

It is our joy and privilege to immerse ourselves in the study of the Word of God and to be saturated by its truth. Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Peter 4:1-6. Let's read the text. "Therefore, 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 lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 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."

Someone has well said, "The only thing predictable about life is death and taxes." We must all die. Sooner for some than others, but we never know when that might happen. Some will die of natural causes, perhaps of old age. Some will be the victim of a disease, or some accident or perhaps some form of violence. For some it may be sudden and for others they may linger on beds of affliction for days, months or years until the Lord takes them home. But friends, for some the Lord might, in His infinite wisdom and for purposes only He knows, call us to be martyred for Him. According to *Prisoner Alert*, which is a ministry of the *Voice of the Martyrs*, "Around the world today Christians are being persecuted for their faith. More than 70 million Christians have been martyred for their faith since 33 A.D." I might add that I believe, along with others, that it's much higher than that. They go on to say, "This year an estimated 160,000 believers will die at the hands of their oppressors and over 200 million will be persecuted, arrested, tortured, beaten or jailed. In many nations it is illegal to own a Bible, share your faith, change your faith or allow children under 18 to attend a religious service."

Our website monitors different countries that participate in our services via the internet. Even the worst countries—those that are notorious for persecuting Christians—have people within them that join our services every Sunday via the internet, and we rejoice in that. My point is this: even though martyrdom might seem very foreign to our thinking here in the United States, it's not foreign to those around the world. Some of us may some day be persecuted in some significant way, even tortured, maybe murdered, for the sake of the One we love. So some questions must come to our minds. Has the Lord left us defenseless here, in the event of such a horrible situation? How do we prepare ourselves for such a possibility?

We even have some of our own who are suffering in significant ways in Nigeria today. Most of us don't think about these things. We all have the attitude of, "That will never happen to me. That's for people somewhere else. That will never happen here in the United States." Certainly the families of those who lost loved ones on 9/11 think differently. What about the many soldiers who have sacrificed their lives for our freedom in a war against Islamic extremism? Frankly, most Americans live in a Pollyanna world. They are blindly optimistic. They have no idea how jealous the rest of the world really is towards us. Also, most Christians are equally oblivious to the extreme animosity that most Americans have toward fundamentalist, Bible-believing Christians, which by the way is a very small segment of those who call themselves Christians in the United States. As we think about it, persecution is on a continuum all around the world and certainly here in our country, from mild all the way to martyrdom. We know that the more you live and the more you take a stand for Christ, the more there is a possibility, even a probability, that you will be persecuted and perhaps even die for Christ.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” In other words, we as saints need to expect persecution. The world hates us. The Lord reminds us of this reality in John 15:18-21 where He said, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.”

The question before us today is, How do we prepare ourselves for the great possibility of persecution, perhaps even martyrdom? This is Peter’s passion. This is Peter’s purpose in what he is writing. We want to ask if God has given us any spiritual weaponry that can be effective in a possible day of suffering. The answer is yes indeed, He has. So in today’s text we are going to see four essential truths that must dominate our thinking, that must be at the forefront of our thinking. Attitudes of our hearts that should drive all that we do and therefore prepare us for this possibility. These four essential truths are: We are to remember the Lord, live for the Lord, remember the past, and hope for the future.

First, let’s understand what Peter is saying here in verse 1, this idea of remembering the Lord. He says, “Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh,” remember, this is referring to the fact that Christ has died for the unjust that He might reconcile us to God. We have read that in chapter 3:18, so in light of that he’s saying, “Therefore, 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.” Notice, “arm yourselves.” This is the divine weaponry we have. This is the dominant verb in this whole text. We must understand that this assumes that there’s a war. It assumes that we are at war. So, if we are at war, we must be prepared for battle. The good news is that God has not left us without divine weaponry. He has not left us defenseless. He has given us weapons that guarantee victory, and this first one is this idea of remembering the Lord.

