



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 1 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

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Many years ago, I used this illustration, so it may sound familiar to some of you. But imagine walking down to the harbor and seeing two ships. One is a cruise ship; one is a battleship. Now try to imagine the attitudes, the emotions, and the expectations of people boarding the cruise ship and then imagine the attitudes and emotions and expectations of people boarding the battleship. They're going to be dramatically different. Now imagine someone thinks he's boarding a cruise ship, but actually boards the battleship, with all of the attitudes, emotions and expectations of a cruise ship, now in a battleship. So first of all, he goes and finds his room and thinks, "This isn't what it looked like in the brochure." He's trying to find the pool, the hot tub, the buffet. None of this is really making sense, and then it really gets confusing when someone starts shooting at them. Sadly, far too many Christians have experienced something similar. When someone heard the Gospel, the way it was explained, it sounded like an invitation to The Love Boat. "This is going to be life on the cruise ship filled with health, wealth and prosperity." But over time that obviously isn't true. It feels more like a battleship than a cruise ship. People become confused. They become discouraged and they're hurt, and sadly, some of them just walk away, feeling like they've been deceived. The New Testament couldn't be clearer—this is a spiritual battle. Jesus was very clear: This is not life on The Love Boat. This is actually a spiritual battle. As a matter of fact, of all the metaphors used to describe the Christian life in the New Testament, by far the majority are military metaphors.

Peter tells us as Christians, "We should arm ourselves for battle!" What does he mean by that? That's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 4. We've been working our way through 1 Peter. We find ourselves in chapter 4. Peter reminded us that even if we suffer for the sake of righteousness, we are blessed, because we have experienced the salvation that is ours through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. So, no matter what happens in this world, our future is full of hope and is more wondrous than we can begin to imagine. Even in the most difficult moments in life we remember that we are indeed a blessed people—which then gives way for the therefore in chapter 4, verse 1:

Therefore...in light of this truth...since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lust of men, but for the will of God. (*NASB, 1 Peter 4:1-2)

Since Christ has suffered in the flesh—that's a review of the previous chapter—at a point in time, God became Man. He became flesh and blood and as the God-Man on Earth, He was

reviled; He was abused, rejected and ultimately crucified. So, he says, “Because that’s true—since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same purpose.” The idea of arm yourselves is a military metaphor which means to strap on the weapon, but in the sense of, “It is go-time.” It would not be like someone who has a concealed carry and carries a weapon because someday, possibly, maybe you might use it. The term is not that. The term is a soldier strapping on, “It’s go-time;” you are going into battle. That’s kind of the idea.

Arm yourselves for the same purpose, meaning if you are identifying yourself as a Christ-follower and if you are going to seek to be faithful to the mission of Christ, since they rejected Him, they are going to reject you. They abused Him; they are going to abuse you. You’ve got to get your game face on. You’ve got to arm yourself. You’ve got to realize this is a battle! That’s the idea there. When he says ...he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...Peter consistently uses this idea of suffering in the flesh, in reference to the crucifixion of Christ. So, he is talking about those of us who are Christians have identified with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It’s very consistent with the language of Paul in Romans chapter 6—that when I identify with the death of Christ, I’m identifying with the fact that He died my death for sin. Therefore, I have ceased from sin. Now the verb tenses here matter. The text is not saying, “As of that moment, I will never sin again.” I wish that was true. But that’s not true and that’s not what it’s saying. It’s a past tense—has ceased. It’s in the Greek, a perfect tense verb, meaning that it’s something that happened in the past, at a moment in time, but the effects of that are on-going today. So, the moment that I trusted Christ as Savior, I identified with the fact that He died my death. Therefore, I died to the condemnation of sin; I died to the punishment of sin; I died to the bondage of sin. I no longer have to live under the bondage and power of sin. I have been set free. I am free now to pursue the righteousness of God, to no longer live according to the lust of man, but actually to pursue the will of God. Verse 3:

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles...Gentiles meaning the pagans, the unbelievers, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

The language in Peter is really interesting here. He’s basically saying, “You’ve already wasted enough of your life pursuing things that ultimately don’t matter, things that ultimately won’t make you happy.” He talked about this in Chapter 1. We’ve talked about the fact that Peter kind of cycles these topics and kind of builds on them throughout his letter. In Chapter 1 he says, “At one time before you knew God, you had legitimate desires and you were trying to satisfy them with anything that you could pursue, and you did that because you were ignorant. You did that because you didn’t know what else to do. But once you have encountered the resurrected Christ, don’t continue to pursue what you pursued in ignorance. Now you have found what your soul has been longing for.” So what Peter is saying is you have already wasted enough of your life. There is a sense of urgency to the mission. We have a job to do; we don’t have one more single day to waste. It is an interesting question to wrestle with. What percentage of your life would you say has truly been lived on mission for the things that will ultimately matter forever? Every day that you live on mission changes that percentage. You can’t go back and change the past, but Peter is saying that we have wasted enough days on that stuff. Let’s arm ourselves to be focused on the mission.

