

1 Peter 4:1-6 | “Armed for Suffering”
Preached on July 4, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Good morning and welcome, please turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 4, verses 1 through 6.

We are continuing our study in the book of 1 Peter. *[pause]*

Peter’s main emphasis in this book has been about being sojourners in a strange and hostile land.

That is, it’s about how Christians can live their lives in the midst of a world that is against them.

And as of late, according to where we are in the book, Peter has written a lot about suffering for doing right, and this passage carries on that theme.

I’LL READ THE PASSAGE. *[pause]*

The American Revolution Institute explains that...

“Supplying its troops with the weapons required to win the Revolutionary War was a critical, complex and ever-present issue for the new American nation.

When the war began in 1775, there were few factories in America capable of producing firearms,—let alone in the quantities necessary to sustain an army for several years.

At the beginning of the Revolution, the army relied on soldiers to bring weapons from home, including hunting guns, militia arms and outdated martial weapons from the French and Indian War.

American soldiers also carried weapons captured from the enemy in the field and reissued to Continental and state troops.

A growing number of American manufacturers produced weapons on government contracts, but they could not sustain the American troops through a long conflict.

Success on the battlefield ultimately depended on the hundreds of thousands of arms supplied by France and Spain.”¹ *[pause]*

So the American army in the Revolutionary War faced a challenge of getting enough arms to be equipped to fight the war.

But there was another problem that they faced when it came to being armed for battle...

The official encyclopedia of the state of North Carolina explains that....

“Another problem was getting the supplies to the soldiers.

¹ “A Revolution in Arms: Weapons in the War for Independence.” *The American Revolution Institute*, www.americanrevolutioninstitute.org/exhibition/a-revolution-in-arms/.

When the Continental army was able to get supplies, they had to be shipped great distances, usually by wagon across rugged trails and roads.

The wagons were sometimes attacked and taken by enemy troops or by outlaws.”² *[pauseeee]*

For a war, a military needs to be equipped, prepared, and armed for battle.

Without being armed, their hopes of winning the war are slim. *[pause]*

Well this morning, Peter wants us to be armed, not for a physical war, but for a situation that will test our faith.

He wants us to be armed for suffering, so that we are ready for when it comes.

And that is the main point of this passage, which I'll give now...

Be armed for suffering with the mindset of Christ.

There in verse 1, we see the main command of this section, “Arm yourselves.”

To ‘arm yourself’ is a military idea.

It means to prepare yourself, equip yourself, get ready. *[pause]*

And what is this arming for?

You don’t just get equipped randomly, but you get equipped for a purpose.

This arming yourself is to be ready for suffering. *[pause]*

Our context shows us this very point.

Peter said, “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves.” *[pause]*

Once again, Peter isn’t talking about suffering in general, but suffering for doing right, so keep this in your mind whenever you hear the term, “suffering,” in this passage. *[pauseeee]*

I was thinking, how often do we think in this way?

How often do we realize that I need to be armed and prepared for suffering to come?

Are we actually arming ourselves *before* suffering? Or are we usually unarmed for it?

I fear that what we often do is hope and pray that persecution won’t come, but we don’t get prepared for it. *[pause]*

Let me ask you this...

² “Outfitting an American Revolutionary Soldier.” *NCpedia*, www.ncpedia.org/history/usrevolution/soldiers.

Are you prepared to handle a situation where someone mocks your faith?

Are you ready to go through verbal abuse because of your Christian views on gender and sexuality?

Are you prepared to be literally beaten by someone because you stand up for what's right?
[pauseeee]

This is so important, for it is suffering that makes many walk away from the faith altogether.

They aren't prepared for it, they aren't ready to handle it, and it leads them to throw in the towel.
[pause]

You may even know someone personally who no longer lives out the faith that they used to profess, and a reason may be suffering.

A reason may be that they were made fun of by others, mocked for their faith, or ridiculed for their beliefs.

And so they thought, "Why continue doing this Christian thing, when it leads to this?"

They weren't armed for it, so that they could persevere. [pauseeee]

This arming yourself is not to be taken lightly!

It's not an optional thing, for imagine a soldier refusing to have any armor, training, or weapons before going into battle.

He just said, "Eh, I don't need that. I'll just hope that I'll be OK, when the time comes."

