

**SET A
PART:
HOLY
LIVING
IN 1
PETER**

An Easter Season Sermon Series
by Ryan Stratton

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1 Peter 1:1-5,13-16,22-25 NIV

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, **2** who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, **5** who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. **6** In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. **7** These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

13 Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. **14** As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. **15** But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; **16** for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. **23** For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. **24** For,

"All people are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,

25 but the word of the Lord endures forever."

And this is the word that was preached to you.

Designed for a Reason

8 days ago we celebrated the incredible, powerful resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because Christ is risen and alive, nothing is the same. The powers of hell and darkness and death are defeated. We have the opportunity to become a new creation and live into the grace of God that is poured out for all people.

The question is, “how different are you really after Easter?” How did you live your life on Monday, the day after Easter? Is the reality of the resurrection changing your life to pay more attention to the power of the Kingdom of God?

This has been a long quarantine/shelter-in-place so far. I’m not sure how long this will last. What is influencing your mind and your thoughts and your attitude right now? There is a show on Netflix that is really popular right now called “Tiger King”. There are other shows people are binge watching as well. With these shows, the music we listen to, the books/articles/magazines/devotionals we may read, are we filling our head and our heart with the wisdom of God? Or are we allowing ourselves to fall prey to the enemy by having ourselves filled with junk?

It is challenging to keep the purpose and mission of our lives in focus. Even more challenging to try and socialize with the people we need to because of the situation right now. But, even though we are not able to live what we call a “normal” life right now, we still have a high purpose, a high calling, a holy way Christ is calling us to live.

We’re beginning a 5 week series on the letter of 1 Peter today. One of the things I love about this letter is the hope that is grounded within it. That hope is Jesus Christ himself. Throughout the letter, we are reminded the reward is Christ himself. We’re not seeking to be blessed by God. We are seeking to be blessed because of the presence of Christ that comes in and changes our life.

There has been debate in the last couple centuries who the author of this letter is. It could have been written by Peter, the apostle, himself. It could have been written by one of his followers. *But as a commentator says, "Whether it was written by Peter or by a later Christian in his name, the epistle helps to strengthen Christians in times of distress; sets their lives within the history of God's activity, which moves from creation to consummation; holds up the atoning death of Jesus Christ; and encourages mutual love among Christian people and forbearance of enemies."*

The author is writing to exiles (Christians scattered throughout the Roman empire), comparing the people to the diaspora (Jewish exile and deportation within the Old Testament). They are undergoing distress and challenges. The author is seeking to encourage and help them remember who they are in Christ and remember the hope they have in Christ.

So, what is this letter saying?

At the beginning of this letter, the people are called "chosen" according to the "foreknowledge" of God. This is an interesting phrase. There is so much within this letter the author is asking the reader to recall from the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament.

"Chosen" comes from the time of Abraham and the time of the Exodus. God has chosen and set a part the Israelite people. Telling the Christian believers they are part of the "chosen" is a way of reminding them they are part of the family of Abraham and therefore entitled to the promises (as well as curses) of the covenant God made with the Israelites.

"Foreknowledge" is reminding the people of God's knowing about them even before they were born. In a way, we can think of the calling of the prophet Jeremiah, "before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart;" (Jeremiah 1:5 NIV) This is a reminder God

has known these people would be in this situation and believe in Jesus. In other words, God is not surprised these “exiles” are undergoing the circumstances they’re in. God is not surprised by anything today, either.

Beginning the letter in this manner helps to give hope to the reader by reminding them what God thinks about them and that God has not forgotten them.

Then, as if this were not enough, Peter goes into praising God!

Think about the situation you’re in right now. You and I do not know everything that is going on. We do not know what everyone is doing. We do not know everything. Peter begins with praising God in the uncertainty. Where do our minds and thoughts go? What do we find ourselves saying about other people? It is easy to focus on things we do not think are right, or go against what we want; but how would our outcome be if we, instead, focused on praising God?

