

How To Face Suffering

1 Peter 4:1-6

Pastor John Miller

I want you to follow with me in 1 Peter 4 beginning in verse 1. Peter says, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh...”—and here’s our theme—“...arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past our life may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excessive wine, revelings, banquetings and abominable idolatries: wherein...”—verse 4—“...they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the alive and the dead. For this cause was the Gospel preached to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

In verse 1, Peter calls these persecuted and suffering saints to arm themselves. I want you to notice it there in verse 1. He says, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh...”—this is the exhortation in the passage—“...arm yourselves.” Now that phrase “arm yourselves” is a military term, and it refers to a soldier taking up weapons in preparation for battle. It has been said, and it’s true, that the Christian life is not a playground, it’s a battleground. And because we are in a war, we need to take up the whole armor of God.

And we battle against three enemies: the world, the flesh and the Devil. Every Christian faces an enemy. And it comes in these three categories. The world is “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.” It’s the evil world’s system apart from God.

And then there’s the flesh; the sinful, carnal nature. Even though we’ve been born again and we’ve inherited a new nature or capacity to live righteously before God, we still struggle with what theologians call the “Adamic nature,” the sin nature that we inherit from Adam. And that is one of our biggest enemies, ourselves. “We’ve found the enemy, and the enemy is us.” Amen?

And then there’s the Devil. And we could probably handle the world and the flesh, if it wasn’t for the Devil. The Bible clearly teaches that there is a personal Devil. His origin is that he was created by God as an angel, and he was created good, and he rebelled against God, and he fell and he became Satan or Lucifer. And other angels fell with him, so there’s the Devil and demons, who are fallen angels who want to wreck you and destroy you. They’ve come to “kill, steal and destroy.”

So if we’re going to stand, we need to take up the armor and the weapons that God has provided. Now we’re all familiar with Ephesians 6. That “we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, powers and spiritual wickedness in high places.” Therefore, we “take up the whole armor of God.” We have to have “the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, the sword...”—which is what?—“...the Word of God.” Amen? So we can stand against the enemy.

But there's another passage, and it's our passage we take up this morning in 1 Peter 4, that deals with arming yourself; taking up the weapons God has provided for us, in this context, that we might stand against the world in the persecution and the opposition and suffering that we encounter because we have chosen to follow Jesus Christ. The whole passage is continuing the theme of suffering for righteousness' sake. And Jesus, at the end of chapter 3, has been set forth as our example of One Who suffered for righteousness' sake, triumphantly.

Now the application, chapter 4, verses 1 through 6. Peter tells us that there's an armor we need to take up if we're to stand triumphantly, like Jesus, and face the suffering persecution that comes to us. Now, what are we to arm ourselves with? I want to give you five things that you need to arm yourself with to be able to stand against the persecution and suffering that can come to you for righteousness' sake. You can write them down.

Number one, arm yourself with the right attitude. I want you to see that in verse 1. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise..."—and here it is—"... with the same mind." The word "mind" could be translated "attitude." We, as Christians, should have the same attitude or mindset or outlook that Jesus had in His suffering. Notice in verse 1, Jesus Christ "suffered for us in the flesh." So this takes us back to chapter 3, verse 18. Go back with me there; I'll point it out. Peter says, "For Christ also once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." Then jump down to verse 22 of chapter 3. "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him."

Now we looked thoroughly at that passage last week, but I want to point out a principle here. Chapter 3, verses 18 to 22, is doctrine. And it's the doctrine of Christ and how Christ suffered for us in His Crucifixion, in His proclamation, in His Resurrection, in His Ascension and His exaltation. But Jesus knew His suffering would lead to glory. So when you come now to chapter 4, verse 1, there's the practical application of the doctrine we learned.

You know, Christians tend to err in one of two ways: they are either all about doctrine, and they don't want to put it into practice; or they're all about practical Christian living, and they don't want doctrine. The Bible is a balanced book, and it has both. Wherever you find yourself in the Scriptures, you first have doctrine, right belief, and then it's followed by behavior. Belief and then behavior, or principles and practice. And to be a balanced, growing Christian, we need both. So we study the whole Word of God; we get that balance.

