



A few months ago my son Levi and I went paint-balling with some friends. I love paintball, especially when you go with younger kids. We got out there and realized when you go paint-balling you have to go prepared. You get the right equipment—a gun, face mask, helmet, proper clothes.

People like me are aggressive and like to run around out there. Once they blew the horn we were out there running around. Most of the dads got hit pretty quickly; I was out there in commando mode! I got all the kids except two—my son and his buddy. They made a fatal mistake: they went back where they thought they would find safety—the bunker. They shot one way but 39-year-old Rob Hall was shooting from the other side. I saw them. You're supposed to say surrender or freeze. What did Pastor Rob do? Bang—you're out!

The lesson learned? Don't play it safe. You think you'll be safe in the bunker, but you're not. You have the right gear and try to play it safe, but not always.

You know what's even more important? Having the right attitude! People are so scared to get hit that they often stay in the bunker. Their attitude is, I want to be as safe and secure as I possibly can. But here's the problem: you'll never win or have any fun by playing it safe in the bunker. Not only that, it's actually not safe at all to stay behind.

I think the same principle is true in life. Every day is a battle and a fight. Most of us are trying our best to work hard, live a good life of purpose and meaning; for some we are raising a family or trying to be a loving spouse, but do you notice how hard life can be sometimes? Why? Because whether you're a Christian or not, life can be hard and difficult.

Life can be going really great and then you are thrown a curveball. You lose your job. Someone gets sick. A spouse shuts down emotionally. A child starts making bad decisions. An unexpected bill hits you at the worst possible time. How do you prepare yourself for those things? How do you arm yourself for the battles ahead? How do you prepare for suffering?

The Apostle Peter is going to help us prepare for the inevitable curveballs of life. He's going to teach us how to respond well to suffering. He's mostly talking about suffering for the sake of Christ, but I also think we can apply these principles to general suffering as well.

How do we prepare? Peter starts first with our mind.

Be Willing to Suffer Rather than Sin

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 (1 Peter 4:1-2).

Our passage begins with, "Therefore," which connects to the previous passage that talked about the suffering of Jesus who was put to death in order that we might have life through his death and resurrection. Jesus is the model for how we are to endure suffering and he suffered unto death. So, in light of salvation through Jesus, Peter says, "Therefore...arm yourselves with the same attitude."

The phrase "arm yourselves" appears only here in the NT. It's a military term that means to equip. Peter says equip yourselves with the same attitude. Be ready. The word "attitude" literally means the "same thinking." Peter is not talking about having a "positive attitude" toward suffering. He's telling us to prepare our minds for suffering, to be ready mentally. He's saying that if we are going to be prepared for real life, followers of Jesus need to have the same thinking as Jesus who willingly suffered.

For some people though, suffering drives them into sin. They give in to the pressure and fold. Some look to numb the pain. Others deny suffering is even there. Still others, when they suffer, respond in a completely new way. Their suffering drives them closer to God. They start to pray more. They show up at church more often. They trust God in the midst of their suffering.

What's the difference? Attitude. It's their mental perspective on suffering. They choose to have the attitude of Jesus. Jesus consistently chose to obey God even when it was hard and it eventually would cost him his life. That's the right attitude.

Peter then tells us the purpose for our suffering. We suffer not because God is mad at us. Sometimes our suffering is because of our own foolish mistakes. But, the hard times in our lives are never pointless. They can serve a purpose if we allow them to. What's the purpose? "**Whoever suffers in the body is done with sin**" (v. 1).

What's Peter saying here? He's not talking about becoming sinlessly perfect. That's impossible. Peter means this: if you trust God enough to suffer for doing what is right, then you've made a decisive break with sin. In other words, those who willingly choose suffering have chosen suffering over sinning.

When you came to Christ, when you placed your faith in him, sin was ultimately put to death. You were "justified," just as if you never sinned. You are positionally made righteous. So when God looks at you, he sees Jesus's life, not yours. But, you and I still struggle with sin. So the lifetime work of sanctification begins. That is God's continual work in you, the process of making you more like Jesus Christ.

Here's another thing—as you endure suffering, somehow temptation loses its power in your life. Suffering helps you see just how much power you have in Christ. You think, "Man, if Jesus can get me through this, nothing is too hard for him!" That's why in verse 2 he says, *"As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."*

The moment you come to Jesus, he begins to transform your desires. Those who suffer with the attitude of Christ live in a completely new way. Instead of living for themselves, they now live for the will of God. Instead of praying "My will be done" they pray "Thy will be done." Preparing for suffering starts first with a willingness to suffer rather than sin, it starts first with our mind and with a right attitude.

Secondly, we prepare for suffering by knowing that it will also come from the outside.

Be Willing to Suffer Abuse from Unbelievers

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 (verses 3-4).

The Apostle Peter was writing this letter to the church living within the Greco Roman world. They really didn't care that Christians wanted to worship Jesus. It was a polytheistic culture. Everyone worshipped someone or something. One of the reasons why the early church suffered and were persecuted was because they worshipped Jesus exclusively. It was very offensive back then (and today) to say that Jesus is the only way to heaven and to label other religions as idolatrous.