Notice the verse, “arm yourselves also with the same purpose.” What purpose is he talking about? It’s the same purpose that Christ had when He suffered on our behalf. He was willing to suffer and to die because He was willing to glorify His Father by making provision for us to be reconciled to God, but also He wanted to glorify Himself. He wanted to be away from this sinful world. That was His motivation. It says here, “because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” Ceased from sin. The grammar indicates that this is a permanent state of being without sin. He suffered in the flesh that He might be glorified, that He might triumph over all that sin produces: all the suffering, persecution, wickedness and death. Christ’s purpose was therefore to conquer sin and to be removed from it. Peter wants us to remember that about the Lord, and what motivated Him, for that is part of your divine weaponry.

Beloved, can you imagine a world without sin? I fear we underestimate the glory of heaven, that place where there is no more sin. I was thinking about it. In a world where there is no sin, in other words in heaven someday, there is no more sickness. No more viruses, no more coughing, no more sniffles. No more cancer. Therefore there would be no need for doctors, no need for hospitals. There would be no pain, no aging, no sorrow, no violence, no rule of law—no need for that anymore. No need for police or military. There would be no more hunger, no poverty. In a place where there is no sin there would be no more deception, no more false teachers or false religions. No more politicians. No more immorality. No more vulgarity, no more pornographers or sexual perverts. There would even be no

more thorns or thistles or chiggers or ticks or mosquitoes. No more inclement weather, no violent storms, no tornados, no hurricanes, no earthquakes, no tsunamis, no more volcanic eruptions, no more floods. No more death and no more taxes. That means no more funerals and no more April 15th.

The Lord has promised in His Word in Revelation 21:4 that in heaven, “He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” All of the effects of this sin-cursed world will be gone forever, and we will have a glorified body. Best of all, we will be in the presence of the Lord. There’s no greater reward, no more superior bliss than this, no higher joy than being in the presence of God. Jesus knew what He had experienced in His Trinitarian fellowship, and thus He was willing to face the cross as Hebrews 12:2 says, “for the joy set before Him.” That was His perspective. While the agonies of the cross would be unimaginable, they would absolutely pale in comparison to the utter absence of sin found only in the glories of heaven. That’s what motivated the Savior in His love for us and for all that awaited Him. The certain prospect of being reunited into the holy fellowship of Trinitarian glory outweighed even the suffering of the cross. This should be our perspective as well. This is why Paul said in Philippians 1:23, “I desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.”

Let me digress with an important reminder. Many Christians look forward to heaven for many wonderful reasons, but sadly, enjoying the fellowship and the presence of God forevermore is often very low on that list of reasons. I fear many Christians wouldn’t mind it if God weren’t even there. That’s a stunning thought, is it not? For many, enjoying the presence of God is a non-issue, because for many Christians, they really do not enjoy the presence of God in their life. They have no secret devotion to God. They have not been in fellowship with Him in a powerful way, in a way that would cause them to have great remorse when that fellowship is broken. They kind of live on the surface of their Christian life, kind of playing church. That’s indicative of our Christian culture. Many perceive salvation as being all about me and my needs rather than God and His glory. Therefore very few Christians can identify with the psalmist who said in Psalm 16:11, “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Many Christians are all excited about heaven when they think of being reunited with loved ones who have gone on before—and rightfully so. Many are excited about the untold pleasures of experiencing a glorified body. But the idea of spending time in the presence of God is frankly not all that exciting. I would ask you, can you say with the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:23, “I desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better”? Or is your joy based primarily, if not solely, on all of the other heavenly benefits? Can you say with David in Psalm 16:5, “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup”? Or with the psalmist in Psalm 42:1-2, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?” Is that the attitude of your heart?