We learned about Jesus dying triumphantly on the cross, rising from the dead, ascending into heaven and exalted at the right hand of God the Father. Now the same mentality, the same attitude that Jesus had in giving Himself willingly to suffer righteously in the will of God and to do the work of God, we need to have. So no matter what persecution or opposition comes to us, we need to have the attitude or outlook of Jesus Christ. So "arm yourself" with the same mind or attitude. Have the mind or attitude of Christ about suffering; that was basically that He was here to do the will of the Father, no matter what opposition He faced, that He was here to finish the work of the Father and He was willing to die in that calling, He was willing to give His

life. Now we can't die for someone else's sins. And we haven't lived a sinless life. But like Jesus, we can say, "I'm willing to forfeit my rights and the pleasures of this world and stand for righteousness and suffer, knowing that it will produce a greater glory." The Bible says if we suffer with Him, we will reign with Him. And I believe that Jesus Christ will come and strengthen us during that time of suffering.

Now he gives us in verse 1 the reason for this attitude and why it's important. Notice it. "For he that has suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." Now what does he mean by that? What is he saying? We've suffered, we no longer sin? He's not saying that if you're a Christian and you are persecuted for righteousness and you suffer, that you're not going to sin anymore. We all know that; right? We can still fall. We can still stumble. But what I believe he's saying here is as a Christian, when I get the mind of Christ and I get the mentality of Christ and I am here to do the will of God, even in the opposition of the world, that I am done yielding habitually and continually and ongoingly to sin. I have committed myself to living righteously. You might say this is the first step in discipleship. Die to yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus Christ. That's the mind of Christ. "I don't care what the world says, I don't care what the world does." "Though none go with me..." we sing "...still I will..."—what?—"...follow." Peter is telling us here that we are going to be done with a pattern of sinful behavior or a lifestyle that is all wrapped up in the chain of sinful behavior. We're done with sin.

You know, we as Christians often face two possibilities: either sin or suffering. We face that possibility all the time. And many times we can live like the unsaved world around us, in sinful pleasures, to avoid persecution and opposition. Or we can live in purity and godliness and bear the reproach of Christ and suffer for righteousness' sake.

Let me get very practical. You're on the job, and your boss tells you to do something that's unethical or immoral or illegal. You have a choice to do either righteousness or to sin. Now you might be saying in your mind, "Well, if I do what they've asked me to do, it's sinful, it's wrong, I won't be persecuted. I won't lose my job. I won't be demoted. I'll get the raise. Everyone will like me." So you opt to do the sinful thing rather than the righteous thing in order to avoid persecution. Don't do that. Maybe your friends say, "Hey, let's go get drunk" or "Let's go do drugs," or maybe you're tempted to get involved sexually with somebody in an illicit relationship, and you don't want to be thought weird or odd and you want to be accepted. You're looking for love in all the wrong places. Instead of being obedient to God, you capitulate to your sin. Maybe you don't want to be ostracized from your friends—we're going to see that in this text—you want them to like you, you still want to go to the parties, you want to be with the "in crowd," and so you opt for sin rather than righteousness. Don't do that. Have a mentality that Jesus had. "I don't care what the world says, I don't care what the world does, I don't care what the world thinks, I'm going to arm myself with this weapon to be able to stand against persecution and opposition that might come my way."

Jesus said in John 13:6, "Truly, truly I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you." So if Jesus was persecuted, what do we expect they're going to do to us? They're going to persecute us. If they rejected Him, what do

you think they're going to do to us? If they mocked Him and rejected Him, they're going to do the same to us.

We must be armed with an attitude that will take up the cross and follow Jesus no matter what the cost or the price that is paid. Our attitudes are weapons. Wrong attitudes will lead to defeat, and a right attitude will lead to victory. So we need to arm ourselves with a willingness to suffer for righteousness' sake.

Let me give you the second thing you need to arm yourself with, verse 2. Arm yourself with the right ambitions. I want you to notice in verse 2. We "no longer should live the rest of our lives..."—so life is short, and we don't want to live how? Verse 2—"...in the lusts of men, but..."—rather the contrast, we want to live—"...to the will of God." Life is short. How many of you old folks like me realize that life is short; right? Amen? All the old people say, "Amen. Preach it brother." I was in high school just yesterday. Really. And it's like where did it go? It just goes so fast. The Bible says life is like a vapor of smoke that appears for a time and then vanishes away. It's like a flower that grows up fresh in the morning and then it withers with the noon heat.

