

1 Peter 4.1-11 / COB / 08.25.13

Introduction

† Pray

† **[Slide 1: map]** I have never seen two maps of Roman era Turkey that agreed on the borders of the various regions, but this will give us an idea of where Peter's readers were living.

- The smiley faces represent places you might know. Antioch in Syria is to the lower right; this is where Paul and Barnabas launched their first mission; Israel would be due south of here. Tarsus, not too far to the northwest, is where Paul was from. Ephesus, over in the far west, was a center for pagan religion, with huge temples, but the church there also thrived and became influential; and – just to give you reference – the northern most city marked is modern day Istanbul.
- You can see, Peter's readers were scattered throughout a large portion of the northern half of the country, which was largely rural at this time. It seems likely that Peter sent out many copies of this letter, to ensure its distribution to the individual communities throughout these regions.

† When Peter was writing this letter, southern Turkey had some thriving churches thanks to Paul's mission trips, while the church was newly planted in the north where his readers were.

- Over the next few centuries, churches in Turkey would thrive and become important sources for Christian thought. Partly because of this and because of Turkey's central location, most of the early church councils were held in Bithynia, where Nicaea, Chalcedon, and Constantinople were located.
- Turkey today is largely Islamic. Most people are moderates, but the church there faces isolation, police harassment, and disruptions of church services, and the persecution has been worse within the last century. It also is worse in other countries.
- This week, scores of Christian churches and Christian owned businesses were seriously damaged or destroyed in Egypt, as the violence between the military and the Islamic Brotherhood turned toward the common enemy of believers in Christ.
- In India this week, a Christian pastor's mother was severely beaten and threatened with death if she did not convert to Hinduism.
- In North Korea, thousands of Christians are in prison camps, but despite the severe oppression, there is a growing underground church movement of an estimated 400,000 Christians.
- In the US, the persecution is far less severe. We do face social pressure from our friends and neighbors, the media often misrepresent us, and the government sometimes pressures us to accept unbiblical views. But if Christians around the world and throughout history have stood with Christ through violence and death, then I hope we can endure these milder forms of suffering without wavering in our faith, our obedience, or our open declaration of the gospel.
- Today, Peter will give us some tips about how to stand strong for Christ in the face of persecution.

† So turn in your Bible to 1 Peter 4. If you are new to the Bible, the table of contents will get you there. My slides will be using the NET today, so you can follow along there or in your translation.

[Slide 2: suffered in the flesh] 1 Peter 4.1-2 NET: **So, since Christ suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same attitude, because the one who has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin,² in that he spends the rest of his time on earth concerned about the will of God and not human desires.**

- † Jesus was scorned, mocked, conspired against, falsely arrested, beaten, robbed, and executed on a cross. He suffered in this life. But his suffering led to his resurrection back to life and his ascendance to the right hand of God the Father, where he waits to return as God's anointed king. His suffering led to his inheritance with God.
 - Christ's suffering also provided his victory over sin and death, which empowered him to offer us reconciliation with God the Father and salvation from God's punishment for sin.
 - We should appreciate that Jesus was willing to suffer in this life, that he was willing to suffer and die for righteousness and for the gospel mission.

- † **[Slide 3: same attitude]** Peter says we should adopt the same attitude or purpose, that we too should be willing to suffer for righteousness and the gospel mission.
 - Why? Peter offers two reasons: first, looking back to consider what he has taught us already in the letter, he reminds us that Christ suffered for us and we are supposed to follow Christ.
 - Second, because "the one who has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin." What can Peter mean by this? He explains in v.2: this person will be concerned with doing God's will instead of with satisfying his or her own desires.
 - Why would this be true? Suppose you were suffering in some way for doing what is right, and you had a choice to continue doing what is right and continuing to suffer or to stop doing what is right and end the suffering; now suppose you choose to do what is right, knowing it will bring more suffering. You are choosing to do God's will, to walk with God, to be disciplined, even though it brings suffering... I have to think this means you are less likely to be tempted into sin to satisfy your own desires.

