pain** or **suffering**.
 - The reason why we struggle with the concept of suffering is because Jesus came to relieve our suffering. He came to take away the suffering of sin, sickness and satan. Yes, that is true! But that is the **lower** kind of suffering; he lifts us from the lower **destructive** suffering into the **higher redemptive** suffering. **Suffering with a purpose**.
- We are to **arm ourselves**
 - *hoplizo* (from *hoplon*, weapon) - to furnish, prepare, referring to food or drink, to equip with arms, as a chariot or ship. In the NT only in the mid. *hoplizomai*, to prepare oneself for a work, to arm oneself, take up arms.
 - In other words, we need to **arm ourselves** for the battle ahead. Or, **prepare ourselves for battle**.
 - Paul said it like this, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." (Eph. 6:10-18)
 - Examples: Jesus' **baptism** Matt 3:13-17, 4:1-11 & *2 **Sam. 23:9-12**
- Jesus' example - Luke 13:32-35
 - "and on the third day I reach **my goal**"
 - Jesus had a goal
 - Luke 12:49-53 - notice Jesus has a purpose and goal
 - **Living with mission and purpose** (from God) makes our lives different from the world.
 - Yes, this world often wants to **aimlessly** toss us from wave to wave. But when we have **purpose** we can **navigate** through the storm. We can endure until we get to our destination.
- What **type** of suffering will we undergo?
 - The suffering of people rejecting the truth. This is what Jesus in Luke 13:32-35 and Noah experienced.
 - The suffering of our battle against the lusts of this world, constantly warring against our soul (1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Pet. 4:2)

- The suffering of insults and rejection for not living the way the world does (4:3-4). “Why aren’t you joining in with the gang?”
- At times physical suffering like Jesus
- The suffering of demonic resistance.
- Luke 18:31-34 - The disciples did not understand why the Messiah had to suffer more.
- Peter makes it clear that the believers life is a changed life
- What is Peter saying in 4:1b-2?
 - He’s not advocating **sinless perfection**.
 - Some interpret it as Jesus - “he who has suffered in his body is done with sin”
 - What he is telling us is that the person who has made a conscious decision to do the will of God and **take up his cross** is not living for sin anymore. The path of sin is not his path, instead he is on the path of obedience.
 - He has taken up his cross (Luke 14:24-35). There’s Jesus’ cross and then there’s our cross that we need to take up as his followers.

2) Psalm 84 shows us how we can arm ourselves to suffer and actually experience joy in doing the Father’s will.

- We need to find **renewal** in God if we are going to arm ourselves to suffer. Only the renewed person is willing to carry their cross. **Continual renewal** and **revival** is needed to continually follow Christ’s example.
 - Psalm 84 teaches us about renewal
- How can you find renewal?
- 1 - Have a **love** for God’s dwelling place
 - That’s the ultimate goal of our church - to be God’s dwelling place
 - What the Psalmist experienced when entering God’s house
 - It’s in God’s presence that you will find renewal
- 2 - **Long** for the courts of the Lord
 - Replace your longing for sin for a longing for God’s house
 - I notice that today’s Christians don’t seem to take church seriously—it’s like an **optional extra**. God’s church is essential for you to be prepared. Going to church won’t save you, but not going to church will cause you to live an unprepared and ineffective life.
- 3 - **Dwell** (remain) in God’s house and live a life of praise
- 4 - Find your **strength** in God
- 5 - **Set** your heart on pilgrimage
- 6 - Learn to **transform** your valley of tears into a place of springs
 - Every valley can be transformed into an encounter with God
 - Every valley can be changed into a place of renewal
- 7 - Go from **strength to strength** by pursuing spiritual growth
 - Today, everything is a priority over spiritual growth.

“In your presence is the fullness of joy”

ENDNOTES

“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, 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, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; but **they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead**. 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” (1 Peter 4:1-6, NASB).