What was also offensive was that these Christians didn't fit into Roman culture with their lifestyle. Unbelievers of the Roman world looked at the lifestyle of Christians and thought they were a ridiculous group of prudes. They didn't go to the Roman theatre to watch the risqué shows. They didn't attend the chariot races or gladiator fights. They didn't have sex outside of marriage, they

didn't get drunk or have orgies, they didn't lie, cheat or steal. What kind of life is that?!

Peter says, *"For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do..."* He's saying, you've done enough sinning for a lifetime! For many of us, we've been there. We know first-hand what it is like to live like the rest of the world. Let's be honest, it wasn't all that bad either! Sin is fun. But, the fun never lasts, does it? You wake up the next day feeling empty, lonely, and lost. You wonder, is this all there is to life? For some of people, you might be thinking, "Hmmm, I'm not sure I've sinned enough!" I hear that from people from time to time, "You know Rob, I know I need to get right with God, but I'm just not ready to give up having fun yet." Peter would say, you've had enough. The time you've spent sinning is plenty. Make the break; choose the will of God. And suffer for it if you must.

And what happens when you make that break is some of your old friends are now surprised that you don't join them in it any longer. They say things like: "What's up miss goody two shoes?" "Oh, you're better than us now?" "You can't change!" "Just come out one more time!" "We know who you really are! It's all good with us."

These new Christians were hearing the same things. Peter says they "heap abuse on you." The phrase literally means "blaspheme." This blasphemy was directed against Christians, not God. They disrespect, malign, slander, and defame you all because of your commitment to Jesus.

This is all normal because you're an exile. You don't fit in any longer. You have a different value system and way of thinking. But it's offensive to some people. As a new Christian, I learned real quick that if I was going to get off to a good start in following Jesus, I had to make some serious adjustments in my life. I had a girlfriend and we were not honoring God in our relationship so I broke up with her and she made fun of my new faith in God. I also had to start finding some new friends. I grew up with a great group of guys from childhood, but we all loved to party. I was too weak and gave into temptation when I was around them. So, I started hanging around more Christian kids. It was hard. But, after I grew in my faith, I was able to re-engage some of my old friendships.

But, let's be honest, what I had to deal with, and what many of you deal with isn't really a big deal. Think about a young muslim woman coming to faith in Jesus Christ in Yemen, Iraq, Sudan, or Syria. At best she's completely rejected from her family and from her community. At worst, she's in danger for her life.

According to The Pew Research Center, over 75% of the world's population lives in areas with severe religious restrictions, and many of these people are Christians. According to the United

States Department of State, Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ. Each month around the world:

- 322 Christians die for their faith.
- 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed.
- 772 forms of violence are committed against Christians.

Those are sobering statistics that put into perspective our suffering here in America. Most of the world would love to have my problems. How do we prepare for that kind of suffering? Be willing to suffer rather than sin, and be willing to suffer abuse from unbelievers.

Willingly Live in Light of God's Judgment

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 (verses 5-6).

Yet again, what Peter says here would anger first-century Greco-Roman people who didn't believe in a universal claim to truth. But, Peter teaches here that no one escapes God's judgment.

Peter is trying to encourage Christians and warn non-Christians. To Christians he's saying, don't be discouraged, those folks who heap abuse on you will have to give account to God! To those Christians who died, they will give an account in accordance with their faith in Jesus. You will be judged based on Jesus' life, not your own!

To non-Christians he's saying, you too will give an account for the abuse they dish out on Christians. And you'll have to give an account of how you lived your life. Those who reject the gospel of Jesus Christ and mock Christians for what they believe and how they live will have to answer to God.

Verse 6 is a little confusing. Who are the dead? And in what way is the gospel preached to the dead? I believe, and so do most scholars, that Peter is referring to Christians who heard and responded to the gospel while alive but now are physically dead. He is **not** saying there is a second chance of salvation for those who have died. If that were the case then why would Peter urge people to suffer in this life for the sake of the gospel if he believed that they would get a second chance in the afterlife?

Again, Peter is answering the question: How do we prepare for suffering? He says finally, live in light of God's judgment day. That means all your suffering is temporary. It may feel long, but in light of eternity, it's really short. When you are suffering, remember, God is coming again. God is the ultimate Judge. So if your suffering is unjust, He will make it right. God will have the final word.

Frederick Buechner wrote: "The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will ring down the final curtain on history, and there will come a Day on which all our days and all the judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully."

How do we prepare for suffering? Be willing to suffer rather than sin. Be willing to suffer abuse from unbelievers. Willingly live in light of God's judgment. Let me take a moment to apply this to three groups who may be here this morning:

Not-yet Christians: You will have to give an account for what you did with what God gave you. God has provided one way for you to escape condemnation, and that is through Jesus Christ. Our sin separated us from a holy God, but God himself sent his only Son to die for our sin. After three days he rose from the dead and offers us not only forgiveness but eternal life. Come to Jesus today.

New Christian: You're just getting started on this journey. I want to talk to you about expectations. Don't underestimate the degree of difficulty. You will suffer, sometimes from people in your past, sometimes for no reason at all. You will be tempted to give up and turn back. Stay the course. It will be hard but it will be worth it.

Mature Christians: Don't forget you're still not done with your journey. You haven't crossed the finish line. So press on! The best thing you can do is pour yourself into someone who is just getting started. Let's set the example for others in how we respond to suffering.

When you and I seek to live like Jesus, you will suffer. So, arm yourself with the right attitude. Be willing to suffer.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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