Can you imagine an entire family, an entire church, all the time, an entire community, an entire nation/world giving praise to God instead of complaining that things are not like we would like? What does that look like?

While he is giving praise to God, he talks about the inheritance, in heaven, kept for God’s people. Now THAT is something we love to talk about because it is something we can receive. But what if we have it backwards? Often we think about *getting* rewards and living on streets of gold, but this is not the goal of life. The goal of life is not even heaven itself. The goal of life is not a *what*. The goal of life is a *who*. That *who* is Jesus Christ himself. Christ is our reward. He is who we aim for. When we aim for Christ, then we get to experience the incredible joy and blessing that comes from the gospel message. *Dallas Willard says, “The gospel is less about how to get to Heaven after you die, and more about how to live in the Kingdom of Heaven before you die.”*

Scripture never says we will be without troubles or struggles of any kind. In fact, scripture says we will live with struggles. What matters is not WHAT struggles we face but HOW we face them.

If our aim is Christ, and only Christ, himself, then we will follow him which does lead to new life but not without going through the cross. But scripture also reminds us that our heavenly character is forged through the fires of struggles:

“These [struggles/trials/grief] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (1 Peter 1:7 NIV)

The Apostle Paul says this in his letter to the Romans:

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; character, hope.” (Romans 5:3-4 NIV)

How is this time shaping you and your walk with Christ and way of life? Remember, Peter is reminding the people their goal is Christ himself.

Then, Peter begins talking about the prophets, and the people who taught and proclaimed to them the gospel. He is reminding them the important thing these prophets (pastors/preachers) have done is point the people to Jesus Christ.

When we are pointed to the reality of Christ, we see our lives are meant to be lived set apart / holy. This means we look different from the rest of the world. We seek the things of heaven instead of dwelling on the things of earth. The key word is obedience.

In Exodus 19:5, God is speaking to Moses to tell the Israelite people, “Now, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession.”

He was speaking to the Israelite people then, but remember the word “chosen” Peter used at the beginning of this letter? The people believing in and belonging to Christ are not part of the lineage of Abraham which means we are God’s “treasured possessions” as well.

But we cannot let this go to our head in any way. We always have to be down to earth and being obedient to Jesus, his teachings, and his mission in this world/life.

Remaining obedient to the voice, covenant, and teachings of God shows the world God. We’ll talk about what it means to be a royal priest of God in this world next week.

For now, know this...you and I have been designed for a purpose—to be set apart, to praise God, to live holy lives by being obedient to everything God says. This is not always easy. There will be times we have to struggle because of our faith. But see, Jesus was never looking for disciples just when it was convenient. He was looking for full-on, full-in disciples who gave their entire life to him.

The power of the resurrection is demonstrated when we see the joy and the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven that is all around us. The power is not giving into the focus on anything negative. The true power is focusing on the joy and glory of Christ. When we fully live into this power, then we can fully know the glorious inheritance awaiting us, that has been promised.

We know the promises of God are true because his word endures forever.

And as chapter one of 1 Peter ends so we end today, “And this is the word that was preached to you.”

Let's pray...

Glorious God,

Our lives are meant to be lived for you. Yet we constantly strive to do our own thing. Call to us and tell us who we are in you. Give us the power, and the courage, to live a holy life in complete obedience to you. I pray those praying right now, are ready to turn their life over to you—because that is where REAL life is. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

1 Peter 2:1-5, 9-17, 20-25 NIV

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

...

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

...

²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² “He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵ For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Called For A Purpose

We celebrated Jesus' resurrection a couple weeks ago. Have you recovered from Easter? I'd really hope not because we should never be the same after we experience the truth of Christ's resurrection. We now live in a "new normal" because of Christ!

The story is told of a zoo that was noted for their great collection of different animals. One day the gorilla died, and to keep up the appearance of a full range of animals, the zookeeper hired a man to wear a gorilla suit and fill in for the dead animal. It was his first day on the job, and the man didn't know how to act like a gorilla very well. As he tried to move convincingly, he got too close to the wall of the enclosure and tripped and fell into the lion exhibit. He began to scream, convinced his life was over...until the lion spoke to him: "Be quiet, or you're going to get us both fired!"

