

Living in the Land of the Dead

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[0 : 00] If you want, I want you to open your Bibles up to 1 Peter chapter 4. We have been walking through this letter for a few months now, and we have finally arrived at chapter 4, and this morning we're going to cover the first six verses here in this chapter.

And so we do something here when we open the Word together is we stand together in honor of God's Word as we read. So I want you all to stand with me. 1 Peter chapter 4, I'm going to begin reading in verse 1.

Peter writes, Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. 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.

For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.

But they will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those that are dead. Though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

[1 : 20] Take your word now, Father, by your spirit, and apply it to our hearts, we ask in Christ's name. Amen. One of the things that we saw at the end of chapter 3 last week, in one of what has been called one of the most difficult paragraphs, or one of the most difficult passages of Scripture in all the New Testament, is we saw that the basic message of verses 18 through 22 at the end of chapter 3, is that Christ has, through his death and resurrection, he has paid the penalty for our sins.

He has redeemed us from our sins, and he has won a great victory over all spiritual authorities and powers that exist.

So that in his death and resurrection, we see victory over demonic beings, and we see victory over our own sin.

And that's the message of the last part of chapter 3. And you can see a reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus very clearly in verse 18. Take a look up at verse 18.

We are told that Jesus was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit. He's put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.

[2 : 41] And I told you last week that that word made alive is a word used throughout the New Testament, primarily to refer to resurrection. So Jesus died, and then he rose. And it's on the basis of his death and resurrection that we have any hope whatsoever.

We have no hope apart from his dying in our place and taking the punishment that we deserve. We have no hope apart from that. We have no hope ultimately if he has not defeated Satan and all demonic powers that would come against us.

But he has indeed done that through his resurrection so that we have all the reason in the world to hope if we have trusted in Christ. Which is why if you turn over a page to chapter 1, we are told that we have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We have a real, living, abiding hope if we have trusted in Jesus. Jesus, because he was put to death in the flesh and made alive in the Spirit.

Now that matters because we're going to come across one of those phrases again in this passage this morning where we are told that Christ suffered in the flesh. And we have to pause right there and ask, what does that mean?

[3 : 59] Because it's tempting for us to read it quickly and assume that all Peter means is that Jesus suffered physically. That he suffered in his physical, fleshly body.

And we might assume that. But one of the things that we have to remember is that words are used differently by different writers in different ways. And this particular word, flesh, is used differently by various biblical writers.

So, for instance, John uses it frequently in the way that we might assume it would be normally used to refer to a body. Which is why in the Gospel of John we read that the Word, that is Jesus, the Word became flesh.

And what John means is that Jesus really became a human being. He had a real human body. That's what he means. But when the Apostle Paul uses the word flesh, he's not using it to refer simply to our physical bodies.

The Apostle Paul uses the word flesh to refer to our sinful, fallen nature as human beings. So, for instance, Paul sets up a contrast that you might be familiar with between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

[5 : 14] It's a contrast there. And he doesn't mean, he's not opposing the things that we do with our bodies to the things that we do with our spirit. He's opposing the things that flow out of our own sinful natures with the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces within us.

So, for the Apostle Paul, flesh means sinful nature. That helps us to understand why when Paul talks about the incarnation of Christ, Jesus coming to end flesh, to have a body, Paul says that he came in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.

He doesn't say that he just came in the likeness, he didn't just say that Jesus came in the flesh the way that John does, because when Paul uses the word flesh, he means sinful nature. And Paul doesn't want to say that Jesus had a sinful nature, because he didn't.

So, Paul's very careful in his use of words, and he says he came in the likeness of flesh. He didn't simply come in the flesh, according to Paul, he came in the likeness of flesh, because flesh for him means sinful nature.

So, here we are in 1 Peter, and we need to ask ourselves, exactly what does Peter mean by flesh? Does he just mean physical body? Does he mean the sinful nature like Paul does?

[6 : 21] What exactly does he mean? I think that what Peter means here by the phrase, in the flesh, is not simply the physical body, and it's not precisely what Paul means by the sinful nature, but Peter means, in the realm of this fallen sinful world.

So that when he says, in verse 18, that Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, what he means is that Jesus was put to death in this sinful fallen world.