Now I know that when you're young you're waiting forever to get out of middle school, and you get into high school, and you want to get into college, and you want to get married and....I'll stop right there. You get kids and you're working and boom! You got one foot in the grave. Like "Ahh! I'm not ready!" Empty nest. Kids get married. Everyone's gone. Just you and your wife looking at each other. "This is boring. What do we do?" Sorry about that. I'm not trying to save myself; I actually love looking at my wife. I love being together. I love the time we have together. I'm enjoying just her and I in the house. It's a blessing. Blessed time. But we do miss our kids. And it's difficult.

Now the mentality here is, since life is short, don't spend it doing the lust of the flesh or the will of man. Did you notice the contrast in that verse? We have two: the lust of man or the will of God. And I've circled both of those. Again, that's your choice. Either you choose to live in the lust of your sinful flesh, the will of man, your will, not God's—that's what Satan said. "My will not God's." Jesus said "Thy will, not Mine." We need to have a Christ-like mentality where we yield our will to God's, willing to do what He wants us to do. So we either choose the lust of men or the will of God.

I love that old song we sing. "Have Thine own way, Lord. Have Thine own way. Thou art the Potter. I am the..."—what?—"...clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still." Have you ever prayed that prayer? Have you ever from the bottom of your heart said, "Lord, I'll go where You want me to go. I'll do what You want me to do. I'll be what You want me to be. Have Your way, Lord." That's the smartest thing you could do with your life. For you to try to find your life, the Bible says you'll lose it in the process. But if you lose your life for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, the Bible says you will find your life. Too many times, even Christians, once they've trusted Christ, are still trying to live for themselves. They're living carnally, fleshly, and they're not really living obediently to the will of God.

What is your ambition? Is your ambition, your aim, to do and obey God's will? You say, "Well, Pastor Miller, I wish I knew God's will. I don't know who to marry. I don't know what college to go to. I don't know if I should buy this house. I don't know where I should live." And you're wondering about God's will.

This is where you start; you open the Bible. And whatever the Bible says is God's will for you, universally for all Christians, you do that. You know, the Bible is very clear. It says this is the will of God for you, speaking of all Christians, "that you abstain from sexual immorality." That's God's will for you. Don't tell me you're looking for God's will, if you're living a sexually promiscuous life. You know, God's will for you is that you be saved. God's "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." If you haven't trusted Jesus Christ, if you haven't been born again, that's God's will for you. God's will is that you pray and you not faint. There's all kinds of things stated in the Bible that we can align ourselves with in the will of God.

And once we do what the Bible tells us to do, then God will begin to lead us individually and personally in our lives. Too many people are neglecting God's Word and yet wanting God's will. So we need to arm ourselves with this ambition. "God, I want Your will. And even if it costs me, even if my friends don't like me, even if I lose my job, even if my wife doesn't understand, or my husband doesn't understand, or my kids don't understand, Lord, I will follow You. And I will be obedient to You." Arm yourself.

Here's the third thing we need to arm ourselves with. Write this down. It's in verse 3. Arm yourself with the right activities. Be doing the right things. Don't do what you used to do, but do the right things. Notice in verse 3. He said "For." So at the end of verse 2, he said they're living according to "the lusts of men" rather than "the will of God. For the time past our life..."—verse 3—"...may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in..."—and he names specific sins that we lived in before we were saved—"...lasciviousness, lusts, excessive wine, revelings, banquetings, and..."—last but not least, verse 3—"...abominable idolatries." Now he's describing their former lifestyle. And he's saying if you're going to be able to stand against persecution and opposition, then you don't want to go back and live the way that you used to live.