How many of us have felt like we have been pretending to be something we're not just to feel like we have a purpose in life? How many of us would make fools of ourselves just to get others to notice us?

Right now, I want all of us to know we do have a high calling, a high purpose in this life. Each one of us was made to honor and glorify God with every aspect of our life.

We continue our look at the letter of 1 Peter, knowing it was not written for us, but also knowing there is truth we can/should apply to our everyday lives.

Last week, we talked about how we were/are all designed for a purpose. We have been designed to be set apart, to praise God, to live holy lives, and to be obedient to everything God says. Because we have been designed in this manner, we now get to look at what we are called to.

Every person, who has professed faith in Christ, was first prompted by the Holy Spirit. God's grace has been at work in and through us, even before we knew it. This is called prevenient grace. Scripture even says, "Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3 NIV)

God has initiated the response we give back to him and when we respond, because of God's grace, our lives begin to shift. We begin to see that everything that goes against God and others is needing to get out of us. "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." (1 Peter 2:1 NIV) There is no room for any of this in the person who believes in Christ because Christ has come for the world, and we are his vessels to share and show his message of hope, redemption, and we also live in a way that our lives, and those around us are re-aligned with God.

To live this way we have to crave the "pure spiritual milk" which is the basics of the message of Christ. Think about the way bible stories are told to children. This is one way we can remember the Lord is good for our growth and nourishment. But then, we have to come to a place where we need more. We have to do the work to be nourished and grow in the faith.

As we grow in our faith, we begin to realize we are being built into something new, into a spiritual house (this can only happen in the context of community since many parts are needed for a house). So, as we come, as a community (even if apart for now), Jesus is building us all into something new, something strong, something made for the Kingdom of Heaven. 2 Corinthians 5:17 reminds us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" This new creation is built upon the strong cornerstone of Jesus Christ, which many will reject completely. The sad reality is, many who say they believe in Christ will still deny/reject him by the lives led. Getting rid of

malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander (talking bad about others), etc. is an important step. This is part of being sanctified, being made holy.

What we've been talking about is not new to the New Testament, or even Jesus' teachings. This has been consistent throughout scripture. Learning the Old Testament is vital to understanding what is meant in the New Testament. Check out Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 8:14, Isaiah 28:16, Exodus 19:6, Hosea 2:23, and so many more.

This is our story.

So, now what?

Now we get to the part of what we are called to...

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10 NIV)

I'm sure many have heard these verses many times. But here is something we have to remember. A "priest" brings the requests of the people to God and represents God in all aspects of life. Sometimes I think we have the concept of the work of a priest backwards. Yes, a priest (pastor, preacher, ect.) does live a life of service. But see, the work of the priest is not to serve people in what they want. The job of the priest is to be God's representatives to the people/world. Yes, priests (pastors, preachers, etc.) serve; but this service is done in a way that serves his desires of God. If there is anything that does not glorify God, then that should not be done. The goal is to honor and serve God and give glory to God and him alone in everything we do.

A difference in priest/pastor/preacher, etc. and a prophet is that a prophet brings God to the people and proclaims what God says.

Now, through all of this, the author is tying the story of the Christian believers to the story of the Exodus (“Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”) The Israelites had no identity when slaves, but when they were freed (to be in service to God), they had an identity. This is your story and my story too. Now we have an identity because of Christ!

This is our calling, to be God’s representatives in the world and bring the people to God through Jesus Christ. This is our mission (making disciples) and this is what transforms the world.

We don’t have to dress up in a gorilla suit and pretend anything. We clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ and show him to the world!

Now, we actually have to live what we preach/teach/say we believe. Peter goes on to say that the life worth living is in complete obedience to God and obeying him and him alone.