“Since Jesus went through everything you’re going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you’ll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want. You’ve already put in your time in that God-ignorant way of life, partying night after night, a drunken and profligate life. Now it’s time to be done with it for good. Of course, your old friends don’t understand why you don’t join in with the old gang anymore. But you don’t have to give an account to them. They’re the ones who will be called on the carpet—and before God himself. Listen to the Message. It was preached to those believers who are now dead, and yet even though they died (just as all people must), they will still get in on the life that God has given in Jesus” (1 Peter 4:1-6, Messages).

New American Commentary on 1 Peter 4:4-6

The initial words of the text, deleted by the NIV (“in all this,” NASB, en hō) should be understood as inferential and translated “therefore.” Because the Petrine readers no longer participate in the activities listed in v. 3, their neighbors “are surprised” (NRSV, xenizontai) or “think it strange” that Christians have forsaken their past lifestyle. In this verse we are reminded in what sense Christians are sojourners and exiles. They do not share the values and aspirations of the surrounding society, not fitting into the social fabric. What surprises unbelievers is that Christians do not “plunge” (syntrechontōn) into or participate in their immoral way of living—“the flood of dissipation” (tēs asōtias anachysin) that characterized life in Asia Minor. The participle blasphemountes, translated “and they heap abuse on you,” is connected by some commentators with v. 5, so that it provides the reason for the judgment pronounced there. More likely the participle should be understood as designating the result or consequence of the first clause in v. 4. Pagans are surprised that believers do not participate in what they consider to be normal cultural activities; in response they criticize, defame, and revile believers and thereby also the God they worship.

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This verse is important for understanding the nature of the persecution in 1 Peter. There is little evidence of state-sponsored persecution that robbed early believers of their lives. Instead, unbelievers were at first puzzled and then outraged by the failure of believers to participate in activities that were a normal part of Greco-Roman culture. We see such a reaction in Tacitus when he says Christians have a “hatred of the human race” (Ann. 15.44). Pagans would feel this way because idolatry was woven into almost every dimension of their lives, from life in the home to public festivals to religious observances and even social occasions. In the Western world we take for granted the segregation of private and public spheres, but public festivals, in which the gods were venerated, were considered a civic duty in the Greco-Roman world. In particular veneration of the emperor was simply a mark of good citizenship, and the deifying of

the emperor was especially pronounced in Asia Minor.³⁷⁴ Those who failed to participate would be social outcasts, just as today American citizens would look with suspicion on those who refused to take the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. We can imagine that those who did not fit in with the mores of society would be discriminated against in daily life and that they would be the object of abuse. Identifying the specific lineaments of persecution in 1 Peter is important, for modern readers in the West tend to restrict persecution to imprisonment, physical deprivation, torture, and execution. As we noted, there is little evidence in 1 Peter for these things. The readers were mistreated by being socially ostracized. We should not overlook that criticism and social ostracism often lead to more severe action, that sharp words can easily turn into sharp swords. If Revelation was written around a.d. 95, it is evident that in Asia Minor at least some believers were losing their lives for their devotion to Christ. When 1 Peter was written, however, the penalties were not yet that severe, though Peter wrote to prepare his readers for whatever might come.

4:5 As is so often the case in the letter, Peter turned the readers' eyes toward the eschaton. Currently unbelievers may have been enjoying the favor and privileges of Greco-Roman society. They may have been experiencing social advancement and the praise of their peers. They may have been the consummate "insiders," while the Petrine readers were on the outside. Present circumstances, however, are not the last word. Those who live now "for evil human desires" (v. 2), who live in debauchery and the "flood of dissipation" (vv. 3–4) and revile believers (v. 4), will be judged by God on the last day. They will need to "give account" to God. The phrase "give account" (apodōsousin logon) is courtroom language (cf. Matt 12:36; Luke 16:2; Acts 19:40; Heb 13:17; cf. Rom 2:6; 2 Tim 4:8, 14; Rev 22:12), referring to the final judgment here. That the final judgment is in view is evident from the words "the living and the dead" (cf. 1 Thess 4:16–17; 1 Cor 15:52). It is hardly credible to define the "dead" here as the spiritually dead, for when combined with the word "living" it refers to all people who have ever lived. The judge in view could quite possibly be Christ (cf. Matt 25:31–46; Mark 8:38; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom 14:9; 2 Tim 4:1). It also is possible that the judge is God himself (cf. Rom 2:6; 3:6; 14:10), for in 1 Pet 1:17 and 2:23 God functions as the judge. Perhaps Christ is to be favored slightly since he is typically designated as the judge of the living and the dead.³⁷⁸ The main point of the verse is affirmed in either instance. Believers should not succumb to the temptation to renounce their faith so they can enjoy the approbation of society. Such approval is short-lived, and those who mistreat believers now will be judged in the future. We should note that Peter did not mention the final judgment of unbelievers to encourage vindictiveness (cf. 1 Pet 2:21–23). Nor did he address these words to unbelievers. He reminded believers of the final judgment of all, assuring them that their perseverance in the faith matters and that those who practice evil will be assessed and condemned on the final day. Hence, they must not align themselves with the oppressors to escape discrimination, for soon the tables will be turned.