Child of God, we must see that our ultimate and most supreme joy is in Him. There is no greater source of exhilaration or delight for our souls than being in the presence of the Lover of our Souls. Our everlasting pleasure is in God alone. This must be the passion of the redeemed. The greatest gift of the gospel is Christ Himself. I cannot imagine heaven without the Lord. While the inconceivable joys of being reunited with those that I love that have gone on before, and the joys, the sheer ecstasy of experiencing sinless perfection, of experiencing a glorified body and the prospects of all of this, causes my heart to skip a beat, my friends, the supreme joy of heaven will be Christ Himself. You must let

that soak into your heart. All else is secondary, even tertiary. For this reason, Paul would say in Philippians 3:8, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.” And he would say in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “I prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

This was Peter’s point as he wrote to these persecuted saints, as even he was facing martyrdom, for he knew that he would someday soon die upon a cross. In essence what he’s saying is this. ‘My friends, arm yourselves with the same purpose as Christ when He faced the horrors of the cross. Strengthen your resolve by remembering the Lord’s perspective when He suffered, and have the same perspective and purpose.’ And what was that? Simply this. He knew that death would free Him from the presence of sin and instantly transport Him into the glory of heaven. So he says, He “who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” In other words, sin no longer has any effect. He would be immediately taken into the paradise of heaven and enjoy once again the full expression of inter-Trinitarian fellowship. The worst thing that can happen to the Christian is that we die. But remember, when we experience death, that is the doorway into paradise. I might hasten to add, death is not the worst thing to happen to those of you who have not placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For indeed, death will be the doorway for you into eternal separation and into hell, lest you repent.

But fellow believers, those of you of like precious faith, who by God’s grace have been united to Christ through faith, our future is brighter than the sun. This is the perspective we must have. This is the blessed hope of all believers. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:42-43, “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.” Isn’t that something? So Peter begins this section by reminding us first to arm ourselves by remembering the Lord’s example and His perspective as He anticipated His glorification.

As I was thinking about this text, I was reminded of what happened, according to tradition, to Peter, probably a year or two after he wrote this. Again you will recall that the Lord told Peter that he would die on a cross someday, and he had to function all forty years of his ministry knowing this. But tradition tells us that when it was time for Peter to suffer for Christ in such a way that first his wife was crucified before his eyes. And that he got on his knees before her as he watched her die. And it is recorded that what he said to her, repeatedly, over and over again, until the Lord caused her to slip through the veil, were these words. “Remember the Lord. Remember the Lord. Remember the Lord.” And then when Peter came to his cross he asked to be crucified upside-down, for he did not believe he was worthy to die as the Savior. So Peter practiced what he preached.

A second way we are to arm ourselves in preparation for possible persecution is to live for the Lord. Verse 2 says, “so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” Think what he is saying here in light of what he has just said. You must arm yourself with the same perspective the Lord had when He was enduring His suffering on our behalf, namely to long for the moment you leave this world and enter into glory, when sin is ceased, and so on. In light of that kind of perspective, don’t live the rest of your life pursuing your sinful lusts, the desires of men. But he says, “but for the will of God.” Do the will of God. Think about this. How stupid it would be to say, ‘How I long to be freed forever from the power and the presence of sin,’ and then you turn right around and indulge yourself in it? What folly that would be.

Imagine a drug addict, and I have worked with many of them and seen things similar to this actually happen. They realize their life is a disaster. They long to somehow be freed from that dependency and all of the misery that goes with it. They dream of what life would be without all of the filth. Then they finally get some help and get detoxed and begin to get their life turned around. And so to celebrate, what do you do? You go back and snort some more cocaine. It's the same type of thing that he's saying here. Our hope is to cease from sin, therefore don't pursue it! That's what he's saying. Live for the Lord. He's saying here, "so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh" in other words the rest of your life, "no longer for the lusts of men." Lusts here is a term in the original language that refers to a strong, passionate, overwhelming craving. This context is the idea of craving to act wickedly, yearning to do something that would satisfy a fleshly appetite and therefore violate God's will. Peter is calling us to arms here by saying, 'Take up the armament of obedient living. Live for the Lord. Learn what it means to mortify the flesh, to starve your lusts. To consider yourselves dead to sin. Don't let sin reign in your body. Do the will of God.'