So we

- Abstain from sinful desire
- Live such good lives people know God through our works and words (see also Jesus in Matthew 5:16)
- Submit ourselves to the governing authorities
- Do not repay evil for evil (in any way)
- WHEN we suffer (for our faith in Christ), do so joyfully without any complaints.
- Always remember you belong to Christ

If you ever wondered what you were called to do with your life, that is it. We are called to represent God to all we come in contact with. We are called to represent God by everything we do, say, think. We are called to

not do anything that is different from scripture. We are called to be free people who live in the service to God and God alone.

We are all called for a purpose, and this is what we're called to.

Let's pray...

Holy and Almighty God, we know you have called us to a high calling, to be set apart in this world and to live holy lives serving you. Give us the strength and courage to share and show your mercy to everyone we come in contact with. Guide us to bring those around us to your throne, to your grace. Even in times like this, we can still find ways to share and show your Kingdom that is all around us. It is in the powerful name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.

1 Peter 3:8-12, 15-22 NIV

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For,

“Whoever would love life
and see good days

must keep their tongue from evil
and their lips from deceitful speech.

¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good;
they must seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Reason For Hope

How are you holding up this week? Where have you seen glimpses of hope in your own life? Think of how you have maybe seen others perk up just because you offered them hope.

Looking at this letter of 1 Peter, we see things really haven't changed much in our world. Christians still get isolated and scattered. Some even give lip service only to their faith. We also see relationships in jeopardy, people suffering for doing what is good, and so much more! If we know the source of hope, and of life, why is so much still marred and messed up in this world, in our own community (wherever you might live)?

If I were to ask you what is the greatest hope in this world, what would you say? (Keep in mind the Sunday School answer is Jesus, and yes this is actually the correct answer). But look at how we live our lives. Is Jesus the source of hope for you? What puts you in a better mood: praying/reading scripture, listening to music, watching your favorite movie/show, eating at your favorite restaurant, what helps your mood change?

Part of what's happening is that we are actually seeking for some thing, some experience, some person to make us happy, to complete us. When we do this, we will be misled and misdirected every day. Think about this. What sounds better to you: finding ways to spend time with Jesus (could mean volunteering), or hanging out with your friends and finding something to do? We, most of us, would choose finding time to spend with our friends or do something entertaining. Why? Because we love to be entertained, we love to have fun. And deep within us, we are more inclined to make sure we have fun.

Why do we do this? Because, on some level, we have misunderstood what it means to be like Christ. Many people think they have to do everything different from the rest of culture. They feel guilty when they

don't read the Bible. I hear people say they "should pray more" than they do.

Unfortunately, we have turned the Christian life into a guilt fest, when we should be people of hope. When we read and study through the letter of 1 Peter, we can see a hope-filled way of life. Christians are supposed to be the most joy-filled people in the world, because we know the greatest hope: Christ. We do not have to avoid parties or anything like that. Remember, Christ went to parties (he even kept the wedding party going one time...check out John 2), he went to dinner parties, hung out with the roughest people, and so much more. Yet, Christ did not lose or compromise his integrity, and that's how we're supposed to live as well...by being able to give glory to and glorify God with ALL aspects of our life.

Chapter 3 is no different. We have already seen how we're designed for a purpose and have a high calling in this life. Chapter 3 begins by saying husbands and wives should submit/love each other *in the same way* as Christ. What does this mean?

In the same way Jesus was obedient to God, the Father, and submitted his life to him and him alone...In the same way Jesus loved by laying down his life...that is how we are supposed to be in relationship with one another. Too much breaks down when we end up living for what makes us, and us alone, feel good, instead of valuing the other person's needs/wants/desires. A great book resource is help work through this concept would be *The Five Love Languages*. I know my wife's love language is acts of service. Mine are quality time and (though I don't want to admit it) words of affirmation. How we relate to one another should be the same way Christ relates to others.

We see this driven home in verses 8-9: "Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary,

repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.” How many of us could live this way all the time?

