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The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:1-11

We live in a world that desperately needs God. This past Monday the top story headline on CNN in the United States was “Supreme Court Sides with Oregon Bakery that Refused to Make Cake for Same-sex Wedding – and the top story headline on CBC in Canada was “Politicians Behaving Badly: Rash of Rudeness Marks Fading Sense of Civility in Government.” The sad thing about both of those headlines is those headlines are not “fake news” – a Christian baker really had to all the way to the highest court in the land to live out his faith in Jesus Christ - and politicians on both sides of our borders are losing their sense of respect, dignity, propriety and morality towards one another and those they serve. These kinds of headlines are now the norm. A quick glance at what is going on in our world today reveals that the foundation of our culture and our society today is sliding farther and farther away from God.

In 1993, Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington wrote a controversial foreign policy paper entitled “Clash of Civilizations.” In it, he wrote: “The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.” With the fall of the Iron Curtain, Professor Huntington predicted that next world conflict wouldn’t be between nations or economies but between cultural entities. An example of a cultural entity would be Muslim peoples living inside of nations where their religion was predominant. His prediction included a tension that induced the spirit of jihad that was declared against America that resulted in the attack of 9/11. Another example he spoke of would be the clash of ideas/values within cultures we see today regarding abortion, euthanasia, gender identity and other social issues. He also forecast the cultural war that would infect the church, causing divisions and diversions from the Bible.

But this should not be new news to us. Long before Professor Huntington presented his theory, Jesus told his followers they would always experience clashes of ideas, values and truth within their culture. But the amazing thing about our Christian faith is that of faith in Jesus is trans-cultural. In other words, there are Christians in every culture because the gospel message is for all people no matter their age, race, background, gender or place in society. Jesus is an equal opportunity Lord and Savior. As we’ve seen in our study of 1 Peter, the good news of the gospel applies to every culture because it transforms people into better citizens, better children, better parents, better husbands, better wives and better workers. However, a problem arises when followers of Jesus allow their faith to be conformed to their culture rather than allowing the power of crucified and risen Christ to transform their faith and their lives. This should not be a surprise to us either, as we see this battle in Jesus’ life, just before he began his public ministry on earth in his battle with Satan, the tempter, in the wilderness. Jesus fought the cultural war against Satan as the evil one sought to tempt him to become a baker rather than a Savior, a showman rather than a Redeemer, a landlord of the whole world rather than the Son of God. But by the power of the Word of God, Jesus prevailed.

The truth is, the devil has been doing this from the beginning in the Garden. Ever since the fall, every man, woman and child who has ever had a relationship with the living God has battled the tempter. And one of the greatest temptations that all followers of Jesus Christ constantly face – in one way or another – is the temptation to *bypass suffering, to reach for the crown, not the cross* - as Jesus was tempted by Satan to do anything but face his crucifixion. So too were those to whom Peter wrote in his first letter in 64 A.D., tempted in every way, as was their Savior, and as we are in our day. They were tempted to try to escape all the political, social and personal suffering they were going through because they were following Jesus. When they first came to Christ, they had no idea of the suffering they would face because of their commitment to him. Their hearts were filled with optimism and joy, peace and righteousness. But then the reality of suffering struck; they discovered that the world around them had no use for their Christianity. Their lives, their families' lives, their livelihoods - everything they possessed was at stake. Faced with all of this pressure, they were tempted to slip back again into the world system, to blend once again into the culture with their neighbors so they would have peace, security and comfort – rather than struggle, embattlement and suffering.

Peter was aware of this. He understood when we truly do live for Jesus, we will suffer, and when we do suffer for Jesus we will be tempted to wander from our faith and conform to the culture rather than allow Jesus to transform us. The question we face this morning is: “How can we overcome the temptation to wander from our faith in Jesus in the midst of suffering?” Peter says: “Live for God!”

“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” (1 Peter 4:1-2). In the midst of suffering, we can live for God and overcome the temptation to conform to culture - by living *“for the will of God.”* Here Peter presents two commands/imperatives that are keys for living for the will of God in the midst of struggle and suffering. First, we must arm ourselves against sin - and second, we must abstain from sin.