4:6 Verse 6 is joined to the preceding by the word "for" (gar), and we will return in due course to how this verse relates to the preceding. The words "this is the reason" (eis touto) do not point backward to v. 5 in this case (cf. 1 Pet 2:21; 3:9) but ahead to the purpose clause ("so that," hina). The reason the gospel was preached to the dead is articulated in the last clause of the verse. Before we examine the purpose, we must investigate what Peter meant by preaching the gospel to the dead. The NIV translation reads, "The gospel was preached even to those who are now dead." The word "now" represents an interpretation of the text, one to which we will return. It should be noted at this juncture, however, that the word "now" is not in the Greek text. The NIV translators supply it in order to interpret the text. A more literal translation is supplied by the NRSV, "For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead." The NRSV translation, which renders the original text well, raises a question: What did Peter mean by the word "dead" (nekrois) here? Various answers have been given. Some scholars argue that the term means "spiritually dead" (cf. John 5:25; Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13). This interpretation avoids the problem of the gospel being proclaimed to people who are physically dead and fits with Paul's notion that unbelievers are spiritually dead. The solution should be rejected, however, because Peter nowhere used the term "dead" (nekros) to refer to spiritual death. Moreover, the word "dead" (nekrous) in the previous verse clearly refers to those who are physically dead. Peter gave no contextual clues that he shifted the meaning of the term in this verse, though I will argue below that he did give contextual clues that alter the meaning of the term "judge."

Others maintain that the verse speaks of the preaching of the gospel to those who have died physically. This interpretation is often connected with 1 Pet 3:19, where the spirits are understood to be human beings and the gospel was proclaimed to them after their death (see commentary on 3:19). According to this view, however, 4:6 is an elaboration of what was communicated in 3:19, for now all those who have died have the gospel proclaimed to them. Some limit this to those who died before Christ's coming; others, to all those who died without hearing the gospel; and others, to all those who died without exception. The advantage of this interpretation is that it understands the "dead" in vv. 5–6 to refer to those who are physically dead, so that there is no shift in meaning. Nevertheless, this interpretation should be rejected for several reasons. First, we argued earlier that 1 Pet 3:19 does not refer to the preaching of the gospel at all but to a proclamation of triumph over demonic powers. Elliott rightly remarks, "The interest in a possible correspondence between 3:19 and 4:6 appears motivated more by dogmatic than by exegetical concerns; namely, a desire to find here a biblical expression of the universality of salvation." Second, the passive verb phrase "the gospel was preached" (euēngelisthē) does not refer to preaching done by Christ but the preaching of Christ (cf. the passive verb from kēryssō, "announce, proclaim," in 1 Cor 15:12; 2 Cor 1:19; 1 Tim 3:16). We should understand this to refer to preaching by human beings, therefore, not Christ himself. Hence, the verbal form provides no support for the preaching of the gospel by Christ after human beings have died. Third, there is no basis in the text for limiting the dead to those who preceded the incarnation, to Old Testament saints, or even to those who have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel. Peter did not even give a hint that he addressed any of these people specifically. We are left, then, with the notion that the gospel was preached to all of the dead after their demise. But this view can be confidently rejected. The New Testament nowhere else envisions the possibility of repentance and salvation after death, quite the contrary (cf. Luke 16:26; Heb 9:27).