It is so much easier to live thinking we have to make sure people “get what’s coming to them” or finding ways to seek revenge. But when we seek after things like that, our minds, and our spirits, get warped and turn into something we were never meant to be, so we become more negative, more cynical, more evil.

If we live, always “prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have,” think of how different we’ll see the world, see each other, see our circumstances. If you don’t feel like your life is too far from God to receive hope, then those around you aren’t too far from God either. This is why we constantly seek to share and show the kingdom because we will constantly be around people who believe the lie they are too far gone, or too hopeless, to receive anything good.

Our hope, and our aim is the person of Jesus Christ. I saw this quote on Facebook and thought it was good: *“You can tell who is truly a Christian from the fact they love Jesus for who he is, not what he has done for them.”* I would also add “for how Jesus is changing and using that person for the good of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Yes, Jesus has done incredible things for people: freed from drugs, brought out of depression, freed from debt. You name it. I know he has done so much for you too!

However, if we constantly focus on what Jesus has *done* for us, we will miss out on who he is and we will constantly try to ask Jesus for things for the here and now: healings, finances, parking spots, etc.

Notice how he taught his disciples to pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.” We give God praise for who he is, and this helps keep our identity in perspective also. Instead of acting like God is our wish-fulfiller, or prayer answer dispenser (let’s face it we all do), think about how much time we spend devoted to praising God (Christ) for who he is.

So, who is Jesus Christ?

If I were to ask you who he is, what would you say? I know answers revolve around what Christ has done for you. What could you say, right now, about how good Christ has been to you (not just in a vague way)?

Our lives are meant to imitate Christ. How we view/express/explain Christ is how we desire our lives to be lived (whether we realize it or not). This is why it is so important to not focus so much on what Christ has done because when others don’t meet our expectations, we’ll get upset with them. But when we know who Christ is, maybe when others don’t meet our expectations, we can see how Christ is using that person/people groups.

Our lives are meant to glorify God instead of living in/for the praise of others. And this will cause unrest/suffering to the believer in many ways.

Yes, people will mock your faith and mine. People will say you and I are close-minded for believing in Christ. We should always demonstrate and exemplify compassion always. Why? Because of who Christ is. Because of what Christ has done. Because we are to imitate Christ.

Take another look at verses 18-22:

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—²⁰to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In

it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”

Notice 3 big words: he SUFFERED...he was made ALIVE...everything is in SUBMISSION to him

Because of Christ, you and I can know what it means to be ALIVE. Even through sufferings, trials, etc., we can know the greatest source of hope...the source of ALL life. The world and everything in it belongs to him. He has claimed you.

Live with this identity of being claimed by Christ and imitate him in all you do, say, and think.

And always be ready to share why you have hope. You never know who needs to hear it.

Let’s pray...

Gracious God, too often we seek you for what you do for us. Help us praise you more because of who you are. You are the greatest source of hope in this world. Nothing compares to you. You have shown us the way to life and how to live by sending Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose again for us. Guide us into a relationship with him and recreate us so we imitate Christ every day. We cannot do this without your power working in and through us. I pray we seek to honor and glorify you with our lives. AMEN.

1 Peter 4:1-4, 7-14, 19 NIV

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. ²As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.

⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹If 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.

¹²Dear 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. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

¹⁹So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Way of Life

We've been on this journey through the letter of 1 Peter. I call it a journey because we are taking it step by step, chapter by chapter. So often we read without taking the time to digest the meaning of the passage.

The Christian life is one that is forged through the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the person. We cannot live this life on our own. We have to be reliant on the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in and working through each one of us.

A couple of days ago, we had a bad thunderstorm in the middle of the night. This caused our power to go out. When I woke up, I tried to make sure it wasn't just the breakers out. I even drove to see who else was without power. I had many things running through my head that morning: how is Amanda going to finish the work she needs to do, how are we going to "cook" our food, We can't really open the refrigerator or freezer, I know the toilets are going to be used, We also need to be able to wash our hands, and so much more...