Remember when you got saved? The Bible says, "Old things pass away and all things become..."—what?—"...new." You become a new creation. You've got a new life. You've got a new love. You've got a new heart. Things you used to love you now hate. Things you used to hate you now love. I remember when I first got saved. I never thought I'd be going to church. And I looked around and I'm in church and I like it. "Hey, I'm in church. I'm with Christians and I don't think they're weird. I'm one of them. I'm praying. I'm reading the Bible and it's amazing. Like, what's happened?" God took my heart of stone out, and He gave me a new heart of flesh, a heart that loves Him and wants Him and seeks Him. And my life began to change. So I don't want to go back to my old lifestyle.

Now I want to point out these sins that are listed there. There are six of them. I'm reading from the King James translation. Lasciviousness. That is lewdness of any kind. Unrestrained

indulgence, primarily in sexual immorality. The second sin named is lust, which is the gratification of unlawful appetites of any kind. Here probably referring to sexual sin, again, in context. And then, thirdly, excess of wine, or should be translated drunkenness. It often leads to weakening of willpower and the yielding of immorality.

I meet Christians all the time. "Oh, I just have a glass of wine here or there with my dinner." And that's okay. And it is true that the Bible doesn't say you have to completely abstain. Let me give you some words of wisdom. Be careful. You know, you can do something that's not clearly said to be wrong in the Bible, but it can be sin if it stumbles someone else, if it offends someone else. "Well, I don't care if it offends them. It's okay. I think it's right. And I'm going to have a drink here or there, and if they don't like it, they can lump it." The Bible says, then you're not walking in love. You're not thinking about other people. And that's true of all Christian liberty. Exercise your liberty but be careful that it doesn't bring you back into bondage. I've seen too many Christians. "Well, I just have a drink once in a while." And then it's another drink and another drink and another. The next thing you know, they are actually getting intoxicated. And then in order to drink, they're hanging out with people who they shouldn't be hanging out with. And then they start doing things they shouldn't be doing. And it lowers their inhibitions. And one step leads to another. Paul says, "All things are lawful, but I won't be under the power of anything." "All things are lawful, but all things do not edify, do not glorify." And if it causes someone to stumble, then I need to step back. Here it's clearly drunkenness, excess of wine.

And then, fourthly, revelings. Now the word "revelings" could be literally translated, and is in some modern translations, "orgies." Drunken, sexually immoral, perverted parties. Pretty much describing what many people did before they got saved. A drunken orgy.

And then banqueting. I go to banquets; that's not a big deal. But the Greek word translated banqueting there means carousals. It's wild drinking parties that lead to sinful and wild behavior. And the Greek word actually denotes the idea of outwardly and publicly. You get drunk in the street, and you're reveling and partying at wild outside parties.

And then last but not least, sixthly, abominable idolatries. Notice it there in verse 3. That's the worship of idols with the associated sexual and drunken behavior. Now in the Roman-Greco world, much of their worship, their idolatry, involved sensuality. They actually worshipped sex and the reproductive system. And they drank and they worshipped the God Bacchus. And they worshipped Aphrodite. And they worshipped Mammon.

Do you know that mankind hasn't changed? Isn't it interesting that when we're reading the words that Peter penned almost 2,000 years ago, mankind hasn't changed. They're still having drunken parties. They're still having drunken orgies. They're still wild and crazy, because man's heart hasn't changed. And they're still worshipping the false gods of our world. They still worship the god Bacchus, the god of wine. They still worship the goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of sex and sensual pleasure. They still worship the god Mammon, money and possessions. There are people in the world today who worship sex and money and possessions and alcohol. Pretty much describes Hollywood; huh? Pretty much describes the

worldly mentality; live to have fun, live to have pleasure. There are no moral absolutes. Just get rid of all restraints.

And these Christians were saved out of that culture. We in America today are slipping back into that same kind of culture. You see some of the college parties and the drinking that goes on and the sexual immorality on the college campuses. And all the crazy, perverted things going on in the sin-sick world of ours. Man has not changed.

