November 18/19, 2017

Arm Yourself for Battle

Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

1 Peter 4:1-11

Pastor Bryan Clark

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, 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." *(laughter)* 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. If you're visiting with us, we've been working our way through 1 Peter. We find ourselves in chapter 4. Last we were in 1 Peter, 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 then 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! 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 then 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 then 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 judge 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. So verse 7:

The end of all things is near; (Vs. 7a)

There's a sense of urgency in those words. The background of those words would be basically from Genesis 3:15 up into Abraham and on through the prophets, there was a promise that one day God would send a Messiah, that one day God Himself would take on human flesh in order to provide salvation for sinful men and women. It's the story of Christmas—that at a moment in time God actually entered into this world as a Man—as the God-Man. He was rejected; He was reviled and He was maligned—ultimately crucified for the sins of the world. Now that the Messiah has come, there's nothing else we're waiting for. If you remember the story of Christmas in the gospel of Luke, when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple, Simeon said, "*My eyes have finally seen Thy salvation; I can die in peace."* He understood this is what everyone's been waiting for.

From the ascension of Jesus to present day, the New Testament refers to this as *the last days*. Sometimes you hear people say they think they are living in the last days. I *know* we are living in the last days. The New Testament says from the ascension of Jesus to the return of Christ are the *last days*. What's meant by that is that there's nothing else we are waiting for. Jesus may come back today. He may come back tomorrow. It may be a hundred years from now. We don't know but there's nothing else that needs to happen for that to occur. So there's a sense of urgency; there's the realization that we can't waste one more day. What is at stake are the eternal souls of the men and women around us. Therefore, knowing Jesus could come back tomorrow, we have work to do. "Arm ourselves; get with it." That's in essence what Peter is saying.

I think one of the best ways to understand this is if you ever sold a house. You get the house all spiffed up, and then you live in this state of readiness. You know you are constantly keeping it clean and tidy. You don't want anything to mess it up because you don't know if at any moment the realtor is going to call, "By the way, in fifteen minutes I am bringing someone over," and so you

wait in this state of readiness. That's like the idea that Jesus could come back today or tomorrow, so there's a sense of readiness, a sense of urgency that I need to be living in light of that. Verse 7:

> **The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment...**which means right thinking...**and sober *spirit*** ...which means clear thinking, I need to be thinking rightly...clearly**...for the purpose of prayer.**

Literally it's plural for the purpose of *prayers*, which is this idea that I'm living in alignment with the will of God, with the mission that God has given me. So I think rightly; I think clearly, and I live my life each day accordingly.

> **Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins**. (Vs. 8)

The second time Peter has told us part of the result of being born again is a *fervent love for one another*. Basically the idea is if we're going to experience the battle *out there*, then we need to have a place of refuge *in here*. There needs to be a place where it is safe. There needs to be a place where we heal, where we learn, where we grow, where we're strengthened. We need to get it right *in here* in order to be effective *out there*. The idea of **love covers a multitude of sins** is taken from The Proverbs. It just basically means that the church is still made up of humans, and humans are kind of odd and they can be irritable. Sometimes they may even say or do hurtful things, but we need to unite ourselves around a common mission and understand that we need to give our lives to something bigger then ourselves.

Our culture is basically defined by selfishness, by self-absorption and by people, because of that, who are offended by everything. It's seems like all we do as a culture is we are consciously, selfishly offended by everything that everyone says or does. The danger is in bringing that mindset into the church—where I am selfish, self-absorbed and offended by every little thing. As long as that's true, we will never accomplish the mission. The idea that **love covers a multitude of sins** is the idea that we need to put differences aside. We need to put those little hurts and irritations and struggles aside and say, "There is a greater mission that we are called to, and for the sake of the eternal souls of the people around us, we need to have our act together. We need to love one another in order to be as effective as possible *out there*."

I think we would all agree that this has been a very difficult year in our nation—so many natural disasters, so many human disasters, so much chaos and hatred and bloodshed. It's just been a very difficult year. But in the midst of these very difficult stories, there have been some amazing human interest, heroic stories of people who have risen to the occasion, set differences aside, and actually risked their own lives in order to help or rescue people they don't even know. There have been some amazing stories that kind of renew your sense in the human spirit, that it is possible that as a culture we could be different than who we are today...just these little glimpses.

One of the things that has been frustrating is you have none of that among our national leaders. You have seen none of that among our national politicians. Think back when 9/11 happened: Our politicians in Washington gathered on the steps of the Capitol, and within twenty-four hours, together they sang *God Bless America*. Think about how much has changed in such a short amount of time. Now in the midst of these terrible human tragedies, within hours the politicians are exploiting human tragedy for political gain—before the facts are even in. I find it utterly disgusting.

