

Leverage What's Left

1 Peter 4:1-6; June 7, 2020

Introduction:

Good morning RHC. I'm preaching today from one of our partner churches, Crosspoint Church in Clemson, SC as I work remotely here until the start of my sabbatical in a few weeks. They've faithfully supported RHC from the very beginning by sending prayers, people and financial support.

This has been another really hard week. The challenges of this season keep multiplying:

- In addition to the global pandemic with death, isolation, and unemployment...
- ...we're confronted once again with the racism and injustice that still exists in our country.
- Just like you, the the tragic and unjust murder of George Floyd, including three officers who stood by and did nothing to stop the injustice, is weighing heavy on my soul.
- This is another example of power and force being abused and the racism that still exists against black people.
 - I will never fully know what it's like to walk in your shoes...but I want to know more than I do now.
 - As a result, I've been praying the very words I preached a few weeks ago:
 - Father, help me to care about the hurts and brokenness of others. Give me sympathy. I want to weep with those who weep. Give me a tender and compassionate heart.
- In addition to the many peaceful protests across our country, we're also seeing many destructive and violent responses. There's additional loss of life and brokenness.

How does 1 Peter help us think and respond to all that's going on in the world right now?

- 1 Peter 2:12: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."
 - Lord, may our lives be windows for people to see the glory of God.
- 1 Peter 2:17: "Honor everyone."
- 1 Peter 2:23: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when suffered; he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."
- 1 Peter 3:9: "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless."
- 1 Peter 3:11: "Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue."
- 1 Peter 3:12: "But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."
 - God sees and cares about every act of racism and injustice. It all matters to him.

As we come to 1 Peter 4 today, Peter reminds us that the clock is ticking for all of us in how we live our lives and it's a call to spend the rest of our lives, whatever's remaining, chasing after the will of God.

Read 1 Peter 4:1-6

Main Point: Leverage what's left in your life running after God's will.

If we're going to maximize and leverage the rest of our lives running after God's will, Peter says four things are essential. The first one is this. We must...

I. Resolve to Suffer Like Jesus (1).

- Here, once again, Jesus' suffering is used as a model and example for his followers (cf. 2:21-24).
- Last week, we saw how Jesus' suffering was the pathway to victory (cf. 3:18).
- Similarly, Peter argues here that suffering is the pathway of victory for believers.

“Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking”

- This means resolving to have the same attitude and intention (cf. Heb. 4:12) to suffer just like Jesus.
- When you *resolve* to do something, you commit yourself fully to it.

Why does Peter say we should resolve to suffer with the same attitude as Jesus?

- In short: this resolve to suffer results in “ceasing from sin.”
- What does it mean to cease from sin? Let's start with what it *doesn't* mean.
 - It doesn't mean that we reach some kind of sinless perfection. We will struggle with sin until we meet Jesus one day.
- There are two likely options:
 - 1. One option is that Peter is arguing similarly to the way Paul argues in Romans 6 (cf. Also Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:3, 5). Taken this way, “suffering” would refer to dying through union with Jesus and “to cease from sin” means to be dead to the power of sin.
 - 2. More likely is a second option (cf. 2:19–20; 3:14, 17). When we resolve to suffer, as the ESV Study Bible says, “the nerve center of sin is severed in [our] lives” (ESV Study Bible).
 - In other words, when we commit to suffer, to endure scorn and mockery, we give evidence that we are done with sin, that we have broken with a life characterized by sin in order to seek after and follow God's will.
 - Think about how many of our sinful choices flow from a desire to avoid the ridicule and shame of others rather than to face suffering; to please others rather than to please God.
- When we resolve to suffer, we're ready to seek after the kingdom of God. We're ready to seek after what's right in his eyes.

Transition: the 2nd thing we must do to leverage what's left is this. We must...

II. Repent and Turn from our Former Ways (2-3).

- Peter here further explains what it means to have “ceased from sin.”
- In short, it means that whatever amount of time we have left in our lives, we should live

our lives zealously for God. We've already spent and wasted enough of our life not doing God's will. Let's not waste any more time.

- Peter contrasts living for God's will and living for "human passions" (2) and the "will of the Gentiles" (3).

What is the problem with "human passions"?

- Our passions and desires can deceive us (cf. Eph. 4:22).
- "The desires of the flesh" are opposed to the "Spirit" (Gal. 5:16-17).
- Our passions wage war against our souls (1 Pet. 2:11).
- As a result, we should be *suspect* of our own desires.
- See also Rom. 6:12; 13:13-14; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 2:3; Col. 3:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; Tit. 2:12; James 1:14-15; 1 Pet. 1:14; 1 Pet. 2:11).

