

Christ, Our Example

1 Peter 4:1-5:11 — Understanding I and II Peter Series, Part 6

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Last time we watched Peter end chapter three with Christ, who "suffered once for sins" and is now "at the right hand of God" (1 Pet. 3:18, 22), and with baptism, which pictures passing through death and coming up on the other side. Paul told the Romans what baptism pictures: "we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). The old man is counted dead and buried, and a new way of walking begins. The salvation Peter says baptism pictures is the one this whole letter is about: "the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9).

Then chapter four opens with "Therefore." Because Christ suffered, and because they've been buried and raised with Him, Peter tells them how to face what's coming. And once more he brings them back to the same pattern: suffering first, glory after.

I. Armed with the Same Mind

"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." (1 Pet. 4:1-2)

"Arm yourselves." Peter uses a soldier's word. Suffering is coming, and they're to put on Christ's own way of thinking about it the way a soldier puts on armor.

What was that mind? Peter has already shown it to them. Christ suffered for doing good, "and when He was reviled, did not revile in return... but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). And he's already told them why they were called to the same thing: "that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 3:9). To arm yourself with His mind is to expect suffering, to take it without striking back, and to keep the inheritance in view while you do.

"He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." That's the baptism picture worked out in a life. Paul says it this way: "reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:11). A man who has counted his old life dead doesn't keep living it.

"For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." (1 Pet. 4:3-5)

Notice the "we." Peter puts himself in the list. Their old friends can't understand why they've stopped running with them, and they say so. Peter's answer is short: the people speaking evil of them answer to God, and that leaves Christians free not to answer back.

II. The End of All Things Is at Hand

"But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.' Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Pet. 4:7-11)

"The end of all things is at hand." Peter meant it to be heard with urgency, and in his second letter he explains how God counts that nearness: "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us" (2 Pet. 3:8-9). The end is coming on His schedule, and Christians are to live as people who know it.

What does that look like? Peter doesn't send them off to watch the sky. He gives them six ordinary things:

- Be serious, and be watchful in prayer.
- Love one another fervently, above everything else.
- Open your homes to one another, and don't grumble about it.
- Use whatever gift God gave you to serve the others, as a steward of something that isn't yours.
- If you speak, speak as God's own words.
- If you serve, serve in the strength God supplies.

And the goal of all six is the same: "that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." Being serious starts with ourselves. Paul told the Corinthians, "For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31). A Christian who knows judgment is near takes stock of himself first.

III. Suffering, Then Glory

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." (1 Pet. 4:12-13)

Their old friends thought it strange that they'd changed (4:4). Now Peter tells them not to think it strange when the fire comes. Christians shouldn't be surprised by suffering. It's what they were called to (1 Pet. 2:21).

Look closely at verse 13: "rejoice *to the extent* that you partake of Christ's sufferings." The suffering and the joy to come are measured against each other. To the extent you share His sufferings now, you'll be glad "when His glory is revealed." This is the same order Peter announced in his first chapter, "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1:11), and now he puts his readers inside it.

Scripture says this more than once:

- "Joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:17-18).
- "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12).
- "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal [*aionios*, age-lasting] weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). Paul piles one word for "beyond measure" on top of another to describe it, and he places it in the age to come, over against "the things which are seen," which "are temporary" (4:18).

Paul knew what he was pressing toward. Writing from prison (Phil. 1:13), he still said, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on" (Phil. 3:10-12). The fellowship of His sufferings comes first, and Paul didn't treat what follows as already in hand.

"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." (1 Pet. 4:14-16)

Peter draws the same line he drew in chapter two (2:20). Suffering for your own wrongdoing, even for meddling in other people's business, earns nothing. Suffering as a Christian, for His name, carries "the Spirit of glory" with it.

IV. Judgment Begins at the House of God

"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?' Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator." (1 Pet. 4:17-19)

Judgment begins "at the house of God," and Peter says "with us first." This is the household, the same people he's been writing to all along, and it's the judgment he warned them about in the first chapter, from the Father "who without partiality judges according to each one's work" (1:17).

Look at the question Peter asks: "what will be the end of those who do not *obey* the gospel of God?" It's a question about obedience. As we saw last time in chapter three, obedience is asked of those who've already believed and been made alive; it's the saved who can obey or fail to (1 Pet. 3:1; 2:8). So Peter is looking at two kinds of people inside the same house: those who obey, and

those who don't. And the salvation he says the righteous one is "scarcely" brought to is the one the letter has been about from the start, the salvation of the soul (1:9). Even for the obedient it comes through fire. For the disobedient in the same house, the question Peter leaves hanging is a sober one.

He's quoting a proverb, and the proverb puts it in terms of recompense: "If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner" (Prov. 11:31). Both receive what their conduct has earned.

So Peter's counsel is to "commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator." There's the word again: *souls*. It's what's at stake, and it's what they're to place in God's hands, while they keep on doing good.

V. Shepherds, Humility, and the Lion

"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." (1 Pet. 5:1-4)

Listen to how Peter introduces himself: "a fellow elder," "a witness of the sufferings of Christ," and a man who expects to share "the glory that will be revealed." And his charge to the elders is the charge Jesus gave him on the beach: "Feed My lambs... Tend My sheep" (John 21:15-17). Now Peter hands it on: "Shepherd the flock of God." The reward he holds out is "the crown of glory that does not fade away," the same "does not fade away" he used for the inheritance in his first chapter (1:4).

"Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Pet. 5:5-7)

Peter's word for "be clothed" means to tie something on, and it was used for the apron a servant tied over his clothes. Peter had seen that done. On the night before the cross, Jesus "took a towel and girded Himself," and then He washed Peter's feet (John 13:4-5). Humility, for Peter, looked like that.

"That He may exalt you in due time." The exalting is God's to do, and it's on His timing. Until then, they can put every care on Him, because He cares for them.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." (1 Pet. 5:8-9)

Peter had been sifted by that adversary himself (Luke 22:31). He doesn't tell them to run from him. He tells them to stand, "steadfast in the faith," and to remember they aren't the only ones suffering.

VI. The God Who Establishes

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal [*aionios*] glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Pet. 5:10-11)

The order is the same one again: "after you have suffered a while," then the glory. Suffering first, glory after.

And look at one of those four words: *establish*. It's the word Jesus used to Peter on the night of his denials: "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32). *Strengthen* there and *establish* here are the same Greek word. More than thirty years later, the man who was told to strengthen his brethren is doing exactly that, and he's praying that God will do in them what He did in Peter. Peter knew the fire, he knew the failure, and he knew the restoration that followed. He's writing from the other side of all three.

Applying "Christ, Our Example"

Peter never treats suffering as a sign that something has gone wrong. He tells his readers to expect it, to arm themselves with Christ's own mind toward it, and to rejoice "to the extent" they share it, because the glory to come is measured against it.

Meanwhile, the end is near and judgment begins at God's own house. That's reason to take stock of ourselves, to love one another fervently, to use our gifts as stewards, to walk humbly with an apron on, and to stand firm against the adversary. Above all, it's reason to do what Peter told those suffering Christians to do: commit your soul to a faithful Creator, and keep doing good.

Looking Ahead

Next, we open Peter's second letter, written to the same people "by way of reminder" (2 Pet. 3:1), and as we saw at the beginning of this series, much of it is about the danger rising up from inside: "there will be false teachers among you" (2 Pet. 2:1).

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.