

## **1PETER 4:1-6    CBC 26.7.2020am**

Peter has just encouraged us with a hopeful picture of our vindication in Christ (3:18-22). Now he draws a conclusion: **Read 1Peter 4:1-6 ...**

### **ARM YOURSELVES v.1**

Peter writes (v.1) “*arm yourselves.*” Since I’m married to a Texan, let me say that Peter is not telling us to go to the gun shop! True, he uses a military metaphor. He wants us to be like soldiers putting on equipment ready for battle. But the fight he has in mind here is not against people, but against sin. And to fight that battle, the weapon we need is not an automatic rifle, but a particular attitude: the attitude of our Lord Jesus Himself: v.1 *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude.*

Do you see? Peter doesn’t direct us to the gun shop, but to the cross of Christ. Why? Because that’s where Jesus not only paid for our sins, but won His own decisive victory over sin. On the night He was betrayed Jesus cried in the Garden, “*Not my will but Yours be done.*” He chose to suffer rather than to sin.

And Peter says, let that be your attitude too, because (v.1) “*whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.*” Don’t misunderstand those words – Peter isn’t saying that suffering *in itself* will cause a person to stop sinning – Pharaoh suffered and sinned even more! He’s talking about suffering we *choose to endure for the sake of Christ*. When you make choices that involve you in suffering, you’re making a huge statement: “*It’s not all about me and my comfort; I’ll willingly do the hard thing for the sake of Christ.*” That’s when there’s a turning point in our life. Not that we’ll never sin again – the Bible tells us that that battle will continue to the end of our life – but suffering for Christ is an indication that we’ve taken a decisive step: that we’ve chosen not to live for our sinful desires, but for the will of God.

Have you ever made that decisive commitment to do the will of God whatever it costs? We’re in a battle and Peter says the only way to win it is to have settled our attitude that we’d rather suffer than sin. How does he know this? Because he’d learned the hard way.

In his younger days he often wrestled with Jesus in his attitude. He didn’t bring his thinking into line with Christ. We see this in the gospels – how Jesus would speak of the way of the cross, and Peter’s attitude was to look for an easier way. And then the moment of crisis came when Jesus was on trial for His life and Peter was in the courtyard being asked if he was a disciple. And because he’d never armed himself with the attitude of Christ, he was unprepared when the critical moment came: sin or suffer? Self or Christ? And to his lifelong shame he denied his Lord. He chose to sin rather than to suffer.

But Jesus graciously restored him, and now Peter sees from his painful experience that it’s no use waiting till the moment of crisis. When the battle has begun, it’s too late to be wishing you were armed! So he tells us to arm ourselves NOW with the attitude of Christ, so that we’re ready to face any challenge. The only way to be ready for battle is to have resolved on this commitment: *Whatever it costs me, I will suffer rather than deny my Saviour.* If the boss tells me to do something wrong, I’ll suffer rather than deny my Saviour. If my children want to sleep with someone outside of marriage, and they want me to tell them that’s OK – I’ll suffer rather than sin.

Do you have the attitude of Christ? Have you settled it as a principle for any and every situation, that you will do the will of God whatever it costs? Because if you haven’t, I can tell you which way you’ll jump when the crisis comes. Decide now that you’re willing to suffer for righteousness.

Now having called us to arm ourselves with Christ's attitude, Peter helps us rise to the challenge! He spells out three blessings of being armed in this way:

### **1. vv.2-3: YOU'LL BE SAVED FROM WASTING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE**

v.2: "*As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*" Peter is challenging us with this question: How are you going to spend the rest of your life? What a great question! Life is short. It goes more quickly than we think. We've already lived a chunk of it, and perhaps it hasn't all been well spent. But what are you going to do with what remains?

Here's the choice. Peter draws a contrast between (v.2) living "*for the will of God*", or (v.3) for "*the will / purpose of the pagans*" (literal translation). He pictures in v.3 a pagan lifestyle marked by sexual permissiveness, heavy drinking and disorder – a graphic picture of many social parties in first century Asia Minor and in our own culture. And Peter says, "*You've spent long enough living like that.*"

Some of you know exactly what he's talking about. You've lived like that in the past. Others never reached those depths – praise God! Our society has been impregnated with the gospel for many centuries and that's reflected in many ordinary people living moral and upright lives. Maybe that was your background. So the contrast for us may not be quite the same as it was when Peter wrote to these people who'd been pagans and been dramatically converted.

Yet the contrast is still very recognisable between a life lived for self and a life lived for God. Your neighbours don't live for God, however respectable they might be. And Peter's point is that any lifestyle – whether riotous or respectable – that's not centred on doing the will of God is futile, because it has no future.