It is challenging to live our lives without any power. How many of you, who follow Christ, attempt to live your life in your own power, in your own resources, in your own way? We all do. Why? Because we would rather be in control. Why? It all boils down to a trust issue all people have.

Look at chapter 4 in 1 Peter:

We've already talked about how God designed us for a purpose, called us into living a holy life, how we always have a reason for our hope. Now, chapter 4 begins with this word "therefore."

To understand what this means, we have to go back to right before the “therefore.” Peter writes, “It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—*with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*” (1 Peter 3:22 NIV)

Everything is in submission to Christ. *Therefore* we are to “arm ourselves with the same attitude” (1 Peter 4:1) of Christ NO MATTER what is going on in our lives. The Apostle Paul, in Philippians 2, outlines what the *attitude*, the *mind of Christ* is:

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

That is what it means to have the *mind* and *attitude* of Jesus. So, what does this look like in our everyday lives? How can we live with this *mind* and *attitude*? 1 Peter 4 basically breaks down into three things:

- 1) Watch how you spend your time
- 2) Have a disciplined mind
- 3) Rejoice always and trust God

Now, these may seem easy to understand and do not need any explanation. But we have to understand these concepts or we go back to living our own way instead of living in the power and life of Jesus Christ.

One of the hardest things to do is pay attention to how you spend your time. NT Wright, Anglican Bishop, author, and professor, talks about a time when he went to the dentist. The dentist suggested he use an electric tooth brush that will help him brush his teeth for 2 minutes twice a day. He says he did the math and that's 4 minutes a day, 7 days a week, which means he'd be brushing his teeth for 24 hours each year! Imagine that, taking a whole day each year JUST to brush your teeth.

See the point is, we spend our time on little things each day. But if we take the time to add up the amount of time spent a year, a lifetime, it is much more than we would have thought. It's like getting a subscription for \$8 a month. That doesn't seem like much. But then you realize that's \$96 a year. Is there something else you or I could be doing with \$96 a year to help further the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven?

How about with gossip (you know "just keeping informed")? How about a little drink? A little time to chill out at the end of the day in front of the TV? Just a little more time spent with a person you know you shouldn't? How about the time we spend angry or frustrated with another person/ourselves?

These, and so much more, may not seem like much time, but add it up and you'd be surprised. These are the things *unbelievers* participate in. Followers of Christ are held to a higher calling and way of life. We are to be the light of the world. Yet, Christians act just like everyone else because it's easier and we don't want to stand out. This is attempting to live the Christian life without the power of the Holy Spirit. It all begins in our minds.

Verse 7 says, "The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray." If we take the time to discipline our minds, then we can see how our lives would surely change from the inside out! 2 Corinthians 10:4 says to take every *thought* and make it captive to Jesus Christ.

Think about that for a second. Peter is telling his readers the end is near. How would it look like if we lived our lives as if this was our last day on earth? Would we pay more attention to ourselves or cultivate our relationships? Selfishness is something *unbelievers* do. Christians live for relationships. This means our minds have to be disciplined (focused, alert, *sober*) so our minds are free to focus on the things that really matter: our relationship with God and our relationship with other people.

This is why Peter writes (verses 8-11):

⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. ¹¹If 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.

When our minds are focused (on the things of God) then this way of life will simply be an outpouring of what God, through the Holy Spirit, has filled us with.

Paul, in Philippians 4 reiterates this point: “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

A mind that is disciplined (through practice...using the means of grace such as prayer, fasting, worship, studying scripture, etc) will be able to focus on the Kingdom of God rather than what is wrong in the world.

Finally, Peter encourages his readers to live a life in complete joy and rejoicing in God. No matter what we are going through, Jesus is there and is with us.

The reader is being encouraged to continue doing good and living a life filled with good works, even if you are suffering. There is something about doing good for another person that 1) helps keep our own life into perspective and able to see the good in the world and 2) shows the world that we can still do good even when things are going wrong because we trust that God is still working and doing good in the world, in and through us.