Sometimes I hear people say, "Well, it's hard to know what God's will is." Oh really? Have you tried reading your Bible? The Bible is filled with things that God would have you do. Certainly there are some things that He has not written about. And frankly the theology there is summarized well by Augustine when he said, "In that case, love God and do what you want." But there are many things that He has defined in His Word with respect to His will. It is His will that we be saved; that we be sanctified; that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength; that we love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves; that we deny ourselves; be willing to take up a cross daily and follow Him; that we love God more than our family; that we hide the Word of God in our heart; that we flee from immorality; that we not be conformed to this world; that we take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ; it goes on and on. He's asked us to pray without ceasing. He's asked us not to forsake the assembling together of the saints. He's asked us to love our wives like Christ loved the Church. He's asked us to train up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. To walk by the Spirit so that we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. The point is, when we as saints arm ourselves with obedient living, then if and when that day of suffering comes, we will have assurance of salvation and we will have the confident power that belongs to every saint who is walking with Christ, knowing that the Spirit of God has been walking with us. As a result of our secret devotion to God and a steadfast commitment to do His will, when the storms blow we will enjoy His power. We will be able to relax in His providence. We will be able to sing through our tears and have a song even in the darkest night.

It is said that early Christians who were fed to the wild beasts in the Roman coliseums would often huddle together in waiting areas and they would be taken out in different groups with bloody animal skins tied to them so that the beasts would attack them. Of course it was entertainment to the wicked people of those days. I might hasten to add that they are no different than the people today were it not for the rule of law. But while people would await their turn, many of them would sing hymns. Perhaps they sang that hymn that we studied not too long ago in 1 Timothy 3:16, "He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory." Perhaps they sang that and others, we don't know. But the testimony of tradition tells us that their singing caused such anger and such guilt in those who would kill them that in many cases they would send the Roman soldiers in to cut out their tongues to stop their songs. But my friends, maybe they couldn't sing it with their mouth, but that song was in their heart.

They were well armed, because they remembered the Lord. They were well armed because they lived for the Lord. And thirdly, they were well armed because they remembered the past, in verse 3. This is a powerful motivation. Not that we dwell on our past, but we remember the misery of our past sinful life. He says, “For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.” My, what a description of unbelievers, those that are slaves to sin. I think of the Bonnaroo music festival they have here in Tennessee every June, where they go to a 500 acre farm near Manchester where last year there were 80,000 people that went there. 80,000 drunks, drug addicts and sexual gluttons that converge on this place to frolic in the filth of drug abuse and sexual immorality for four days. A party of drunken debauchery with the world’s music blaring into their minds.

Peter’s point is simply this. You’ve had enough time in your life, more than enough time in your life to indulge your flesh like the Gentiles, which is a reference to the unsaved. The grammar indicates that those days now are completely over. That chapter in your life as a Christian should be closed forever. He says, “having pursued a course of sensuality.” To resurrect an old term, lasciviousness. We don’t use that much. But sensuality is a reference to those who pursue every kind of evil and they do so without restraint. It’s the idea of having unbridled and uninhibited indulgence. It’s decadence, debauchery. We see it in the strident hedonism that flaunts its immorality in defiance of God in our Playboy culture. We see it in MTV. We see it in the whole spring break crowd. That’s what he’s referring to. You’ve had enough time to pursue a course of sensuality.