That's the mindset of many when it comes to suffering for righteousness, they aren't prepared, and when the time comes, it was over before it started. [pause]

You need to be prepared and equipped for persecution, for it's going to be a *battle*.

It won't be easy, and everything will make you want to avoid the suffering, so you need to be armed. [pause]

But armed with what?

Peter tells us that it's with the same way of thinking as Christ, who suffered.

Really, we are to have the same insight into suffering, the same mindset about it as Christ.

When it comes to suffering for doing good, we should think about it the same way as Christ did.
[pause]

And how did he think about it?

He expected it, he was willing to go through it, he did what was right no matter the cost, and avoided sinning through it all.

He didn't see suffering as a thing to be avoided at all costs, but rather, sin was to be avoided at all costs.

He was utterly convinced that it was better to do right and suffer for it, than to do wrong.

He was willing to face the cost, no matter what it was, in order to do the will of God.

This is the way of thinking that Christ had when it came to suffering, and it's the way of thinking that we ought to have, too. *[pause]*

Do you expect suffering to come, or are you surprised when it comes?

Are you willing to go through suffering, if it means following God?

Or is avoiding suffering your ultimate goal?

Is doing right and living for God more important than comfort or the approval of others? *[pause]*

Arm yourself with Christ's way of thinking!

We don't arm ourselves with guns or knives for this battle, but with thoughts and truths. *[pause]*

Your correct thinking prepares you to suffer well, like putting on defensive armor.

So will you be armed with the right thinking about suffering *before* suffering happens? *[pause]*

Imagine the difference this would make in your life or in the lives of all Christians!

When you're prepared with these thoughts, then you aren't caught off guard by suffering, but ready for it.

It's not like it shocks you, and you aren't thinking, "How could that person do that to me? How could our country be like this?"

But you know that being a Christian means you will face suffering. *[pause]*

When you're armed with these thoughts, then you are willing to go through suffering, if it means doing what's right and being faithful to God. *[pause]*

Some of us need to cast off the idea that suffering is the worst thing in the world, for this will not prepare you to suffer for doing right.

Rather, it will make you extremely *unprepared*.

That wasn't the way of thinking of Christ! *[pause]*

Think about if Jesus thought that suffering was the worst thing in the world, and he needed to avoid it at all costs.

Then he would have never gone through with the Cross!

For he had chances to give up, he had chances to avoid the suffering of the Cross, and yet he didn't, because there was a supreme purpose in His mind. *[pauseeee]*

So also, we need a supreme purpose that reigns over our suffering.

We must have the idea that living for God is the most important thing in the world, and therefore, being unfaithful or giving up in your faith is one of the worst things to do.

That's the kind of thinking that Christ had, and that's the kind of thinking that will help you to persevere through suffering. *[pauseeeee]*

Imagine our young people going out into the world, knowing and ready to suffer for doing right.

It would sustain them through it, so that they do not give into the world or peer pressure, but they stand firm. *[pause]*

Imagine yourself, knowing and ready to suffer for doing right.

You would be armed to persevere. *[pauseeee]*

There's that famous quote, and I don't know who originally said it, but it goes, "Preparation is half the battle."

Preparation for suffering goes a long way.

Are you arming yourself with the mindset of Christ when it comes to suffering?

Maybe it's time to look more to Christ and his mindset.

Maybe it's time to change your thoughts and purposes to be more in line with his. *[pauseeeee]*

In our culture, it's becoming increasingly hard to be a Christian, and it will be more so as time goes on.

Will you be armed for it, or unarmed?

Will you be prepared to be reviled and mocked for your faith?

Will you be ready to be threatened with the loss of your job because of your beliefs about homosexuality or marriage?

Will you be ready to be taken to court because of your views on transgenderism?

Will you be prepared to even give your life for Christ? Or will you give in to it all?

Thanks be to God that He who says to “arm yourself” leaves us no lack of weapon, but the best weapon of all, Christ’s way of thinking. *[pauseeeeeee]*

We have seen the main command of Peter, but in this text, he also gives us two motivations to be armed for suffering.

And the first one is...

A. Because Christ also suffered in the flesh.

When I was in grade school, our school used to have field days.

And during the field day, there would be games and competitions played.

Well one such game was the obstacle course, where you had to maneuver through various obstacles quickly. *[pause]*

I always found the obstacle course daunting.