Arm yourself with worshipping the true and living God, Who says, "Be ye holy, because I am holy." You got that? If you are a Christian and you are following the true and living God, you're not to live like you did in your BC days—before Christ. You're to be a holy, devoted individual to God. That doesn't mean you have to wear a robe, that doesn't mean you have to cut your hair. That means that you're separating your life from the world unto God. It doesn't mean you come out of the world. It means that you realize that you're no longer part of this world. I'm a child of God. I have a new family. I have a new Father. I'm not to be like I used to be. Be holy. Live a holy life. You know, a holy life is a powerful weapon in the hand of God. Just as an unholy life is a powerful weapon in the hand of Satan. A professing Christian who is living an unholy life does a lot of damage, just as a Christian who lives a holy life does a lot of good.

Now let me give you the fourth thing you need to arm yourself with. You need to, fourthly, arm yourself with the right associations. Note that in verse 4. Look at it with me. He says, "Wherein they..."—that is, these unbelievers, these ungodly individuals, who are living according to the flesh, the sin nature, the will of man, the lust of man—"...think it strange that you..."—that is, the Christian—"...run not with them to the same excess of riot..."—and what do they do?"—"...speaking evil of you." They think you've lost your marbles! "You're crazy! You don't want to party anymore? You don't want to have fun anymore?"

Now take this one verse. Notice they think it "strange." The word is "astonished." They're perplexed. You get saved and your friends say, "Hey, you want to party?" "Nah, I don't do that anymore." "What? Are you crazy?! You don't want to get drunk?" "Uh, no. Uh, I'm a Christian now." "You've lost your mind!" "No. I've found my mind. You're the one who's crazy." I mean, we used to say "get wasted." Think how stupid. "Yah, let's get wasted." You talk about airheads. Damaged what little brain we had. "Wow! Wasn't that awesome last night?" "I don't know; I don't remember anything. What'd we do?" "Oh."

And now that you're in your right mind, you're thinking correctly. And you know, life is short and God is holy and you want to live for eternity, they think you're crazy. You're the person who has lost his marbles. "Oh, they went kooky; they found Jesus. Oh, they're not thinking straight. They're actually going to church on Wednesday night. Something's really messed up with them. They're not doing drugs anymore. What's with that?"

They think it's strange that you "don't run..."—notice that in verse 4—"...to the same excess of riot." Those words "excess of riot" means overflowing dissipation. You don't just live wantonly. It's the same word used for the prodigal son, who wrecked his life on riotous living.

Wantonness, reckless, prodigal. The word “prodigal” means wasteful living. And then they “speak evil of you.” It means they heap abuse on you verbally, or they attack you or maybe even persecute you. They call you names. They slander you. Now remember, you are a child of God. You have a new family, so you have a new association.

Now, Peter’s not saying that as Christians we don’t interact with non-Christians. If you go out to a restaurant this afternoon, you don’t say, “Do you have a sanctified section? We are Holy Spirit filled Christians. And we would like a waitress who is filled with the Holy Ghost.” No. You sit with all the heathen. But you don’t think like them and talk like them.

I remember breaking away from my old crowd for a couple of reasons. One of them was their language. I didn’t want to listen to their filthy language anymore. It was so horrible. You know, it’s funny when you’re not a Christian, you have that pleasure in sinning. But once you become a Christian, it’s not a pleasure; it’s a burden. It’s a weight. I don’t want to hear that. I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to be there anymore. And as much as you love these people, you have to back away from them.

Psalms 1 says, “Blessed...”—or, oh how happy—“...is the man...”—or the woman—“...who...”—listen carefully—“...walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...”—be careful who you hang out with—“...doesn’t stand in the way with sinners and doesn’t find themselves seated in the seat of the scornful. Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” You know, it starts off very subtly. You’re just walking with them, going out to lunch with them, hanging out with them. Maybe a little bit more than you do with your Christian friends, or fellowshiping with believers or attending prayer meetings. You’re attending business meetings all the time where there’s alcohol and smutty jokes, and if you want to be part of that group, then you have to laugh at their humor, which is not funny. And they’re offended by the fact that you don’t think it’s funny, because you’re a “holy Joe.” And this is just the way it happens. You find yourself standing and then seated in the seat of the scornful.