How have you been able to praise God lately? It's not easy to praise him when we do not live with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The other morning, I had many thoughts about how we were going to live. I began to think of what we needed to do. But I also tried to pray to focus on the good that God is doing. Luckily for us the power did come back on a few hours later and we were able to do what we needed to do.

It is in the momentary, what seems like a, loss of power that we begin to rely on ourselves and what is available here and now.

But a Christian, a follower of Christ, lives a life in complete in complete obedience, submission, and trust in him and him alone.

That is how we can live our life with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray...

God, who is above all, you have given us the power of your Holy Spirit. The only reason we can live our lives, your way, is through your grace. Help us to see you guiding our lives and thoughts to be focused upon you and you alone. So many other things take our focus off of you, but the only way to live is in complete submission and trust in you. Lead us, O God, and let us be the people you have called us to be. It is in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, we pray. AMEN

1 Peter 5 NIV

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them— not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

“God opposes the proud
but shows favor to the humble.”

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Final Greetings

¹² With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

¹³ She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

God Above All

This is the week we finish the letter of 1 Peter. We have talked about many things over the past 5 weeks: we are designed for a purpose, we are called for a purpose, there is always a reason for hope, Christ shows us the way of life, today we focus on leadership and putting God above all.

There is always more in scripture than we can talk about in a sermon time. So I invite you to always go back and study the passage for yourself during the week. I guarantee God will speak to you, through the Holy Spirit, if you are open.

I don't know about you, but I am tired. This time apart has been more exhausting, in many ways, than having a "normal" schedule and normal way of life. I hear many people say they are ready for things to get back to "normal." But "normal" has to be defined.

What I hear people say they are ready for things to get back to "normal", what they are saying is they are ready to go back to the way of life they had before this shelter-in-place / social/physical distancing we have had to do over the past few months. This has been really difficult for many people, many businesses, and many relationships.

What I have not heard a lot is, how is God asking us to use this time to grow closer to him? We keep saying we are ready to get back to normal that I get nervous we haven't been asking God is he wants us to go back to the way things were.

See, getting back to "normal" is a coping mechanism because we are seeking some sort of control back in our lives. We find comfort in our routines. But seeking to get back to "normal" is also selfish in many ways because we are wanting *our* lives to go back to the way they were, free to do as we wish and go where we want.

This is one of the challenges I have as a leader of this church. There are many pressures to bring back the social dimensions of the church sooner rather than later. Why? Because relationships matter. We were not made to be alone or to distance ourselves from others for prolonged periods of time.

At the same time, there is a bigger picture I have to keep in mind and continually assess.

1 Peter 5 goes into the topic of leadership. Now before we continue, know this:

1. Leadership is a spiritual gift
2. Everyone seems to want to be a leader, but the reality is we need more people to follow
3. Leadership is more than just telling people what to do or how to do something
4. Leaders continually learn and find ways to care for their people
5. Leadership requires sacrifice

Peter is writing to the people leading other people. In verses 1-6, he talks about several things about what it means to be a leader

Here's what we have:

Verse 2: be willing to care for the people entrusted to you

Verse 3: be examples to those you care for

Verse 4: Keep your eyes on the prize – Jesus

Verse 5: submit yourself to the elders

Verse 6: be humble

This is important for us to notice because being a leader is so much more than what many think.

A real leader is *caring, an example, fixed on Christ, able to submit and serve, humble*

This is not an exhaustive list, but these are big things.

The leader is caring because it is not just about what he/she wants or what the people want. It is always focusing on Christ and what Christ wants and desires for his people. This means the leader will catch heat and opinions when faced with the task of doing what Christ wants rather than the people. A good example of this is when the people of Israel sought, argued, and told the prophet Samuel they want to be like everyone else, give us a king. (see 1 Samuel).

The leader is an example to the flock. First of all, the image of the people being a sheep is used throughout the scripture, and it is NOT a flattering image. Sheep tend to follow anything that catches their eyes. Shepherds do everything they can to keep the flock safe and pointed in the right direction. The problem comes in when a single sheep decides to go their own way. Then the entire flock can go astray.