But what made the obstacle course easier to face was *not* being the first one through it. *[pause]*

You see, the first one was kinda like the guinea pig.

They would be the one who didn’t realize that they couldn’t go super fast across the balance beam or else you would fall, or something like that.

Well what was helpful for me was if someone really good at the obstacle course went before me. *[pause]*

This is because their example showed me, first, that it’s possible to do the obstacle course well.

But secondly, it showed me *how* to run it well, even though it’s hard at times.

I could look at their example and see that I need to crawl on my knees through those tires and not just bend over. *[pause]*

Well Christ is like that for us when it comes to suffering, but so much more.

He showed us that it’s possible to suffer for doing right, and he showed us how to suffer well because he lived perfectly.

That’s why Peter says, “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.”

He’s drawing a conclusion from what we just learned in the previous passage. *[pause]*

Christ suffered and was victorious, that is, his suffering was the pathway to glory.

So therefore, arm yourself with the same way of thinking as Him.

Be prepared for suffering since Christ also suffered in the flesh. *[pause]*

He is the foremost example of one suffering righteously, so we must live like Him.

He showed that those who are righteous suffer, that those who are righteous can suffer well, and that those who suffer for righteousness are blessed and vindicated in the end. *[pause]*

So if the Son of God and Savior of the world suffered in the flesh in this way, so you too, arm yourself with that thinking. *[pauseeee]*

The Cross is an ever-present model for our suffering.

His example motivates and encourages us to face suffering, trusting and depending on God.

So therefore, I need to arm myself with the mindset of Christ about suffering because Christ also suffered this way and was victorious.

And it's implied that based on Christ's example, you should and can live for God and be victorious in suffering. *[pauseeee]*

We can be prepared to face our own suffering by looking back to Christ's suffering.

Christ's suffering showed us the right path, so follow His path!

Don't give up, but arm yourself with his very mindset, for he suffered in this way. *[pause]*

As Hebrews 12 says, "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, *looking to Jesus*, the founder and perfecter of our faith,...

...Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."³ *[pauseeee]*

Be armed for suffering with the mind of Christ because he also suffered, but also...

B. Because suffering in the flesh demonstrates a life lived for God, rather than self.

Peter says in the second part of verse 1 into verse 2...

"for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God."

³ Hebrews 12:1b-3.

These are somewhat difficult verses to understand because they could take you to an incorrect place, if you let it. *[pause]*

These verses *aren't* telling us that a person can obtain a place of sinless perfection on this side of Heaven.

That idea is shown not to be true in other places of Scripture.

But rather, he's saying that a person who suffers for God demonstrates that they have made a clear break with a life dominated by sin.

It's not that you never sin, but that your life isn't driven by sinful passions. *[pause]*

By your obedience, even though you suffer for it, you show that you are committed to a new way of life, living for God's will.

He makes this clear when he says right after, "so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God." *[pause]*

Another proof of this is later in this passage when he talks about examples of their past lifestyle.

They used to live "in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry."

But now they do not join in that kind of lifestyle anymore.

That's what he's talking about - they have ceased from a life dominated by sinful passions. *[pause]*

This actually makes sense, if you think about it.

Let's say that your parents told you that you couldn't go to a party that had drinking at it, but your friends made fun of you for this.

Your friends even suggested ways to get around their command, but you still held firm to obeying what your parents wanted.

This caused your friends to make fun of you even more. *[pauseeee]*

By obeying, even in the midst of being made fun of, you are demonstrating something aren't you?

You are demonstrating that your friends' opinions of you don't dominate your life, but your parent's desires do.

You are demonstrating that you are living in obedience to your parents rather than living for your peers.

You are displaying that doing what's right is a higher value than suffering.

That's the sort of thing that Peter is pointing out. *[pauseeee]*

When you suffer for doing right, and don't give in, but suffer well, then you have shown that living for God beats out your comfort and sinful passions.

You are showing freedom from a life dominated by sin! *[pauseeee]*

Today is Independence Day, as we celebrate how our country became free from under the control of Britain.

We rejoice in our freedom in our country and are grateful for that freedom.

But there is an even greater freedom, which is freedom from sin, which Christ has won for us.

It was only through his death and resurrection that we *can* say 'no' to sin. *[pauseeee]*

When you do right, even if you are mocked and treated horribly for it, then you are demonstrating that you aren't living for your passions, but for God.