- † I have friends who are about to become missionaries in a country that doesn't allow missionaries. They will risk deportation, fines, imprisonment, maybe even the safety of their family, to do what is right. In that situation, having made that big decision for the sake of righteousness, do you think they will have trouble resisting the temptation to pirate music or cheat on their taxes? If they are willing to die for what is right, are they likely to chase after worldly desires?

- † This was the situation of Peter's original readers. They were facing social pressure to conform to their sinful culture; if they would conform, the persecution and suffering would end.
 - However, if they were willing to suffer to continue doing what was right, then they could continue to walk with God and live to do his will, resisting the temptation to seek acceptance, comfort, and fleshly pleasures through sinning along with their non-believing peers.
 - We have the same choice today; we must learn to expect suffering for doing what is right as we follow Christ, instead of looking at suffering as something to avoid by sinning or by becoming dependent on coping mechanisms. Remember, it is just as much a sin to neglect to do the positive commands of scripture as it is to be doing what we should not.

[Slide 4: non-Christians] ³**For the time that has passed was sufficient for you to do what the non-Christians desire. You lived then in debauchery, evil desires, drunkenness, carousing, drinking**

bouts, and wanton idolatries. ⁴So they are astonished when you do not rush with them into the same flood of wickedness, and they vilify you.

- † If you are reading the NASB, ESV, or NKJV, you might notice your translation refers to Gentiles instead of non-Christians. Since most of Peter's original readers were Gentiles [or non-Jews], it might seem strange that he would associate Gentiles with all these sinful acts in this verse.
 - Here's what's happened. The Greek word ἔθνος means a nation or a people; it's the source of our words ethnicity and ethnic. In Israel, people used the plural of this word, meaning "nations," to refer to all the people groups who were not in ethnic Israel; thus we think of it as meaning Gentiles, as in non-Jews. But the usage of the plural in this sense meant any people outside the group, and in this case it refers to those outside of the church. So the way Peter is using it, it means pagans or non-believers.

- † Before you and I came to faith, we followed our lusts and lived in sin, just like pagans do, because we were pagans.
 - But as we talked about back in chapter one [1.14-15], we have put away those bad habits now. Now that we have been given new spiritual life, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and Christ as our model, we stop complying with our evil urges and instead seek to become holy and pure in all things.

- † **[Slide 5: astonished]** Those who still do not believe in Christ tend to be surprised when we do not continue in our sins, as they do. We used to get drunk with them, we used to gossip with them, we used to do all the bad things they do, but now we stop. This confuses them and leads them to malign or vilify us.
 - Acting righteously can provoke hostility in others because it shines a light on their sins and leaves them with a sense of spiritual conviction which they misinterpret to be your judgment on them. They therefore will pressure you to sin along with them, and will be surprised that you do not, which will lead to further hostility.

- † **[Slide 6: list]** Peter and Paul both use lists of sins in their letters. Peter's list of sins is not meant to be exhaustive, just representative. But this list can help us understand what was happening.
 - It is notoriously difficult to translate biblical lists, because often the words are rare and often they will have overlapping meanings. Considering the historical context of Peter's readers and consulting the best lexicons [dictionaries], here is how I would translate this list: "You lived then in wildness, lusts, drunkenness, gluttonous eating, drinking parties, and disgusting idolatries."
 - Idolatry is the worship of other gods, which was a part of day to day life in that culture, every day, it was woven into the social fabric. Wild parties characterized by drunkenness and sexual sin were commonly associated with the idolatry. When Christians refrained from these activities, they stood out as different. This led people to perceive the Christians as both judgmental and subversive since they would not participate in the emperor cult, so those people persecuted and ostracized the Christians, preventing them from becoming an accepted part of the community.
 - In the US today, there is no emperor cult, but we are expected to follow superstitions, read horoscopes, decorate our houses, offices, and even children once a year with signs and symbols of evil; we are expected to accept as legal the atheistic and secular-humanistic perspectives on the rights of a fetus or the nature and source of mankind; and we are expected to tolerate other religions without considering them idolatrous. When we stand up for Christian perspectives on these and similar issues, we face a strong backlash of hostility.