It was in this world, in this fallen place, that he was put to death. And it was in the spirit, in the realm, and in the working power of the spirit, that he was made alive in the resurrection.

Now that's important, because as we approach chapter 4, we hit this phrase, and we need to understand it clearly. Since therefore, we are told, Christ suffered in the flesh.

Christ suffered, not simply in his physical body, but he suffered here, in this sinful fallen world.

Since Christ suffered in this world, and we too live in this world, he says, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.

[7 : 43] Now pause right there for a moment. One of the things that Peter wants us to see throughout this letter, is that we are pilgrims of a sort. We are strangers, we are aliens in a world to which we no longer belong.

And that's the point of emphasizing that Christ suffered in the flesh. We, like Jesus, do not belong in this world, because we have trusted in him. The spirit now dwells within us, and we belong to a heavenly kingdom.

We're strangers and aliens in this world. Which means that there will be many times that when we don't quite fit in this world, there will be many times when we sense and feel the alienation that Peter says we have.

There will be times when we are acutely aware of the fact that we are strangers, that we are pilgrims here. We are very much like those who are alive and yet living in the land of the dead. Because this world is fallen and destined for destruction. Because we're told in Scripture that all those who are outside of Christ, who have not trusted in Christ, are dead in their trespasses and sins, yet we have been made alive.

[8 : 55] So we are alive by the power of the Spirit. We live in the Spirit, and yet we are still, in a sense, in the flesh, in this fallen world. We are living people living in the land of the dead.

And that presents some unique challenges. The question that we have to ask ourselves and that Peter is going to answer for us here is, how do we conduct ourselves? If this is reality, if this is the case, if we really are strangers, if we are, in a way, out of sorts in this place, how do we respond to that?

How do we live? How do we survive in a place like this? And remain faithful to Christ? That's what these verses here are about.

And it begins by reminding us that Jesus also suffered in the flesh. Jesus suffered in this world, and he tells us to arm ourselves. So he's using now warfare imagery.

This is military language. Arm yourselves, therefore, with the same way of thinking, or with the same mindset, or the same attitude, or the same intent. Arm yourself with that.

[10:04] So the first way in which we survive in this world is that we reorder our thinking. We reorder the ways in which we assess things around us.

Arm yourselves with the same kind of mindset that Christ himself had. Arm yourselves with the knowledge of what Christ has accomplished on your behalf.

Change your way of thinking. Change your way of seeing things, is what Peter is telling us here. Specifically, though, in what way? Now, in the translation that I'm reading, in the English Standard Version, it says this at the end of verse 1.

It says that, For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. Arm yourselves with this way of thinking, because whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

What does that mean? Literally, what the text says is, Arm yourselves because the one who has suffered in the flesh is through with or has stopped sin.

[11:11] The one who has suffered in the flesh is through with or has stopped sin. So, here's the question that we ask. To whom is Peter referring when he says, the one who has suffered in the flesh?

Now, the way my translation reads, it sounds like it's anybody who suffers in this world. That would be you and I. Anybody. Whoever suffers in the flesh. But I'm inclined to think that since Jesus at the beginning of this verse is referred to as the one who suffered in the flesh, since in verse 18 of chapter 3 we're told that he suffered and then was put to death in the flesh, I think that the one who suffered in the flesh here is Jesus.

So, it's not all of us who are through with sin or have ceased to sin. It is Jesus who has put a stop to sin. It is Jesus who is through with sin.

And you ask yourselves, in what sense is Jesus through with sin? Because Jesus himself never once sinned. Jesus was without sin in his earthly life. So, in what sense is he through with sin? He's through with it in that he has put an end to the judgment that it ought to bring upon his followers. Which is exactly what verse 18 has told us.

[12:27] Christ suffered once for our sins. Four sins. The righteous substituted in the place of the unrighteous so that he might bring us to God.

Christ, through his suffering and death, has taken upon himself the punishment for sins that you and I deserve. He has stopped. He is through dealing with sin for you and me.

So, that's the first sense in which I would say, how has Christ who suffered in the flesh, how is he through with sin? He's through with sin and he has finally, once for all, the writer of Hebrews says, he has once for all paid the penalty for our sins.