Leading with the gentleness of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus, means we do not force but leaders encourage the flock to follow Christ in every aspect of their lives. The leader emulates this with how their life is lived. It is not always easy, and the people will question your motives and heart, but we should always remember Galatians 1:10 "If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ."

Leaders are always Christ focused and seek the things of the Kingdom rather than the things of the earth. How do we know we are seeking the things of the Kingdom? We do not focus on what others have. We do not focus on what we think we don't have. We do not fight or argue because we're not getting our way. We seek to find ways to build the community. Everything we do points the world to Christ, not us which means we do everything we can to reach the world for Christ in whatever means the world will pay attention to.

The leader is able to submit to the elders. Do we like to submit? Not really. Why? Because this means we have to listen to and respect others which means we give up control. This is not always fun, and it means we have to trust another person knows what is best.

Now, Peter says to submit to the elders. This is not talking about age, but about the leaders. One of the challenges is we are seeing younger people in places of leadership. This is so important because this is an opportunity to allow younger generations take the lead, take ownership, so the organization lasts beyond the current generations. There are many younger leaders than me and many have incredible gifts for service and ministry that I am excited about the church for the future.

The leader is humble. Now if anyone ever says they are humble, automatically think they are lying or just not self-aware of their pride. At the same time, humility is not diminishing yourself when people praise you. That is not giving God the glory for how he works in and through you. True humility is thinking of others more than we think of ourselves otherwise we live into the pride within us. And scripture says, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

Now, after all of this, who is ready to be a leader? I believe there are more people than we realize that have been called by God to be a leader. Maybe they need us to ask them to serve. Asking goes a long way and it might be confirmation to them God is calling them.

Leadership, life, has many challenges that create anxiety (worry, stress, fear). This can creep into our heart and cause us to be a person God did not create. But God says to cast ALL of our anxiety and worry upon him. Why? Because he cares for you.

There have been many moments of anxiety over the past few weeks about when to have in person worship again.

There is anxiety there will be some who do not follow the guidelines we will have to have in place.

There is anxiety about people who have gotten into the habit of “worshipping” at home.

There is and will be anxiety, from some, about being back together in a larger group.

There is anxiety with health concerns.

There is so much to be anxious about.

But God says to put ALL of that burden on to him. Jesus even said “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Anxiety is really a burden we put upon ourselves. Jesus continues, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.”

Rest for our souls. Now that is what we all need. Leaders need rest. The people need rest. Where do we get this rest for our souls?

Keep the truth in mind that life is ALL about God. If we keep our minds alert to the Kingdom of Heaven and the reality of God all around us, we have an incredible defense against the enemy, against evil, against anything that wants to capture our souls.

The greatest comfort is that God is the One who is ultimately in charge. We do not have to worry how to run the universe because God is the One in charge.

When our life is focused on Jesus Christ, then we experience incredible forgiveness, grace, and mercy. We also experience being restored into the presence of God that was lost and broken with Sin.

Restoration with God happens because he has called you and I. It is only because of the grace of God we have the strength to endure, embrace,

this life's challenges and stand steadfast in his promises. Remember the promises of God are not just for the future, but for here and now also. We can experience the power and presence of God here and now.

May you always know the power and presence of God working in and through your life.

May you always know who you are, what you are designed and called to do/be.

May you never lose sight of the hope that is in Christ.

May you walk in the ways of Christ.

May you live in such a way that your life glorifies Christ.

May you seek after the real reward in this life – Christ himself.

Let's pray...

*Almighty God who has called us out of darkness and into your marvelous light, thank you for calling us. Thank you for illuminating our lives with your presence. I pray the people listening today know you personally and experience you right where they are. I pray their hearts and lives are open to you. I know there are some who have not professed faith in Christ, and some who have strayed from you. May they right now affirm your calling in their life and say YES to you. May we always live our lives for your glory. In Christ's name we pray,
AMEN*