Do you think a genuine martyr for their faith is living for their sinful passions in the moment of death, or for God? *[pauseeee]*

So let me ask you: what drives you most? Your sinful desires or God's desires?

You need to be armed to suffer because giving into sin or peer pressure can come easily.

Christ's mindset *in* your sheath protects you from sin.

Why? Because you are armed to suffer, being convinced that doing right is most important like Christ was convinced. *[pauseeee]*

Author Greg Forbes put it well when he said, "You are unlikely to suffer for your faith if a non-Christian lifestyle is more attractive to you than following Jesus."⁴

Because sin is more important to you than following what God wants.

So the key to the battle with sin is this: you need a supreme desire.

Sin is really sinful desires that rise up, so you need a better, more powerful desire to beat it out.

And that desire is to do God's will, and we gain that desire the more we look to and become like Christ.

⁴ Forbes, Greg W. "Leaving the Past Behind: A Sermon on 1 Peter 4:1-6." *Southern Equip*, 28 Nov. 2017, equip.sbts.edu/publications/journals/journal-of-theology/sbjt-213-fall-2017/leaving-past-behind-sermon-1-peter-41-6/.

And when we do this, we show that our sinful passions don't rule us, but God's will does.

[pauseeee]

Peter's point in all of this is to re-emphasize the need to be armed for suffering, realizing that there are two paths...

Either you live for your sinful desires, or for God's desires, and suffering for doing right brings to light the path that you are on.

One leads you to give into persecution, and the other leads you to stand firm in it.

So what about you?

Are you armed to suffer with the same way of thinking as Christ?

If so, it will lead you to live for God. *[pauseeeeeee]*

Peter has been talking about sinful passions, and now he expands upon them.

Look at verse 3, "For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do," and he gives a list of the things they used to be involved in. *[pause]*

Do you see what he's saying?

He's essentially saying, "You've spent enough time on your sinful passions already."

The time past is sufficient for sinning, meaning, it's enough!

'You've spent enough time on a sinful lifestyle, so now turn away from it, and live for God.'
[pause]

Truly, any amount of time in the past spent on sin is *enough*.

This is something that we each need to preach to ourselves daily: "my time spent on sin in the past is enough."

It's time to move on.

I don't need to be seeking more sin, more thrills, more living for self - it's enough, I've wasted too much time on it already.

Instead, the time remaining, however much time that may be, is to be for God. *[pause]*

May we each possess this mentality, what a difference it would make!

No matter how old we are, or how much sin we have committed, may we each think...

'My past has been spent on enough time of sin, so now with the time remaining, I'm going to strive to live for God.'
[pause]

You can't change your past, just like Peter's readers couldn't change their past and erase the time spent on sin, but you can live for God with the time remaining.

Will you live for Him or live for yourself? *[pauseeeee]*

Peter gives a detailed list of sins that they were involved in, and I don't have time to go into detail into each one.

But the sins have things in common with each other.

They all demonstrate a life ruled by sinful passions.

They all display a life where there is no restraint, but only a following after satisfying immediate, fleshly wants.

They involve sexual sins, misuse of alcohol and food, and basically a life of sinful abandon and prodigal living. *[pause]*

But did you notice the huge contrast between a person doing God's will and a person doing all of these sins?

One is living for God, the one is living for self, but there's something else.

One is living a life of satisfaction, but the other is living a life of never being satisfied, always looking for the next "thrill". *[pause]*

Let me tell you today, living a life of sin will never satisfy you.

It may feel good in the moment, but you will always need more.

So turn away from sin, it doesn't satisfy, and you've spent enough time in the past on it, and now live for God, who satisfies. *[pauseeee]*

Peter relates their past life of sin, but now he says they're different now, as they don't join in with others in these things.

The text is really saying, "You don't run with them anymore in their flood, or outpouring and excess of debauchery."

'Debauchery' is excessive indulgence, recklessness, and prodigal living.

You do not join in the same outpouring of excessive indulgence on self.

And the truth is, they are surprised by this.

The word really means that they are startled, bewildered, or caught off guard by something strange or unusual. *[pause]*

You swim against the stream of how the world lives, so they think this is strange and malign you for it.

They slander you, and speak evil of you.

They make fun of you because you don't join them in going to the bar and getting drunk on Friday nights.