Verse 4:

In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you;

Excesses of dissipation just means wasted living. It's the same phrase that was used to describe the prodigal son when the prodigal son was wasting his life. Who are the they that malign you? The they are those that you used to run with, those that engage in the behaviors that are described. At some point in time you decided to no longer live that way but to actually pursue righteousness—to live according to the will of God—and the text says that surprised those that you used to run with. I don't really care for that translation. It isn't just that they were like surprised, but they find it strange; they find it odd. There's even a little bit of the flavor that they are kind of offended. Your choice to walk in righteousness exposes their sin and they don't like that, so they react to that. When you choose righteousness, it exposes unrighteousness. Most of us have had that experience. The people that we used to do those things with now get offended—they look at you like you're so holier than thou, and all of a sudden there's slander and verbal abuse and they start to malign you because your righteousness is exposing their unrighteousness, and they don't like it.

Now stop and think about this. Peter actually heard these words directly out of the mouth of Jesus Himself. Listen to what Jesus said to Peter in John Chapter 3: "This is the judgment that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light. (Why?) For their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

That's exactly what Peter is saying. You need to understand that when you choose the path of righteousness—you choose to do the right thing—there's going to be people around you that don't like it because it exposes their own sin. It's like a flashlight shining on their life, exposing the cockroaches in their life, and they don't like it. So, they verbally attack; they malign you; they slander you. If you're going to be a serious Christ-follower and you are a people-pleaser by nature, that is going to be a very difficult assignment. You have to accept the fact that if you're going to walk in the Light, if you're going to walk according to righteousness, this is a declaration of war—a spiritual battle! You're not always going to be loved or accepted or applauded. You're going to be slandered, maligned, and treated unfairly. That's part of the cost. That's what he means by arm yourselves. Verse 5:

...but they...those that slander you...will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

There is a reminder that at the end of the story, there is only one opinion that matters. We have already seen this in Peter in Chapter 3—that God is for the righteous; God is opposed to those who do evil. This is the reason why I do not seek vengeance, why I don't fight back. Peter has told us again and again that our calling as the people of God is not to contribute to the anger...to

contribute to the hatred...to contribute to the conflict that so defines our culture. Ultimately, I understand, that at the end of the story there is only one opinion that matters and that is the opinion of God—and God sees me through His grace and mercy. Peter told us in Chapter 1 that you have been born again through the grace and mercy of God to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ to inherit an inheritance already reserved in heaven for you. Nobody can change that. Nobody can diminish that. Nobody can take that away from you, no matter what the culture says about you. At the end of the story there is only one opinion that matters, and as a Christian that One opinion is for you.

But there is also a reminder that those who attack, those that slander, will stand before a holy God and give an account. The idea of judging the living and the dead is that some of that judgment will be now, in various ways, but absolutely for sure, all of us will ultimately stand before God at the end of the story—which then kind of creates the urgency in the next verse. Verse 6:

For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

What Peter is saying there is because we understand that one day every single person—everyone we work with, everyone in our family, everyone that we go to school with, everyone next door—will ultimately stand in judgment before a holy God. We as a culture don't like this. We don't want to talk about it but that doesn't make it go away. What Peter is saying is that's why we preach the Gospel. What is at stake are the eternal souls of the people around us. If they do not understand the Gospel, if they do not experience the saving grace of Jesus, they have no hope. Peter is saying when he talks about those who are dead, he is meaning those who are dead right now, at the moment he is writing this, and what he is saying is that there were those whom we preached the Gospel to who heard it, they believed it, and their life was radically transformed by the power of Jesus. But because they chose to walk righteously, they were slandered; they were persecuted. Most scholars think he is referring to those that were ultimately executed for their faith. So, when he says they were judged by men in the flesh, he is saying those people on this Earth judged them and executed them for their commitment to Christ. But now at this very moment, as Peter is writing, they are very much alive in the presence of God, because at the end of the day, God's verdict is the only one that matters. In essence, then, Peter is saying there is an urgency to the message of the Gospel. At the end of the story, every single one of us is going to die and we are going to stand before a holy God and the only thing that will matter then is whether or not we have trusted Jesus as Savior. Between when Peter said that and now—two thousand years later—imagine how many millions of people have died. There is an urgency to the message of the Gospel. We cannot afford to waste one more day. There are people you work with, you go to school with, you live next door to, and they will stand before a holy God, and we have the responsibility to steward the message of the Gospel that they might experience God's salvation.