Furthermore, if v. 6 refers to all the dead, then it follows from the rest of the verse that all of the dead will be saved, for Peter said the gospel was preached to the dead so that they should "live according to God in regard to the spirit." Nothing is said in this verse about any being condemned, but the notion that all will respond positively to the gospel is ruled out by the rest of the New Testament, where the final judgment of the wicked is taught consistently (cf. Matt 25:31–46). Fourth, there is an insuperable problem contextually with this interpretation. In the entire letter Peter exhorted the readers to endure persecution, knowing that they have the future reward of eternal life. Even in this paragraph he presented that very argument, urging them to persevere because God will judge those who are sinners (v. 5). It would make no sense at all if he were to shift gears suddenly and promise a second chance to those who have rejected the gospel during this life. If Peter were promising a second chance, the Petrine readers could not be faulted for concluding that they could deny the faith now and then embrace it after death. Apostasy, in any case, would not be the last word, for they would have another opportunity after death to believe the gospel. This interpretation should be rejected, then, because it veers away from the purpose of the entire letter and even contradicts the teaching of 4:1–6. Elliott rightly concludes that any notion of Christ's universal redemption or of a second chance "to those who died before Christ ... is thoroughly inconsistent with the theology, ethics, and aim of 1 Peter as a whole."³⁸⁸

The interpretation that makes the best sense is reflected in the NIV.³⁸⁹ Peter considered the case of believers who had died physically. These people heard and believed the gospel when they were alive but had subsequently died.³⁹¹ Unbelievers viewed the death of believers as proof that there is no advantage in becoming a believer, for all without exception die. Peter indicated, however, that unbelievers do not understand the whole picture. Even though from a human perspective believers seem to gain no benefits from their faith since they die, from God's perspective (which is normative), they live according to the Spirit. Elliott understands the phrase a little more precisely, so that the Gentiles did not merely observe the judgment on believers but, according to the context, with their slander "actively faulted the Christians according to their own God-opposed norms."³⁹³ In any case, death is not the last word for believers. They will be raised from the dead. The contrast between the "flesh" and "spirit" here is parallel to 1 Pet 3:18, for Christ also died in terms of his flesh, but he was raised to life by the Holy Spirit. A similar destiny awaits believers. They die physically but will be raised to life by the Holy Spirit. I am suggesting, therefore, that Peter did not consider the intermediate state here but the resurrection of the dead. He used the

present tense because the future will certainly come to pass. This interpretation makes the best sense contextually, for it gives the readers encouragement to continue to endure the social ostracism they are facing from their contemporaries. Peter reminded his readers that even if they die physically, death is not the last word. The resurrection awaits them.

It could be objected against this view that the “dead” in v. 6 is restricted only to the believing dead, but such a limitation is derived from the context since Peter only spoke of those who live according to God by means of the Spirit. The limitation of the dead to believers, then, is not an arbitrary imposition on the text but is demanded by the verse itself. Another objection is similar, for judgment in v. 6 cannot be identical with the judgment in v. 5; v. 5 points to the condemnation of unbelievers, but the judgment in v. 6 refers to the death of believers. Once again the difference between the two parts of the verse is contextually grounded, since the verse tells us that the judgment is “according to men” and that they will “live” according to God. If they will live, it is evident that final condemnation is not in view here and that the judgment in v. 6 does not involve final condemnation as the judgment in v. 5 does. Nor are we required to understand the datives “flesh” (sarki, NIV “body”) and “spirit” (pneumati) identically. As I argued in 3:18, the datives can be construed differently. Here the “Spirit” is likely a reference to the Holy Spirit and the resurrection. Believers died “in the sphere of the flesh,” but they will live by means of the Holy Spirit. We find an interesting parallel to what Peter taught here in Wisdom of Solomon (3:1–6):

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 a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of others 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 of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.

The parallels should be noted: (1) the wicked think the death of the righteous is disaster and punishment; (2) the difficulties of the present are temporary; (3) believers have a future hope of life. The hope of the resurrection is explicit in Peter, while the author of Wisdom focuses more on immortality, which fits with his Greek point of view.