He doesn't have to be re-sacrificed. We don't have to bring another sacrifice in order to pay for more sins. Our sins have been fully covered by the death of Christ. And so, in that sense, Christ is through, he has stopped sin.

But there's another sense in which he has stopped sin. I want you to turn back and look back again in chapter 1. In chapter 1, we read in verse 18 that we were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

[13:52] We have been ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our forefathers. And if you can remember way back, if you were here, when we covered this passage, I said that what this text is telling us is not simply that Jesus paid the price for our sins.

That's chapter 3, verse 18. What this passage is telling us is that we have been redeemed, ransomed, and bought out of a sinful way of living that we inherited from our forefathers.

So Jesus is not only through with sin by way of having paid the penalty for sin. Jesus is through with sin. He has put a stop to sin in us in that He has set us free from the sinful way of living that we inherited from our forefathers.

So we are free from sin. We are really and truly free from the power of sin. Not only the guilt of sin, but the power of sin.

We are free. We do not always live in that freedom. We do not always sense and feel that freedom, but it is a real freedom that we have been granted through the work of Christ on the cross.

[15:01] Progressively being realized throughout our lives. So, arm yourselves with this way of thinking. that Christ has put an end to sin by suffering in your place and taking upon Himself the penalty deserved and He has put an end to sin by setting you free from the power of sin and the futile ways of life that you inherited.

You are free. Guilt no longer hangs over you if you are in Christ and sin no longer rules over you as a master if you are in Christ.

Know that. Arm yourselves with that. You want to know how to live in the flesh in this fallen world as a follower of Christ? First and foremost, you must reorient your thinking around the cross.

You must celebrate and know and think upon and praise God for the work of the cross in setting you free from sin. You must reorient your thinking.

You need new thought patterns. That's the first thing that you need if you're going to live successfully in the flesh as a follower of Christ. Reorient the way that you think around the cross.

[16:15] Have it shape the way that you view the world. Have it shape the way that you view yourself. Have it shape the way that you make decisions and the way that you think about everything else. That's the first thing. Secondly though, not only a new sort of thinking pattern here that's cross-shaped, but also Peter tells us that we need to have new desires.

Take a look at what the text says here in chapter 4. He says, so that we are to live, verse 2, so that we are to live or so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, for the rest of our time in this world, no longer for human passions or human desires, but for the will of God.

So there ought to be a fundamental shift, not simply in our thinking, but there ought to be a fundamental shift in the things that we want, in our desires. No longer are we living according to bare human passions, but now our desires are to be shaped by the will of God Himself.

What exactly does that look like though? What does it look like to have your thoughts and your desires reformed and reshaped according to God's will?

Well, we can see it in the passage. He gives us here in these verses, He gives us a negative example. Here's the kind of life you used to live. Here's the kind of lifestyle that the people around you are still living.

[17:45] And then if you move on past our passage this morning, He will give us some examples of ways that we ought to be living now as followers of Christ. So let's look negatively. Verse 3. This is a new behavior that we're going to have because of our new thinking pattern and new desires.

Verse 3. The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles do. Here it is. Living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

That's quite a list, isn't it? That's quite a list. All of these things relate directly to sexual behavior and abuse of substances.

They're all tied together. But they're tied together for a reason. It's not as if Peter just said, let me pick on these specific sins and ignore everything else at this point. They're tied together for a reason.

Because in the world in which the original readers of this letter were living, these sorts of things, these kinds of gatherings where everyone would get drunk and they would do all sorts of things that they ought not to be doing, these things were tied not only to the religions that were prominent in their areas, but they were also tied to their everyday life and their jobs, their livelihood.

[18:59] So for instance, if you were a mason, if you were a bricklayer, then in the Greek world, you would have been a part of the masonry guild. You'd have been a part of the guild of bricklayers.

Or if you were a carpenter, you would have been in that guild. And all of these various guilds had certain sacrifices that they were to make to certain gods at certain times of the year to ensure the success of their jobs.

And at these festivals in which they would offer these sacrifices, that's when all of these sorts of things would take place. But once you come to Christ, you can't participate in the worship of these

false gods.