If you’re a child of God, you’re not at home in this world anymore. But I’d rather walk a lonely road with Jesus than be without Him in a crowd. Amen? It’s so important. In Romans 12 it says, “Don’t be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Even Peter, who wrote these words, was warming himself by the enemy’s fire when Jesus was being tried in the court of Caiaphas. He followed afar off. He sat down with the enemy. And they said, “You’re one of His disciples! Aren’t you a Christian?” Moment of decision; sin or righteousness. What did Peter do? “No, I don’t know the guy! I’m not a disciple. No, I’m not a follower of Christ! No, I don’t even know this guy!” “Are you sure? Surely you’re one of His disciples. You’re a Galilean. Your speech betrays you. You have that Galilean twang. You’ve got that hillbilly Galilean accent.” And what did Peter begin to do? Curse and to swear. Oh, man. Peter wrote this book. He wrote 1 Peter. “I don’t blankety blank even know Him. I swear blankety blank I’m not one of His followers.” Oh, Peter. And then like a knife cutting through that still morning air, the rooster crowed. And it cut to Peter’s heart, and he went out and wept bitterly. “I failed.” Well, Peter, you started when you weren’t praying and should have been praying. And then you followed afar off when you should have been close, and then you’re

hanging out in the wrong place.

"I don't know why I keep falling prey to temptation and sin." "What do you do?" "I just hang out at the Fuzzy Frog and shoot pool. Smell the brew. I don't drink anymore. I just like to hang out with the guys. I just like to have a lemonade." Yah. You start walking, and then you start standing and then you're sitting down. Get in the Word of God. Take a stand for truth. It's so very important. You have a decision: sin or righteousness. So we need to have the right kind of association.

Here's last, but not least. Number five. Write this down. Verses 5 and 6. Arm yourself—one last weapon to arm yourself with—the right assurance. Now the background for this is verses 5 and 6. I want you to look at it with me again. Peter says "Who..."—that is, these wicked, ungodly individuals who walk according to the will of the flesh—"...shall give an account to Him that is ready to judge the alive and the dead"—that is, God. There is judgment coming for them. Verse 6. "For this cause..."—because judgment is coming on the unbelieving, Christ-rejecting world—"...was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." You can be absolutely sure, verse 5, that a day of judgment and a day of reckoning is coming.

I want you to listen to me very carefully. That's what this verse is saying, and it's true. The Bible makes it very clear that if you reject Jesus Christ, if you live according to your sinful lusts and you go your own way, one day you will stand before God, and you will be judged for your sin. One day every human being will give an account of their life to God. You go, "I can't believe you're turning into some kind of hell-fire, judgment preacher." That's what I'm doing right now, because that's what this text is all about. And it's because I love you that I want you to know today that if you're here and you're not a Christian, you will die, and the statistics on death are quite impressive. And you will stand before God, because this is what the Bible says. "It's appointed unto everyone once to die, and after this..."—the what?—"...the judgment." And if life is short, and death is certain and judgment is real, what you should do is get right with God right now. Amen? Don't put it off.

And when he comes to the end of this passage trying to fortify and strengthen these persecuted, suffering saints, he said you can have assurance that God's going to take care of those wicked persecutors. You can have absolute assurance that one day they're going to stand before God. And even those who are alive—they will stand before God. If they're alive when the Lord comes back at the Second Coming, He'll separate them as the sheep from the goats. And the goats will go into everlasting fire, but the sheep will go into the kingdom of God. If you die before Jesus Christ returns in the Second Coming, it tells you that at the end of the 1,000 year millennial reign of Christ, you will be resurrected. The wicked dead will be resurrected, and you will stand before what's called the Great White Throne of judgment. And all of the books will be opened. And if your name is not found written in that book, you'll be cast alive into the lake of fire. Jesus said it's a place where the worm dies not, the fire's never quenched, there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." And what a horrible thing that is.

“You know, I can’t believe that a God of love would send anyone to hell.” He sends no one to hell. He sent His Son to die to save you from hell. And He’s holding out His hand right now saying, “Trust in Me. Believe in Me. Come to Me.” And you can spend eternity in heaven. If you—underline the word “you”—if you say no to God’s provision of Jesus Christ dying on the cross for your sins, then you will go to hell. That’s what the Bible teaches. There’s no way to avoid that. Everyone dies, and you either go to heaven or you go to hell. And what determines where you will spend eternity is your relationship to God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

I want you to notice in verse 6, “For this cause” or literally, “For this reason.” Because a judgment day is coming, we “preach the Gospel.” The Gospel is that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, that Jesus was buried, that Jesus rose again from the dead. That’s the good news. The bad news is you’re a sinner and judgment’s coming. The good news is God has made provision through Jesus Christ. When He died, He actually took your place and paid for your penalty. But you must accept it by faith and trust in Him.