Cara: Bryan, thank you for reminding us that our time here is short. Our mission here is dire too. People's souls are at stake.

Bryan: Yeah. There's definitely a sense of urgency in Peter's message and we need to be getting with it.

Cara: I think traditionally we think of sharing the Gospel as being sort of this one-time presentation but stewarding the Gospel as you encourage us to do, gives us a different perspective on that, and that sounds like it's a way of life.

Bryan: Yeah, so it's unfortunate that we think of the Gospel as one, two, three, and here's your ticket to Heaven, but it penetrates every area of life, of how I think, how I act, what I do. You know, honestly, a presentation is clean, it's tidy, it takes 10 minutes. I wipe my hands of it and move on. But if we're really going to live out this message, it's messy. It takes time. It takes energy. It's frustrating. Paul talks about in Philippians One, to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel. It's like if this is true, then we need to live like it. And that would be true of every area of life.

Arnie: We should expect that a few people would admire the way of our life, but it's absolutely going to irritate others. But really even that in itself can be used by God if it gets them to think beyond this life.

Bryan: Yeah, so I think we need to be sensitive in the moment what to do, what to say. I always want to make sure the offense is the message of the Gospel and not the Messenger. So, every circumstance is a little bit different, but like as a preacher, I would rather someone respond in some way, even if they're upset, that's better than nothing happening. If they're unmoved, they walk away unchanged, then nothing happened. If people are stirred in some way, then usually it means God's doing something and you have to trust God with the rest.

Cara: I really liked your battleship - love boat analogy, but I want to ask you: we're not supposed to be shooting back - I'm going to try to be the best at that - but how do we arm ourselves then for battle?

Bryan: Yeah, so every metaphor breaks down, if you push it too far. So, the basic idea of that, it first came out of a study in Philippians, but it has to do with the mindset. So, there's nothing wrong with the cruise ship and there's nothing wrong with the battleship. And so, when you get on the cruise ship, you have a certain expectation. You're in a certain frame of mind. You get on a battleship, you have a different expectation, you're in a different frame of mind. The problem comes when you think you're getting on the cruise ship, but you actually got on the battleship, then nothing makes sense. You know, where's the buffet? Where's the entertainment? Where's the hot tub? Why are people shooting at me? Nothing makes sense. But if you understood you're getting on a battleship, then the fact that people are shooting make sense. You're in a frame of mind. You're ready to fight, you're on alert. You got your game face on. So, a lot of this goes back to how we present the Gospel, and I think we need to be careful that we're not telling people that the Gospel is an adventure on The Love Boat. We're going to get there eventually one day.

Cara: Yeah. So, when we know we're getting on the battleship, [Yep], we are knowing that we're going to have to battle. So, our mindset is right [Right]. So, this is a mindset situation.

Bryan: It's a mindset. So, a way to illustrate that is, when I know people are coming to my office essentially to yell at me, I'm ready for it and I've got my game face on, rarely do I end up saying something I shouldn't. It's when they catch me totally off guard, that then I get defensive and it catches me in a way that I maybe respond poorly. So, it's the same thing, that living the way Peter's calling us to live is not easy. So, the idea of arm we, is get your game face on, expect it, respond rightly, be disciplined. So, you think about soldiers on a mission, they can't just start shooting willy-nilly in every direction. They have a mission and they need to stick to the script in order to accomplish the mission. And that's the idea there. They need to understand the strategy and the mission and stay true to that.

Arnie: So really what we're talking about here today is preparing ourselves for the battle. And really that's what we're all about at Back to the Bible. So, whether it's the great teaching from Bryan Clark or podcasts, you listen to our daily devotionals, or even our goTandem app, we're all about you and your daily walk, and helping you move closer to Jesus today than you were yesterday. And the best way we've found to help you grow spiritually is to get you to engage the Bible, so that when you're in the battlefield, you'll be strong and really can win people to Jesus. But Cara, you've tried goTandem. What do you think?

Cara: I don't just try it. I use it every day and I will say; you know, you struggle with things and it's not like you're struggling with the same thing all the time. So what I really appreciate about goTandem is, that if there's just something that I'm struggling with in that moment, I can switch the app around, and I can just really grind it in that God's got this, maybe I need to stop doing this, or I need help in this area, and I am growing with it. It's not over my head. It's absolutely perfect for where I'm at spiritually right now. Gotandem.com. It sends content to me when I need it, which just happens to be every day at 9:00 AM.