1. We must arm ourselves against sin. The first part of verse 1 gives us our example: *“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh.”* The word *“therefore”* takes us back to 1 Peter 3:18 and 1 Peter 3:22 where we read that, *“Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit”* – and that Jesus *“has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.”* Because of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, we are now dead to sin *positionally before God.*

But the problem is that we still sin in practice. The middle part of verse 1 is an exhortation: *“Arm yourselves also with the same way of thinking.”* Brothers and sisters, you and I are also in a spiritual battle with the world, the flesh and the devil. And unfortunately, many Christians see themselves on a playground, not a battlefield. Sin is our enemy and we are called to *“arm”* ourselves with the same mind that Christ has against sin. This word *“arm”* refers to heavy, not light armor and was used for a soldier who was fully outfitted with a javelin and shield. *“Arm”* is also in the aorist imperative tense, meaning that we must make a decisive choice in response to an urgent call to arm ourselves.

Take note that this war is won or lost in our minds. We are to have a militant attitude toward sin because it is destructive, deceptive, decay-producing and death-causing. We must be both vigilant and diligent. This takes us back to 1 Peter 1:13: *“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded.”* And Peter picks up on this in 1 Peter 5:8 as well: *“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* Sadly some of us are not sober-minded about our sin and are dismissive about our disobedience. Regarding that, the Puritan John Owen said: “The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin...be always at it while you live. Cease not a day from this work. Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”

In the last part of verse 1 we're called back to the example of Christ: "*For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.*" In other words, he who has died in the flesh has stopped sinning. A dead man has no ability to sin. Jesus is now done with sin because he's defeated it. In a similar way, we are to "cease from sin" because in Christ we have died to it. Peter tells us, as Christ suffered at the hands of wicked men, but entrusted Himself to the righteous Judge, and finally suffered physical death, so we are to consider the spiritual reality of what that physical death means to our own spiritual death. The fact is that the life we had before we surrendered to Jesus Christ is now dead. It died when Jesus died.

In Romans 6:8-14, the apostle Paul sums up our new life in Christ: "*Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*" We must and we can arm ourselves against sin.

2. We must also abstain 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.*" Here's our choice in a nutshell – we can live for our lusts or we can live for the Lord. The word "*passions*" refer to strong, lust-like desires. The contrast is clear – we either live for the will of God or we live for the will of the world. Peter tells us that we are abstain from sin "*for the rest of the time.*" Here Peter also reminds us of our mortality. We have a limited time on earth and then we face eternity – and that time should be spent arming ourselves against sin and purposefully and personally abstaining from sin. For what purpose? So that in the midst of suffering, we can live for God and overcome the temptation to conform to culture by living "*for the will of God.*"

What is "*the will of God*"? The vastness of the meaning of God's will cannot be defined in our short time together, but in the context of our text for today the best illustration of understanding the will of God is found in the life of Jesus. On more than one occasion did Jesus speak about God's will. John 4:34: "*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.*" John 5:30: "*I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*" In the Garden of Gethsemane, in Luke 22:42, Jesus said, "*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.*"

The key to God's will, on the part of Jesus, was his attitude of obedience found in the words of John's gospel: "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*" (John 15:9-12). The apostle Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:3: "*For this is the will of God, your sanctification;*" - that is, our willingness to be set aside for his intended purpose. Further, Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" The bottom line is that we can't know the will of God until we develop a personal relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son. Then, as our love grows for Him, our wills are molded into His will and our deepest desires will become like His desires. God's will should always be, "Not not our will, but His, be done."

"*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.*" Here Peter spells out six specific sins that we're to abstain from which are supposed to be in the "*past.*"

“*Sensuality*” is shameless sexual excess and an insatiable desire for pleasure. “*Passions*” is an inordinate, out of control lust. “*Drunkenness*” speaks of excessive and extravagant indulgence of long drawn-out drinking. “*Orgies*” is about riotous conduct, often translated as “carousing.” The background to this is when a group of drunken men would dance in the streets in honor of the Greek drinking god Bacchus. “*Drinking parties*” were drinking matches to see who could drink the most alcohol. “*Lawless idolatry*” is the abominable idolatry of serving forbidden idols. This is a small list of the samplings of sin the evil one offers us in the world we live in. These are also the things by which we are assessed and evaluated and treated by the world - “*with respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.*” But we need not be offended nor angry because “*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.*” This verse refers to those who were saved while living but now they have died. Our job is to share the gospel to people who are still living, so that when they die they will go to heaven and not hell. All wrongs now will be made right at the judgment. Jesus Christ will come back soon to judge every human being who has ever lived. But in the meantime we are to live for God by living for the will of God by arming ourselves against sin and abstaining from sin so we would not be tempted when we suffer to wander from our faith and conform to the culture rather than allow Jesus to transform us. When we live for God we “*live in the spirit the way God does.*”

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:7-11

When Peter says, “*the end of all things is at hand*” he affirms the various personal, political, social and spiritual difficulties and struggles and suffering the church was going through – as those who were truly following Jesus sought to live a godly lifestyle in the midst of an increasingly decadent culture. Peter is also encouraging, that in light of the certainty of the second coming of Jesus Christ, these early Christians were to remain steadfast, and not give up on the hope that lay before them, and continue to live for God by living for the will of God by living out a lifestyle of prayer and a lifestyle of service.