Well, says Peter, we've all wasted enough time doing our own will rather than God's will. But we don't have to waste the rest of our life, praise God! We can live for His will and His glory. And that's not burdensome because God's will comes from God's heart, and therefore it's an expression of God's love. It saves lives rather than destroying them.

So Peter says, arm yourself with the attitude of Christ: that you're going to live completely for the will of God. And then you won't waste the rest of your life – you'll invest it wisely.

### **2. YOU'LL BE PROTECTED AGAINST PEER PRESSURE v.4**

v.4: "*They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.*" What's Peter saying here? That when people become Christians, their lives change because the Spirit of Jesus is now in them. They turn away from former sins. And others react, often with hostility.

I guess most of us will have experienced this in some degree. It's one of the hardest things a new Christian has to face. Your friends liked you because, to use Peter's blunt language, you shared in their sins. But now you've embraced the will of God – and your friends haven't! When they invite you to join them in what you did before, they're surprised when you say NO. They don't think it strange when people live in a way that wrecks their bodies, careers, families. But let someone turn to Christ and live a life of purity and service to others, and they think it's weird!

And we need to be patient with them. We were in their shoes once. And Peter says it's simply beyond their ability to comprehend your new life, because they don't live in the same world you do. Peter has said many times in this letter that we're now strangers in this world because we're citizens of another kingdom. Don't be surprised if people say about you as a Christian, "*(S)he's a bit strange!*" Indeed, it should probably worry you if no-one ever says that about you. It's inevitable if you're a Christian that people won't really understand what makes you tick.

In fact, Peter adds something which some of us will recognize with great sorrow: they not only find us strange, they find us offensive. And so v.4 "*they heap abuse on you.*" Some mock, and some are aggressive because they feel challenged. They have a vague sense that you belong to another King who lays claim to their life too, and they will not have Him to rule over them. Family members may feel threatened – they want the old you back.

This pressure to fit in with everyone else is very real, isn't it? God has wired us as social beings. We want to belong, to be included. But there's no chance of living by the will of God when I'm still trying to please that old crowd. And Peter puts the key to victory in our hand: "*Arm yourself with the attitude of Christ! Commit yourself completely to the will of God – I'd rather suffer than sin!*" Don't wait till the crisis comes – that will be too late. Arm yourself now. And then you'll be protected against peer pressure.

### **3. YOU'LL BE READY TO FACE THE COMING DAY OF RECKONING vv.5-6**

vv.5-6 "*But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.*" What's Peter saying? He's reminding us of the greatest reason of all for arming ourselves with the attitude of Christ: that this world is heading towards a day of judgment and salvation.

Those who judge us don't realize that God is going to judge them! We should pity them and pray for them. Because, though we must all die, there's life in Christ if we'll have it. That's the meaning of v.6. Peter is speaking of those who've already died in Christ – that through the gospel they still live in the presence of God. Indeed, he says this is why the gospel is preached – because Jesus lived and died and rose again, conquering death, so that He might give us eternal life. So in that moment when you're being mocked, misunderstood, struggling with temptation, say to yourself, "*This is not all there is! Eternity is sure and I will live with Christ forever.*"

Brothers and sisters: There'll be a day when your obedience will be vindicated by God, and the mockers will be defeated and judged forever. Your story isn't stuck in this moment of suffering – it's moving forward to a day when justice will be done. To use the language of Psalm 23, God is preparing a table for you in the presence of your enemies. Cling to this promise, because there'll be moments in your life when this promise will be all you have. But God's word won't fail you.

So arm yourself with the attitude of Christ. Be done with sin, and commit to doing the will of God. And you'll be ready for the day of judgment and salvation that's coming, because it will be clear that you belong to Christ.

### **CONCLUSION**

Are you armed with the attitude of Christ – not just now as you listen to the sermon, but in this fallen world as you live through these moments of temptation? Have you made up your mind to do the will of God whatever it costs – to suffer if necessary rather than to sin? Or are you drifting, waiting to see where the tide takes you with the least resistance?

I'm sure many of us are conscious of having failed in critical moments because we weren't prepared to stand. We hadn't armed ourselves in advance. But don't despair. Let me close by reminding you who wrote these words: Peter, who didn't always have the same attitude as Christ – who even denied Christ. But it wasn't the end of the story – there was still the rest of his life to come, and he grew. And now he says to us, "*What about the rest of YOUR life?*" Make up your mind today to arm yourself with the attitude of Christ, and to live what's left of your life for the will of God.

**PRAYER:** We thank You, Father, that the gospel is a message of life and hope. Grant us courage to have the attitude of Christ, so that enabled by Your Holy Spirit we may live completely for Your will, to the praise of Your glorious grace. AMEN.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION**

- Where do you find yourself struggling to live for the will of God because of the cost?
- How can we help one another to be armed with the attitude of Christ?