But this is what we need to learn from that. We need to remind ourselves what that's telling us—that the change will never come from Washington, D.C. It won't. It's going to come in the trenches. It's going to come in the grass roots. It's going to come from the average people in the streets and the community that finally says, "We want something different," and at the forefront of that movement should be the people of God who aren't contributing to the hate, aren't contributing to the anger, aren't contributing to being offended by every little thing. But instead we choose to roll up our sleeves, to get in the mix and genuinely seek to make a difference. There's a sense of urgency to this. In order for that to happen, it needs to start together as the church—as we love one another here—in order to be effective at accomplishing our mission out there.

Then Peter just basically defines this love further. Verse 9:

> **Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a *special*** gift...I prefer a "calling"...,**employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.** (Vs. 9-11)

In essence we've all received a *calling*, so we need to be faithful to our calling, whether it's up front or it's behind the scenes. We need to be faithful to that calling to the praise and the glory of Jesus Christ. These verses remind us that our mission statement as a church is dead on: *To glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ.* That's exactly what Peter just said. So Peter is saying we need to **arm ourselves** which is a mindset—it's a game face—to realize if we're going to follow Christ, we've wasted enough of our lives pursuing the things that don't matter. Let's not waste one more day, but rather let's choose to rightly represent the message of the gospel—understanding that it will come with cost. The people around us won't always understand or appreciate the righteous path we have chosen, but there's a sense of urgency to this. The people you work with, the people you live next door to, the people you go to school with—every person in our community will one day stand before a holy God in judgment.

People are free to believe what they want, and if people want to believe that all roads eventually lead to God, they are free to believe that. But at the end of the story there's only one opinion that matters, and that is the opinion of God, and God has been perfectly clear that there is no way to God except through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Therefore we have a responsibility to be faithful stewards of the message. Jesus may come back tomorrow—there's a sense of urgency to this!

So there are lots of ways we could illustrate this but I am going to illustrate it this way. I would say that we as a church do well with this. I do think that we love one another. I do think that *love covers a multitude of sins.* I do think, generally speaking, we're united around a common mission. I think this is something we take seriously and I think we take seriously our call to represent that message out into the streets and the neighborhoods and the community. In light of that, stop and think about it. Right now—November, 2017, this very day—there are people you know, people you work with, people living next door, people we go to school with who today are lost in their misery. They are empty. They are desperate. They're trying everything that this world has to offer to somehow satisfy the emptiness within. They're trying to figure out some way to deal with the restlessness inside of them. But now they are getting more desperate because they are starting to wonder if anything will

ultimately ever satisfy. They may put on a happy face at work or school and in public but at night when their lights are out and nobody is around, they are empty; they are desperate and they're wondering, "Is there even a reason to live one more day?"

But as a result of people in this room today taking this mission seriously and choosing to live on mission, some of those people who right now, today, are empty and desperate, one year from now will be sitting in one of these seats, and their lives will have been radically changed through the power of Jesus. They will know the forgiveness of sin. They will know the removal of their shame and guilt. They will have found what their soul has been longing for. They will have a sense of meaning, purpose and hope, and their lives will have been radically transformed by the power of Jesus. A year from now some of those in your school, your neighborhood, in the workplace, in the community, they will be among us and they will bear testimony that their lives have been radically changed by the power of Jesus. And that will be true because there are many of you who are here this morning that take this mission seriously, and God will use you to be a voice to proclaim a message that will change someone's life forever—to the praise of the glory of God!

Our Father, we celebrate this morning, that You have called us to live on mission, to be proclaimers of the message that is what the people in our culture are searching for. God, may we together, as the people of God, seek to faithfully live on mission, so that others might come to know Jesus, that their lives might be radically changed both now and forever, Lord, to the praise of the glory of Your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. How much of your life have you spent seriously focused on accomplishing the mission God has given us as Christians? Try to evaluate it in percentage. Would you say you are currently living on mission? Why or why not?

2. What is the cost to living on mission for Christ? How has it affected the relationships around you? Do most people seem to admire you for your commitment to the mission or do they seem more irritated or confused by your priorities? Why do you think that is?

Bible Study

1. Read I Peter 4:1-6. Review what Christ has done for us according to Peter in 1:3-9; 2:21-25; 3:18. All this is then tied to the "therefore" in 4:1.

2. Peter states we need to "arm" ourselves. What do you think he means by that? Compare I Peter 1:13-21. What does he mean by "ceased from sin?" See Romans 6:1-11.

3. Peter reminds us we have spent enough time wasting our lives away on worthless behaviors. It's time to live for what matters. How will our holy living likely affect the people around us according to Peter? Compare John 3:19-21.

4. What then do we need to remember about who is the final judge? How does that affect our view regarding the seriousness of the mission?

5. Read I Peter 4:7-11. What does Peter mean by "the end of all things is near?" How should that affect how we live?

6. What is necessary inside the church (the people of God) for us to be effective in accomplishing the mission outside the church? What happens when the selfish consumer-driven mindset defines the church? How does this affect our ability to accomplish the mission?

Application

1. According to Peter, what does it mean to "arm yourselves?" What does this mean specifically for you? What will be necessary for you to do this?

2. What can you do personally to maintain the perspective that we are on a battleship rather than a cruise ship?

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