They speak bad of you because you won't sleep around like they do.

They mock you because you won't use the same foul language or lie at work like they do.

And they think you are weird or an oddball because you don't do these things. *[pauseeee]*

This is reality, Christian!

By living out your faith and not living for your sinful desires, you will be seen as strange to the world.

But we need to embrace being weirdos.

This is the life that Christ has called us to! *[pause]*

So many Christians try to do everything in their power to make sure they don't seem weird to the world.

So they will try to dress like them, talk like them, act like them to make sure they think that Christians are 'cool', too, and not weird.

But God tells us that a natural result of living righteously *is* being weird to the world! *[pauseeee]*

The fact is that if unbelievers don't think you are strange in any aspect of your life, then you are doing something *wrong*.

I'm not saying that we go out of our way to be odd, but the simple result of living like Christ makes you odd to the world.

Your values and priorities are completely different.

Your actions and mindset is totally unlike theirs, so they will think you are strange, and malign you for it. *[pauseee]*

But Peter tells us not to worry about this, for they will be judged someday.

He says, "but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." *[pause]*

Someday they will stand before God and give account for what they have done to you.

No harsh word or reviling goes unnoticed by the Judge of the living and the dead.

Your mockers and maligners won't have the final say, but they will be held accountable for what they do to you.

The judge will judge everyone righteously, and he is *ready* to judge.

He doesn't have to prepare, he won't delay when the time of judgment has come, but he's ready to judge.

So don't worry about them, for though they look like they are getting away with so much, they will not eventually get away with it. *[pause]*

This is good news because it means that we can leave justice in God's hands.

We can rest in the fact that the Judge will take care of it, and he's a good and righteous Judge, who loves us.

So in your suffering for doing right, entrust the situation with Him. *[pauseeee]*

And then Peter rounds out this passage in verse 6, explaining that this judgment is why the Gospel is preached.

He explains that the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, and he's really saying that it was preached to those who are *now* dead.

Those who heard the Gospel and believed and are now dead live on!

Though they died, and unbelievers think, "Look they face death just like us!"

Yet they live on because of God. *[pauseeee]*

The saints who went before us may have been condemned by unbelievers and even killed by them, but they are alive with Christ!

It's the gospel that makes the difference. *[pause]*

Believing the gospel renders the judgments of man and physical death to be nothing, for you live on! *[pause]*

This is so encouraging when you suffer for doing right!

For your suffering won't be the end, but you will live on because you simply believed in the good news of Jesus Christ.

We are sinners, yet Jesus Christ, the Son of God took on flesh, lived a perfect life, and died for our sins.

He rose again, showing that the price was paid and showing that he conquered sin and death.

It was because of Him that we can live on after we die, so why fear death or your persecutors or suffering?

Therefore, stand firm under it, looking forward with eyes of faith to your eternal life. *[pauseeee]*

It's worth it to follow God through suffering!

Christ suffered in the flesh here on earth, too, leading the way and showing us a great example.

When we suffer in the flesh well, we show that sin doesn't rule us, but God's will does.

And by living for Him, no matter what, we show that we are different from the world, and we are maligned for it.

But God will judge them someday, and because you believed the Gospel, though it may look like you are judged by the persecution that you face and physical death you face....

...You are not truly judged because there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus⁵ - you will live on into eternity! *[pauseeee]*

These are the splendid truths needed for your arsenal when you face suffering for doing right, so that you persevere through it all.

But are you armed with them?

Are you prepared to suffer for doing right? *[pause]*

Arm yourself with the mindset of Christ, who suffered!

To have his mindset, you need to look to Him and dwell on Him more.

It's really looking to Christ and the Cross that empowers and strengthens us to live rightly, not in our own willpower and strength.

So get to know him more and more deeply. *[pause]*

See his way of thinking in suffering, as he did the will of God, no matter what, rather than giving into sin.

See his mindset, as he was maligned, yet he didn't conform or compromise, but remained faithful.

See his way of thinking, as he gave justice for his suffering to the one who judges justly. *[pause]*

Arm yourself with his mindset.

⁵ See Romans 8:1.

You've spent enough time of your past living for yourself and avoiding suffering at all costs.

Now strive to live the rest of your time for God's will, obeying him no matter what the cost.

It's worth it because Christ showed us that it's worth it.