

West Valley Church
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On This Rock

Part Six

1 Peter 4:1-19

Is the Corona Virus a judgment from God? Well, in the sense that it wouldn't be here if humans hadn't originally sinned, then yes. But that's more of a consequence than a judgment. Is God specifically judging us with this? No. But God won't waste the opportunity that this time presents in order to help us grow close to God and in Christlikeness. I know *I'm* trying to learn everything and do everything that this time affords me to grow and be Christlike.

These are the things we consider in the Scriptures as we look today in 1 Peter 4. We're in a series called "On This Rock," exploring the Apostle Peter and his letters.

You might remember from last week that I said chapter three to the end of chapter four is the main section of the letter about suffering and that we were taking it in two parts. The passage today starts off with the word "therefore," which means that Peter's thoughts in this section are a result of what he said in the previous section. Peter dives deeply into the subject of suffering here, and in the process we see some great truths for our lives today. The first is...

1. Freedom over sin (4:1-6)

That's a good thing to have, but you might wonder what that has to do with suffering – in fact, it has *a lot* to do with it. Let me read the first six verses to you, and then we'll take a look at what Peter is saying. 1 Peter 4:1-6 –

"Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 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."
(1 Peter 4:1-6, niv)

Peter is telling them – and us – to arm ourselves with the same attitude that Christ had. The word "arm" is a military term that means "to equip." A soldier goes into a battle with his or her mind and instincts equipped to be sharp, noticing even the smallest things that

might seem out of place and every sound that might be a warning to him or her. We are to have that kind of determined and focused mind and attitude – just like Jesus had. This is very similar to what Paul said in Philippians 2:5-11 when he said:

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had...” (Philippians 2:5a, niv)

So we need to have that same attitude and approach to struggle and suffering and persecution as Jesus did, because, according to Peter, “whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.”

Wait. What? Listen: this is *not* saying that our suffering sets us free from sin, as if something we endure will resolve the issue of sin in our lives. The *only* way to deal with the sin in our lives is by God’s forgiveness through Christ’s work on the cross and his death and resurrection, and the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives. So if Peter is *not* saying that suffering removes sin, what *is* he saying?

There are likely two explanations – and quite possibly both of them in Peter’s mind.

Remember that he just finished talking about baptism, so he means that through our association with *Christ’s* suffering, death, and resurrection, we can be done with sin. In other words, it is *Christ’s* suffering that does this for us. And that is very true.

But there is another meaning that Peter would have known. The Jews were very familiar with suffering; they had put up with hatred and persecution and that continues to this very day. Jews know about suffering. And they know that when you are being persecuted for your faith, everything comes into sharp focus. When you are being persecuted for your faith, you either abandon your faith or you take your faith seriously and don’t have luxury time to dabble with sin.

Peter is saying that Christ’s suffering gives us freedom from sin, and when we suffer like him, we also become less likely to be involved in all the kinds of sins that Peter lists – sins that were very prevalent in their culture. Peter said “you’ve spent enough time doing” those things. In other words, he’s saying “You’ve been there, done that, before you became Christians.”

Then, if you caught it, you saw that Peter said that the gospel was preached to the dead. Again? Like last week, this is a confusing statement, but most likely *here* he is referring to the Christians who are now dead. Peter wants to reassure them that all the promises are true when we die, whether by persecution or suffering or natural causes, so if we suffer and die in our faith, we can be sure that our salvation promises are fulfilled.

I think of Pastor Arden who had such an impact on people, especially those in the hospital during his last days. He would never complain, but he was suffering. When he and I talked, he could only say about three words at a time without gasping for air. *But* – he knew that the promises would be true after he died, and because of that, he was so at peace and full of joy that his caregivers were amazed.

So, Peter’s saying that being saved and set free from sin and more focused on Christ, they could begin...

2. Living for God (4:7-11)

Again, let me read the next passage to you and then point out some important parts.