You can't participate in all the behavior that surrounds those sort of festivals, which means your livelihood is at stake. You've been trained your whole life.

You were apprenticed to be a carpenter or a bricklayer or whatever it might be. You've been apprenticed and trained your whole life. This is your livelihood. This is what you know how to do. And yet a key component of participating in that workforce is now eliminated for you.

[20 : 01] You can't do it anymore. So this is not simply a matter of, well, I'm going to avoid this list of sins and everything's fine. That shouldn't be overly difficult. I just won't go to the places where people do these things.

It's not that sort of thing. If we read it on that surface level, we will miss the radical amount of change that was required in these newfound followers of Christ. This is a wholesale change in their lifestyles because their way of thinking has changed.

Because now they're to have new desires. Desires so strong they would rather have Christ than their job, than their livelihood.

If that's what it costs them, that's what it costs them. If it costs them to lose all of their standing in the community, to be belittled by everyone around them, then that's the cost that they must pay because they cannot participate in these things.

They have new desires, new thinking, and because of that now, new behavior. Look at it positively though. Let's look at the negative. New behavior. You can see it if you just look down a few verses.

[21 : 13] Verse 8. He says, or verse 7. He says, The end of all things is at hand, therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded. So we see we're still dealing with the mind and we're still dealing with the passions.

Self-controlled, sober-minded. Here it is. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly! Since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling as each has received a gift.

Use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's grace. Whoever speaks as the oracles of God. Whoever serves as the one who serves by the strength that God supplies. So that now, their lifestyles and their desires are shaped by not a desire to get ahead in life, not a desire to participate in these pagan festivals and this immorality, but now it's shaped by a desire to love one another within the body of Christ, to show hospitality to one another, to use their gifts to serve one another. It is a life reoriented now around love and service of one another. It's a total shift in their way of thinking. No longer are they pursuing things for their own gain.

No longer are they looking out primarily for themselves, but now, because Christ suffered in their place and that suffering informs their thinking, they will now serve the people that surround them.

[22 : 42] It's a new way of life. It's not just avoiding particular sins. It's an entirely new way of thinking, feeling, acting, and living.

This is life in the Spirit while you are still in the flesh. It comes oftentimes with a price.

No doubt a price that these people had to pay. Take a look at verse 4. We are told that with respect to this, with respect to all the things Peter's just mentioned and their participation in this sort of setup in society, with respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery.

They're surprised by it. It doesn't make sense to the world around them. It makes absolutely no sense. Why? Why would you have a problem with this? This is just what we do. This is just how things work. Why would you not participate in this?

You've been doing this your whole life. I've known you. This is what we do here. They're surprised. They're shocked. Why would you be so different? They're surprised. They're surprised that you don't join them in the same flood of debauchery and because of that they malign you.

[24 : 00] They malign you. They slander you. They say all sorts of things against you and that's been a problem that Peter has addressed over and over throughout this book because persecution does not always come in the form of a beheading or being thrown to the lions.

In fact, most of the time that's not the form that persecution comes in for people. Persecution usually begins with social ostracism, with rejection, with slandering.

And then there's no doubt that many times it takes a turn into the worst things because we see things happening on the news all the time. We see churches in Egypt being burned. We read of people having Bible study in their homes and China being arrested and thrown into prison.

These are realities in the world around us. These are realities throughout history as we saw last week. These things exist. But simply because you're not experiencing those, simply because there's no threat of imprisonment or no threat of your home being burned or your church being burned does not mean that you're not under persecution.

These people were not facing the lions here. They were being slandered. They were being mocked. They were being maligned by people whom they once called friends and family. And that's a harder burden to bear than we often realize.

[25 : 17] Are you willing to be misunderstood and mocked by those that you have called your closest friends for all of your life for the sake of Christ?

Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to be whispered about and laughed at and slandered when you're not in the room by your co-workers or by your family members?

Because you won't participate in what seemed to them like everyday normal activities. Because you don't lie to your boss when he asks a straightforward question.

Or because you don't participate in all the same office activities and parties that everyone has always done and has always just been a part of life. Because you don't participate in all the same discussions that have always gone on.