- Similarly, the person who does not get drunk, does not attend wild parties, does not participate in discussions about sexual sins, can end up lonely in the office or classroom.

[Slide 7: vv.5-6; 5 highlighted] ⁴So they are astonished when you do not rush with them into the same flood of wickedness, and they vilify you. ⁵They will face a reckoning before Jesus Christ who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶Now it was for this very purpose that the gospel was preached to those who are now dead, so that though they were judged in the flesh by human standards they may live spiritually by God's standards.

- † Because we all want to avoid trouble and we want to be liked, it is tempting to soften our beliefs or our walk with God and start to conform in little ways to our culture. Peter wants to prevent this.
 - In v.5, he reminds us of the choice we have to make. We can side with God, the church, and righteousness or we can side with those in the darkness. But what is tempting about their situation? They might enjoy social acceptance and some sinful pleasures, but they will face the judgment of Jesus when he returns! They will have to answer for their lack of faith and their life of sin.
- † Today, it is commonly claimed that religious truth is relative. That you can believe whatever you want, and for you that is truth. Peter disagrees.
 - He says there are two paths: the path of faith in Christ, by which we might suffer a little now, but by which we are empowered to endure and assured of our salvation and inheritance in Heaven; or the path of sinful disbelief which leads to judgment by Christ. You are in or you are out.
 - How silly is it if those of us who are in – who enjoy a relationship with God, empowerment by the Holy Spirit, cleansing, right standing, deliverance from the power of sin, salvation from the punishment for sin, and a guaranteed inheritance in Heaven – how silly is it if those of us who are in are jealous of and tempted to join those who are out?
- † Think of their fate: they are going to Hell! No earthly benefit is worth that price! They are condemned, they have no spiritual life, and so they live like they are dead, dead in their corruption and sin. Let us not be tempted to chase after their social acceptance or their sinful pleasures!
- † **[Slide 8: v.6]** God has given us the mission of proclaiming the gospel to everyone, so that those who are out might have a chance to move from the darkness to the light, to join us in true life with God. If they join us, they and we might be judged by human standards, hated, and even killed in the flesh, but the payoff is eternal and spiritual life with God through faith in Christ and his sacrifice.
 - Note the meaning of v.6 is that the gospel was preached to those who are “now” dead back when they were alive, not that they received the gospel after they were dead.
 - Both non-believers and believers die, so non-believers might see no advantage in “ruining” this life by rising up to Christian standards. But death is not the end. By sharing the gospel with people, we give them a chance to respond in faith and be saved, so they can avoid God’s condemnation and join us in the glorious eternal inheritance in which we believe.

[Slide 9: vv.7-9] ⁷ For the culmination of all things is near. So be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of prayer. ⁸Above all keep your love for one another fervent, because love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Show hospitality to one another without complaining.

- † As we have said before, we are in the “last times” [1.20], awaiting the return of Jesus to judge and end all things. The return of Jesus is considered “imminent,” in that it could happen at any moment.

Now, I understand, almost 2000 years have passed since Jesus ascended to Heaven, and his people have been waiting and waiting. Still we must feel a sense of urgency, because he could return before we finish this service!