Peter then lists "the will of the Gentiles" and what these "human passions" lead to:

- See other lists in the NT: Mark 7:22; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:10-11; 6:9-10; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:31; 5:3-5; Col. 3:5, 8; Tit. 3:3.
- Basically, this list combines sexual sin along with drinking and parties, a practice common in our world today as well.
 - Sexual Sin
 - Sensuality: cf. Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19
 - Passions: cf. Rom. 1:24; 1 Thess. 4:5; 2 Pet. 2:18
 - God created sex to be a beautiful and wonderful thing within marriage. But we live in a culture that assumes sex is the norm. Pornography is the norm.
 - Don't buy into the lie of your own deceitful desires or the way of our world. Seek the will of God. He knows what is best and most satisfying. The same love that motivated God sending his own son is the same love that motivates his commands around sexual purity. Jesus is better.
 - Drinking and Parties: drunkenness, orgies and drinking parties.
 - Paul argues, "Do not get drunk...but be filled with the Spirit."
 - The issue here is about God's will and desire. Drunkenness leads to being led by things other than God's Spirit and God's will.
 - Lawless idolatry.
 - This phrase highlights "an unholy and profane lifestyle" (Schreiner).

Yes. Let's repent and turn...but let's let our lives be characterized by doing the will of God.

- Let's be characterized not primarily by what we don't do...but by what we do!
- Isaiah's words have resonated with me this week:

"Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" (Isa. 1:16-17).

- As one professor, Nathan Finn, from my former seminary said this week:

- “Followers of Jesus Christ should not just not be racists, but should be anti-racists....Being anti-racist means to not only embrace a non-racist posture in your personal life, but speaking out and seeking change where there are communal and structural forms of racism.”
- Similarly, our very own Superintendent of MHS, Dr. Marice Edouard-Vincent, ended her letter the other day. She quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said:
 - “The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.”
- May our lives be characterized by doing good; seeking justice. “Father, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Transition: the 3rd thing we must do to leverage what’s left is this. We must...

III. Resist Returning to our Former Ways (4-5).

- When you choose to run after God’s will, a will that is contrary and opposed to much of what we see in the world, Peter says...
 - It will surprise those who knew your former way of life. Others are astonished by the transformation that has taken place your life.
 - As a result, they will malign you. They will heap abuse on you. They will revile and ridicule you...and the God that you worship.

Sidebar: how should we interact with those who are not followers of Jesus?

- Jesus was a friend of tax collectors and sinners (cf. Matt. 9:12-13).
- We’re not to avoid spending time with unbelievers. The call here is to avoid joining them in participating and practicing a sinful lifestyle.

But additionally, Peter implicitly warns believers to resist returning to their former way of life and renouncing their faith. Why?

- “But they will give account” (cf. Matt. 12:36; Luke 16:2; Acts 19:40; Heb. 13:17; Rom. 2:6; 2 Tim. 4:8, 14; Rev. 22:12).
- Everyone will face judgement and give an account for all that they’ve done (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 8:38; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 14:9; 2 Tim. 4:1).
 - Approval from others on this earth is short-lived and limited in perspective. As one commentator notes, “Soon the tables will be turned.”
 - We should be living for the approval of God. He is the one who has the last word. The wicked will be judged (both for their sin and their mistreatment of you) but believers will be vindicated. So, resist returning.
- Additionally, this is also a reminder that one day God will repay every act of racism and injustice. Either Jesus pays for these sins through his death on the cross or people will face God’s judgment.
 - This is why Peter urges us not to repay evil for evil.
 - God is the just judge and he will repay. Vengeance is his (Rom. 12:19).

Transition: the 4th thing we must do to leverage what's left is this. We must...

IV. Remember the Promises of the Gospel (6).

- This is another difficult verse so let's walk through it carefully.

Is Peter suggesting that there will be a second chance for salvation offered to unbelievers after death? No.

- Such a teaching would clearly contradict other passages of Scripture (cf. Luke 16:26; Heb. 9:27) including what Peter has just said in v. 5. God will judge all people and this is one the main motivation to endure suffering.
- Then what's going on here?

What does this verse mean?

- "Those who are dead" refers to those who are physically dead (cf. 4:5).
- The gospel was preached to people while they were still alive and they believed in the gospel. But these people are "now dead."
- Peter says they were "judged in the flesh"
 - "Flesh" here refers to physical, earthly life.
 - The judgment believers faced was the judgment we all face: physical death.
- Peter is addressing another objection to the gospel: unbelievers viewed the death of believers as proof that there as no advantage to becoming a Christian because all people die.
- Peter says, you're wrong! Peter's point is that physical death is not the last word for believers. Unbelievers don't see the whole picture. The hope and promise of the gospel is eternal life, that believers will ultimately be raised from the dead to live with God forever.
- The same destiny of Jesus awaits believers. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit (cf. 3:18).

Conclusion

- If you're listening today and you haven't made a decision to believe in Jesus and commit to follow him with you life, why not today!
- The gospel was preached to you today so that death doesn't have to be the last word in your life. Rather, you can live with God forever.
- If you want to commit your life to Jesus and believe in him today:
 - Text the word "Jesus" to the number on the screen.
 - If you're in our Church Online platform click "Raise Hand" to commit to follow Jesus and then select "Request Prayer" so that we can celebrate and pray with you.
- The clock is ticking. Our life is a vapor. Let's arm ourselves with the attitude and intention to suffer in follow Jesus as a means to help us leverage what's left for chasing after the will of God.

Let's pray.