Because you're not a part of those things anymore. Are you willing to step back from those things and be maligned for them? Or will you live in the flesh and look no different than the rest of the people living in the flesh?

[26 : 27] What will you do? Peter says that there are consequences for those who come against us. There are consequences for those who would mock us.

He says, verse 4, with respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of devultry and they malign you. And then verse 5, but they will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Every other place in the New Testament where someone is spoken of as judging the living and the dead, it's a direct reference to Jesus. Not so much a reference to God the Father.

He's often referenced as the judge, but anytime someone is referred to as the judge of the living and the dead, it's always Jesus. So now this same Jesus who has paid the penalty for our sins, who endured such great suffering on behalf of us, now he will sit as judge the living and the dead of everyone.

so that we need not as followers of Christ, we need not concern ourselves with setting things right. We're in the flesh, we're in this world, we're in this fallen place.

[27 : 44] Our concern, our first concern is not how can I set this right? How can I make sure that that person gets what they deserve for saying what they said or doing what they did behind my back? How can I get them back?

That's not our concern as followers of Christ. We accept that we are strangers and aliens and as strangers and aliens, you don't appeal for justice in a foreign land.

You don't. And Jesus is saying, Peter is saying here that Jesus is indeed going to judge everyone, living and dead.

And those who mock you, those who malign you, justice waits them. It's not your task, it's not your job, it's not your concern. In fact, he goes on to say that as evidence that Jesus is judged not only of those who are alive, but even of those who've died, he says, this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead.

He doesn't mean that Jesus went and preached to people who were already dead. What he means is that people who have died, fellow believers, have heard the gospel. The gospel was preached to them before they died and now because of that, even in the judgment, they will come before a judge who is also their savior.

[29 : 06] That's exactly what the passage goes on to say. This is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, or you might say even to those who are now dead, so that though judged in the flesh, even though maligned in this world, even though judged by people here in this world, even though that's the case, though judged in the flesh, they might live in the Spirit.

They will be vindicated when they come into Christ's kingdom. They will be vindicated when they come before Him who judges the living and the dead because they will be in the Spirit the way that God is.

They will have eternal life. And so the issues that stand before us as we read this text are will we accept that we are strangers and foreigners and pilgrims?

Stop insisting on justice now and trust that He who has paid for our sins is also He who will vindicate us on Judgment Day.

Will we live that way? Will we be different from the world, characterized by service and love with a new way of thinking shaped around the cross?

[30 : 23] Will we be a people who love and serve because we have been loved and served by the Maker of all things? Or will we go with the flow and be no different from anyone else?

And all of this, of course, assumes that you are a pilgrim. But the reality is some of you may not be. Some of you may be perfectly at home here. And the reason for that is because it's the only home you have. And you need desperately to trust in Jesus and be given a better home, a better future, and a hope that is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus.

Let's pray. Father, I don't want us to be just like everyone else. I don't want us to be different for the sake of being different and pursue strange things, but I want us to be different in obedience to your word.

Different because the cross of Jesus makes all the difference for us. the resurrection of our Savior changes everything for us.

[31 : 43] Let us not bend to pressure to look and act and hide among everyone else, but let us be willing to so trust in Jesus and so desire Him that we'll stand out and be the strangers that we are.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to do something a little bit differently because Brian had to take off to go home to check on Summer and the baby because he can't get anyone to answer a phone.

And so rather than closing by singing the way that we normally do, I'm going to get Joe and Nick here just passing. You guys go ahead and get the baskets. We'll pass our offering baskets.

Okay? And then as soon as we're done passing those, we will close by reading some scripture and I'll dismiss and then you can stay here and visit for a few minutes.

No, that's kind of strange, awkward. It's not the way we usually end our service. Okay? But we'll make do. All right? So you guys pass the offering plate. Yeah. Yeah. You spread out the skies over empty space said let there be light into a dark and formless world your light was born.

[33 : 16] You spread out your arms over empty hearts said let there be light into a dark and hopeless world your son was born.

You made the world and saw that it was good. You sent your only son for you are good What a wonderful maker All right, you guys stand.

I'll dismiss you with this passage of scripture. Jude verse 24 says, Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time and now and forever.