“The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:7-11, niv)

Peter talks about the end being near. This is something we see a lot from the New Testament writers (Romans 13:12; Philippians 4:5; James 5:8; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 1:3; 22:20). But here we are, 2,000 years later. So were the early church fathers mistaken or wishful thinking? Well, as it turns out, they were *not* mistaken, but *we* often are. We *always* think the end times are here. They thought that at the turn of the century with the Spanish flu. We think it’s going to happen now with our pandemic. They thought that in each of the World Wars. They thought that when Mt. St. Helens blew. They thought that right before the year 2000. We always want to hunker down and hang tight till the end. We are always looking to blame culture or events and justify ourselves. The early Christians would have NEVER thought like that.

First of all, in their minds, the end had already begun, because Christ had arrived. In Him, time was invaded by eternity; God entered into the human situation and all the prophecies were fulfilled. On the Day of Pentecost, which we celebrate next Sunday, Peter preached on a passage out of Joel about how Christ fulfilled the last days (Acts 2:16-21).

I’m saying if Peter were alive today, he would have no problem with it having taken 2,000 years so far, because he and the other apostles knew that for God, a thousand years was like a day (Psalm 90:4). The end is *still* near, today.

But they also meant something else: the end *for every person* is near. Every one of them, and every person to this day, will meet their end in death. It’s only a few days or years or decades away. None of us knows when the end will come, but it *will* come for us, and it is always near, so we must be very sober about that. As a result then, they expected us to live for God. There is no time to lose. That kind of clarity of mind and perspective leads us to pray earnestly and effectively.

Peter tells us to love each other – the central command of the Christian faith – but then adds that love covers a multitude of sins. So, does that mean if we love someone, their sins are covered over? Not entirely. Peter is quoting Proverbs 10:12: “Love covers all wrongs.” This is a truth that has been around forever. The power of Christian love can result in forgiveness and reconciliation when people have been hurt or wronged. Jesus said:

“If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” (John 20:23, niv)

So there is power in true Christian love.

Then Peter explains what living for God looks like: we show hospitality to each other without complaining. And all of us have two great spiritual gifts to give others: all of us are to do all we can to tell others the Good News of God's love, and to show it through our acts of service to them. To live for God means that we love others so much that we tell them about God's love and we show it through our service to them. That has always been our driving mission at WVC – to love people so much that we want to introduce people to Jesus, to be equipped with our faith that works in service to others, and to live out our lives as people with that singleness of purpose. Peter gets so excited thinking about it that he breaks out into a doxology in verse 11! Then he concludes by challenging us again to be...

3. Sharing in Christ's sufferings (4:12-19)

Peter picks up on a theme that he's repeated throughout this letter and it is the point of this main section – that God is good, he can use suffering for our and other's benefit, and we can trust him. Let me read those last verses to you:

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” (1 Peter 4:12-19, niv)

Peter urges them and us to not be surprised by persecution and suffering because we live in a world that does not share our values. And besides, Jesus told us to expect it (Matthew 5:11-12; 10:24-25). The more hot the suffering, the further we are refined by it (remember Peter's words in 1:6-7). If we suffer for Christ, we are like Christ, and that should bring us joy. But, if we suffer for breaking the law or being immoral, then we deserve it. Peter gives some examples, and in the list of things that include murder, he uses the word “meddling.” It literally means “to oversee something that is not ours.” In other words, mind your own business! I know Christians who get involved in other people's business, and begin telling them how they are supposed to live and what choices they are supposed to make and how they should act, making the person feel guilty or judged if they don't do it. Then, when the person pushes back, the Christian acts like they are being persecuted. When that happens, Peter says that's not persecution; we are getting what we deserve.

In fact, then he reminds us that judgement begins with Christians. This means a couple of important things: we should always focus on ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to correct *us*; and we will let God judge others. Besides there is judgment for *everyone* at the end – whether Christian or not. But the Christian will receive mercy because we've accepted what Christ has done for us and lived for him.

So if God works this way in people who love him (after all, he disciplines those he loves – Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6), then I hate to think how he will judge those who refuse his love. Let's make sure that everyone we know is introduced to Jesus – even if they mistreat us or persecute us for it – let's not be busybodies about that; let's simply keep loving, sharing, and serving in all that we do!

In the words of Peter in verse 11, "In all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."