1. In difficult times, in light of the return of the risen Christ, we are live out a lifestyle of prayer. “*The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.*”

The phrase “*The end of all things is at hand*” speaks about the coming judgment and the Judge who is ready to judge the living and the dead. This phrase has the same urgency as both the judgment in Genesis 6, when God judged the sinful generation of Noah's time and the great white throne of judgment at Jesus return. In light of this, Peter encourages us that this is not a matter of fear, but of joy - the joy of Christ's second coming. He is our living hope! That is what this letter emphasizes again and again – our joy and hope in Jesus, which should motivate us to hang in there in the midst of suffering. Peter writes of this in 2 Peter 3:8-13: “*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*”

This is the fire in Peter's heart--the joy that he has to pass along to believers of "*the coming day of God.*" We must remember that God does not count days and years as we count them. That always comes as a surprise to us. We should feel that just about any day would be a great day for Jesus to come back. The God who is in control of time wants His followers to have a lifestyle of power. That is the lifestyle that Peter also desired for his spiritual children. That is why he says, "*therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.*" When you pray, be clearheaded; don't panic, don't be irrational or illogical in the midst of your present suffering. From a human viewpoint the world may seem to be coming apart, but from God's point of view everything is coming together!

What is prayer? Prayer is communication with God. Prayer is how we live out our relationship with God. God wants to communicate with us and He wants us to communicate with Him. He wants us to realize that we are totally dependent upon Him; that every breath we breathe is from Him. He wants us to ask Him about everything in life. That is what prayer is - dependence upon God for all of life: physical, emotional and spiritual. Life is such an incredible mystery to us. So many things are way outside of our control. So many things happen to us and to people we know, and we are helpless to do anything. But we can pray to the living God who loves us. He can literally change hearts and events.

Ray Stedman wrote: "Man ought always to pray and not to faint. We must either be praying or fainting. There is no alternative. The purpose of all faith is to bring us into direct, personal, vital touch with God. True prayer is an awareness of our helpless need and our acknowledgment of divine adequacy. For Jesus, prayer was as necessary as breathing the breath of His life. Although God certainly knows all of our needs, praying for them changes our attitude from complaint to praise, and enables us to participate in God's personal plans for our lives." Peter himself had to learn how to pray. Perhaps he remembered his own inability to understand the power of prayer as he looked back to the time when he fell asleep in the garden, although Jesus had asked him to pray. Later at the trial of Jesus, he panicked because of fear. At the time he wrote this letter, however, the apostle was speaking from a mature conviction based on many years of experiencing just how powerful a tool prayer is.

2. In difficult times, in light of the return of the risen Christ, we are also to live out a lifestyle of service.

"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies." Here Peter points out the need for Christians to serve one another in three ways until Christ returns. First: "*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*" The various trials they were suffering must have caused all kinds of tension and other problems among them; thus Peter asks that they would serve each another by having an "earnest" love for one another. Second: "*Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.*" Christians are not only to love one another but also love strangers. In the ancient world, hospitality was a sacred duty. The inns of those days were fearful places; so much so that Plato called innkeepers "pirates who held their guests to ransom." Peter recognized the great need for open homes, so that Christians would feel safe and welcome. The same is true today. When we gather in our homes together, we do so as the family of God. And for those of us who do so, we find out that open homes are that cause and the result of open hearts. Thirdly: "*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.*" God gives each one of us a spiritual gift/skill that is to be used to build up the church. By using our spiritual gifts/skills we demonstrate love for God and love one another and love anyone else whom God might send our way. When we truly do live for Jesus, we will suffer, and when we do suffer for Jesus we will be tempted to wander from our faith and conform to the culture rather than allow Jesus to transform us. We can overcome the temptation to wander from our faith and conform to the culture - by arming ourselves against and abstaining from sin and living lifestyles of prayer and service for one another and for those who do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior - "*In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!*"