So because judgment day is coming, verse 6, “We preach the Gospel.” And then a phrase that confuses people in verse 6, “them that are dead.” “We preach the Gospel to them that are dead.” He’s not talking about Jesus descending into hell and preaching to dead people or spirits. What Peter is actually saying there is people who are now dead when he writes these words, but they were alive when they heard the Gospel. And they heard the Gospel and they believed in Jesus Christ. They responded to the Gospel. Now they’ve died, no doubt, because they were persecuted for righteousness. And it said that they were “judged according to men in the flesh.” That’s their judgment; they died. And notice, lastly, “but live according to God in the spirit.” In other words, they’re alive with God in heaven.

You know, the worst thing that could happen to you as a Christian is the best thing that could happen to you. Do you know if somebody kills you for your faith in Jesus Christ, guess where you’re going? To heaven. Praise God! Amen? You’re going to leave this earth. Your hope is in heaven. You have nothing to fear. They can kill your body but they can’t kill your soul. You have eternal life. And the moment you trust in Jesus Christ, you enter into that life eternal. Which isn’t just quantity; it’s quality. It’s a new sphere. It’s a new dimension where you’re really living. You have His joy and His love and His peace. Yes, the Christian life can face opposition and difficulty and hardship, because we live in a world that hates God. But we’re going to be with God for all eternity, so we don’t need to be afraid.

There’s two things you can have assurance of. Number one, unbelievers will stand and be judged for their sin. And God will take care of it, so we don’t need to slit their tires. I know we’d want to. We don’t need to call them names, say ugly things on your Facebook page about them. The Bible says, “‘Vengeance is mine. I will repay,’ says the Lord.” In other words, don’t beat them up in the name of Jesus. Put it in God’s hands. God will vindicate. God will judge. God will take care of it.

And the second thing we can have assurance of—If they persecute us and should they kill us, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” Amen? What a great hope that is.

Did you know that this morning you can have absolute assurance that if you die, you're going to go to heaven? And that's my closing question. Do you know that? Do you have assurance? Do you have the assurance that if you died right now, you would go to heaven? There are some of you who are here who haven't really been born again. You haven't really trusted Jesus Christ. Maybe you're religious. Maybe you come to church. Maybe you come to this church. Maybe you sing the songs. Maybe you read the Bible. Maybe you even have a Christian haircut. And you've been baptized. And you can do those things and still not be saved. A Christian is a person who has the life of God in their soul. Do you have the life of God in your soul today? Do you know that your sins have been forgiven and you've truly trusted Jesus Christ? Do you know that if you die you would go to heaven? No one has a lease on life. None of us can guarantee we'll be here tomorrow. I don't care if you're young, old or middle aged. It doesn't matter. No one has a lease on life. No one knows. Are you ready to die? Have you trusted Jesus Christ? Are your sins forgiven? And if not, why not?

I'm going to give you an opportunity right now before we leave this morning. If you haven't trusted Jesus Christ and had your sins forgiven and have the life of God in your soul and be given a new nature, a new heart, a new life, and you don't know that when you die, you'll go to heaven, I'm going to give you an opportunity right now, right here, to say, "Jesus, come into my heart. Forgive my sins and be my Savior." And what you're going to do is say, "I'm tired of living for myself, and I want to turn from sin and I want to follow Christ. I'm going to turn from selfishness and the lust of my flesh, my drunkenness, my lasciviousness, my greed, my materialism, my pride, my anger, my bitterness, my hatred, all the hurts of my past—I'm going to turn and reach out right now to say, "Jesus, I receive what you have to give me: the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven and eternal life."

If you're here this morning and you haven't trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, if you haven't bowed your heart and your knee before Him, this morning, "Now is the day of salvation." Today is the accepted time.