- † **[Slide 10: prayer]** If we have a sense of urgency about Christ's return, then we will be intentional and disciplined about our prayer life. Why?
- I don't know about you, but I have family members and friends who are not yet in, who don't know Christ, so I desperately am praying that God will save them before it is too late.
 - I also want to sprint through the finish line, so I ask God to bless us with fruitful church ministry and for his empowerment to live righteously and represent him well to others.
 - I know we are to put all our hope in God's deliverance, so I ask him to help us depend on him, to trust completely in him for deliverance through our day to day struggles and ultimately through death into our inheritance with him.
 - I also ask God to help us praise and worship him with thanksgiving and submission, so that he is pleased with us.
- † **[Slide 11: love]** In light of Christ's return, Peter commands us to have an earnest love for each other. The Greek word here, ἐκτενής, implies a constant, earnest love, similar to the term Peter used in 1.22.
- We are not to be merely passive or opportunistic about showing love. Peter's word choice suggests we must continuously find ways to show love to one another, persisting even when we do not feel the emotion or there are relational difficulties.
 - Peter says this effort at love is "above all," meaning it is of the utmost importance and of the highest priority within the Christian community. Why? Because this kind of love, coupled with God's truth, is the antidote to disunity within the church.
 - When Peter says such love "covers" a multitude of sins, he is not saying that we can earn forgiveness: Peter already has revealed that salvation and forgiveness are by grace, and cannot be earned [1.18-19; 2.24-25; 3.18; see also Ephesians 2.8-9].
 - What Peter means is that when we choose to love others, we overlook their sins against us, rather than using them as a basis for retaliation. If we receive sin but respond with love, then we can prevent disunity and broken relationships, as we follow Christ's example.
- † **[Slide 12: hospitality]** One way to show love is by being hospitable to each other. This can include special situations like putting up visiting missionaries or opening your home for ministry meetings, but it also can include simply having people over for meals or social activities.
- We are commanded to be hospitable to each other, even if we do not have that spiritual gift, any natural ability for hospitality, or the desire to be hospitable. As with love, we are to show hospitality even when we do not feel like it. Interestingly, Peter says we are to be hospitable to each other without grumbling. Why would he mention that? We should reflect on that this week.

[Slide 13: vv.10-11] ¹⁰Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God. ¹¹Whoever speaks, let it be with God's words. Whoever serves, do so with the strength that God supplies, so that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

- † God blesses us with time, energy, money and other material possessions, creativity, personality, intelligence, natural abilities, experiences, and spiritual gifts. We are to be "good stewards" of all

these resources, as we oversee them for God. According to these verses, to be a good steward is to use these resources to help others [instead of ourselves], and to do it for God's glory [not our own].

- † A spiritual gift is a way that God consistently works through you to supernaturally draw others into a deeper faith in Christ. In whatever ways God wants to work through you, let your attitude be to glorify God through your service to others.
- † **[Slide 14: gifts]** Peter said that if we have a speaking gift, we should be dependent on God so we can share God's revelation [not our own philosophies]. Most often, this would mean sharing and explaining scripture, though at times God might inspire us to say something unique that would help draw a specific person closer to Christ.
 - Peter also said that if we have a serving gift, we should be dependent on God for strength, so we can carry on without growing too weary.
- † **[Slide 15: glory]** The glory God receives through all this is through Jesus, because we are God's people through Jesus' sacrifice for us.
 - Recall from an earlier passage that only if we are serving in Jesus' name – by his will, by his authority, by his direction, for his glory – only then is our sacrifice acceptable to God. God saves us through Christ, and so we serve God through Christ.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 16: map]** Let us summarize briefly before we close. Our unbelieving culture will attack us in two ways, a carrot and a stick: they will tempt us to seek their acceptance and join them in sinful pleasures; and if we choose instead to stand for righteous and the gospel then they will persecute us.
- † Peter says we need to prepare our minds in two ways: first, we must prepare for and expect to suffer; and second, we must prepare to hold fast in our faith and obedience so that we do not get tempted to conform.
- † In this regard, Peter gives us four action steps: pray urgently; love earnestly; be hospitable happily; and bless each other through spiritual gifts. Could you improve in one of these ways?
 - If we help each other in these ways, we can each grow stronger together, and then we can be victorious for Christ, just as we already are victorious in Christ.
- † Let's pray...