

***AN ATTITUDE FIT FOR ALTITUDE*****1 Peter 4**

**INTRO:** If you have your Bibles, turn to 1 Peter 4. I'll be reading the entire chapter, and it's not particularly short, and that is why I do not have it up on the screen. This chapter is the next installment as we resume our study of these little letters that have such a big message. We've been working our way through these letters, which we find at the end of the New Testament, since last Spring. We will wrap the series up in early February, and then hear from Matt Lewis about his ministry around the world, and then a Lenten series will follow at the end of February that will take us up to Easter.

Now listen to 1 Peter 4. (Read 1 Peter 4)

Peter and John had such a powerful ministry after they were filled with the Holy Spirit that they got in trouble for preaching and healing in Jesus name. We see a picture of this in Acts 4 where we read, *When they (the religious leaders) saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.* Acts 4:13 (NIV). For me, to have something like that said of me, would be the highest honor. For Jesus to be so clearly a part of my life, would mean that I'm on the right track. There are people for whom Jesus shines through so obviously that you can't miss that they have been with him. (Tell about the girls coming home from Wal-Mart after meeting Reggie)

People like this have an attitude that shows they are bound for glory. They have an attitude fit for altitude.

Let's see how, if it's not already true of us, we can make it an eternal reality.

It seems it's a not brainer, but in order to have this reality, we need to have. . .

**The attitude of Christ**

- And Peter starts out with the painful truth – it will take suffering. But its not just any suffering – lots of people suffer; what Peter is talking about is suffering for righteousness sake.
- Peter's audience is more and more becoming acquainted with persecution and suffering. Many of them were Gentiles who, because previously they had been involved in the prevailing pagan religions of the day, had not been molested. But now they were fair game for persecution, from anyone and for anything. Peter says, if Jesus suffered for us, we should do no less for him.
- One commentator made the point that being with Jesus means we are in the line of fire. It's like when a commander is leading a daring charge. The enemy will zero in on him and that means, anyone who takes up the charge with him is bound to draw fire too. Jesus is an easy target. His followers are too. Living for God is not popular – so it only stands to reason that we will suffer for it.
- So let's . . .

**Kiss sin goodbye**

- Peter says in verse 1 to “be done with sin,” F. B. Meyer says we are to make “*A clean break with sin.*” What that means is we need to be determined to cease from sin.
- Just a few verses prior to this, at the end of Chapter 3, Peter has been referring to baptism. Now he's harkening back to it again. As I've often pointed out, the New Testament picture of baptism is in Romans 6 where Paul says that the experience of baptism is like being buried with Christ in death and raised with him to newness of life. In that act of baptism the Christ Follower is identified with Christ. His readers have rejected paganism and now share in Christ's sufferings and even his death. And even in that death he has the risen life and power of Christ and, even in suffering is victorious over sin. This builds spiritual muscles.
- It wasn't easy then and it's certainly not easy now – but the person who is in Christ says goodbye to their old life and makes God the boss. So get rid of the old life and put on the new life – kiss sin goodbye – that will bring the attitude of Christ.
- A quick aside about verses 5 and 6: Let me read them again. *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.* 1 Peter 4:5-6 (NIV). Over the centuries there have been many different ways of looking at these difficult verses and I really don't know the answer. Older translations talked about the judgment of the “*quick and the dead*” (KJV). It influenced the Apostles Creed (which is used and recited very seldom in our tradition). It came to sound like Jesus went into hell and preached to those who inhabited it –

which gave rise to the teaching of purgatory in Catholicism, and has seemed to give some, even today the idea that there is a second chance for those who have died to receive salvation. This is not supported elsewhere in scripture. But here is a thought from William Barclay that makes some sense: He writes “*Many in repeating the creed have found the phrase "He descended into hell" either meaningless or bewildering, and have tacitly agreed to set it on one side and forget it. ... But it contains these three great truths--that Jesus Christ not only tasted death but drained the cup of death, that the triumph of Christ is universal and that there is no corner of the universe into which the grace of God has not reached.* (end quote). This is indeed true. But it seems that most, if not all, modern translations, indicate that, as we see from what I just read, that the dead have had their chance and God is a God of mercy and grace.

- Now moving on. Regardless of what Peter really meant in those verses, the next verses make it abundantly clear . . .

### **People get ready!**

- Or better yet – People BE ready! Specifically he says, *The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.* (v 7). All through the New Testament this was a familiar theme. Jesus is returning soon! Paul, James, and John anticipated it and the people of the early church still believed these words to be true. And it’s still true, 2,000 years later – he is returning soon – any time. The hymn says hopefully:

*It may be at morn, when the day is awaking,  
When sunlight through darkness and shadow is breaking  
That Jesus will come in the fullness of glory  
To receive from the world His own.  
It may be at midday, it may be at twilight,  
It may be, perchance, that the blackness of midnight  
Will burst into light in the blaze of His glory,  
When Jesus receives His own.  
O Lord Jesus, how long, how long  
Ere we shout the glad song,  
Christ returneth! Hallelujah!  
Hallelujah! Amen. Hallelujah! Amen.*

- Here is the truth – the time is near! It could be NOW! It could be tomorrow morning. It could be that we hit an icy patch on the way home and hit a tree. No matter how it happens – we need to be ready. Are you?
- So be alert and ready and anticipating the return of Jesus. And be sober minded – which means, literally to have a safe mind.
- And then Peter points out some key ways to be ready. He already says we need to flee sin – and then we are to love. Love covers a multitude of sins. Your own, perhaps, but also those you love. When we love those who don’t deserve to be loved we are just like the one who loves us when we didn’t deserve to be loved.
- He goes on to say that we are to offer hospitality and utilize the gifts we have been given, whether it’s preaching, service or stewardship. The long and the short of it is that we are to serve the world with our preaching and practical service – all for the glory of God. And all because glory is just around the corner, we are not only ready ourselves – we are helping others to be ready. And then Peter points out . . .

### **There WILL be a test**

- It’s a shame that we have gotten so comfortable being Christians that we aren’t ready for the kinds of persecution that strike many around the world. Peter says we should not be surprised by the fiery ordeal. In fact we should rejoice in it.
- Is this because Christians are supposed to be masochists? Of course not. Even though some through history have sought persecution and suffering, that is not the point. Peter makes it clear that we don’t have to go looking for persecution, it will find us – and how we handle it will reveal his glory. It shows we are true to his name.
- Finally, in verse 19 Peter exhorts his readers to continue to do good and, whatever happens to them to commit their lives to God. He is their faithful Creator and you can count on him.

- The word Peter uses here that is translated “commit” is the Greek technical word for depositing money with a trusted friend. There were no banks in Peter’s day. We know from Jesus parable of the talents, that when a man went on a journey, he would leave his money in the safe-keeping of a friend. Barclay writes that “such a trust was regarded as one of the most sacred things in life. The friend was absolutely bound by all honor and all religion to return the money intact.” This reminds me of a discussion that I’ve often heard in Kathy’s family. In fact, I heard her and her sister discussing it just this past Monday. (Tell about Kathy’s grandmother’s trust being squandered). A sacred trust was broken, and now, over one hundred years later it is still remembered with a certain bitterness.
- Peter points out that if a person commits himself to God, God will not fail him – it’s as simple as that. In fact, this is the very word used by Jesus, when he said, from the Cross, “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*” (Luke 23:46). That was Jesus faithfully entrusting his life to his Father.
- Trust in God and do the right thing. That is what happens when you have an attitude fit for altitude. You get Glory. Amen.