He also says “lusts.” These are sinful passions of the flesh that crave gratification. That is what Hollywood caters to. It knows exactly what we crave and it gives it to us. And also “drunkenness.” *Oinophlugia* in the Greek, it means literally *wine bubbling up* and it’s a reference to excessive alcohol consumption and habitual intoxication. It is used in other places to describe drug abuse, narcotic abuse, drug dependency and so on. You’ve had enough time for that: sensuality, lusts, drunkenness. He’s got another one here, “carousals.” That term was used first in the Greek language to describe a band of people who were celebrating with a victor who had won something in one of the games. Typically all of the singing and carrying on would eventually digress into drunkenness and carousing. It would degenerate into a mob of slobbering drunks, singing and being a public nuisance. These are the party animals of Mardi Gras. You’ve had enough time for all of that stuff. He goes on and says, “drinking parties and abominable idolatries.” This is especially a reference to the drunken orgies of the pagans in those days when they came to worship their pagan gods.

He’s saying, ‘You’ve done all this. Remember the misery it once caused you, the guilt, the broken relationships, the financial ruin, the loss of jobs and careers, how it has wreaked havoc upon your health and has left you depressed and hopeless, living a futile way of life. Some of you came out of that. Remember that and let that motivate you to righteousness. Arm yourselves by abhorring the past.’ How easy it is to forget the misery of sin. Certainly not everyone has done all of these things, but we are all acquainted with the sorrow and destruction it produces. We can look around our communities and families, some of our church families and extended families, and we see the ravages of sin. We see how drunkenness has destroyed families and health. We see, every time we turn on the news, how drug addicts have once again murdered someone and stolen things in order to support their habit as they slowly kill themselves because of their lusts.

We see how adulterers and fornicators and homosexuals and pedophiles and transvestites and transsexuals are all trying to push their agenda as they continue to destroy themselves. Miserable

people. I've worked with all of those types of people. They are miserable people, far from being "gay." Their families and relationships are in shambles. They're diseased and depressed as they continue to be slaves to their lusts. You watch people pursuing all of this stuff, and all they have to live for is the next fleeting pleasure of sin. When it's gone you've got to grab another and yet another. It's never enough. Peter is saying, the time is already past for all of this. Those days are behind you forever. Let your memory of the past motivate you to do the will of God. Hunger and thirst for righteousness. As a result you will strengthen your arsenal of divine weaponry and be prepared for the day of battle.

Notice what happens when you do this, in verse 4. "And in all this, they are surprised," in other words, those friends that were with you when you lived in those days of debauchery, "they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you." Unbelievers hate being around true Christians, unless it's at some superficial level. We love the things that God loves and hate the things that God hates, which is just the opposite for them. They love the things that God hates and hate the things that God loves. So for all of the former party buddies, they will typically say something like this. "So, you suddenly got religion, huh?" They are surprised when they see this. My, what a change. "All my rowdy friends are settling down," the singer exclaims.

The text here says they're surprised, which means they are incredulous. They are flabbergasted, astounded. The connotation also has with it, especially in this context, that they're angry, they're frustrated, they're resentful. They are offended by your new pattern of life. Naturally this will be the case because sinners love darkness rather than light. They spend their life gratifying their flesh and trying to silence their conscience. As Paul says in Romans 1:18, they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." They know what's true about God, they know what God would have them do, but they don't want to do that. Instead they are sucked into all of the temptations of life. They try to gratify their flesh. They say, "So, you think you're better than me now that you've got religion? Now that you're saved?" Haven't you heard that before?

In verse 4 they're saying, now that you do not "run with (us) into the same excess of dissipation." This idea here in this text denotes people running in a mad dash towards riotous living. Dissipation is a fascinating term, *asotia* in the original language. It can be translated debauchery. It's used in Ephesians 5:18 when the apostle Paul said, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation (*asotia*), but be filled with the Spirit." It literally describes one who cannot save or spare anything. One that is completely out of control. One who extravagantly squanders all that they have. We see this pictured in the story of the prodigal son. They are out of control. He's saying here that these people will say, "Yeah, you think you're better than us. You don't run with us anymore into the same excess of dissipation." This is a picture of people who need the Lord. People who need to be transformed by the power of Christ, who will become a new creature in Christ. The old things will pass away and the new things will come. Those who are not that way will hate Christians because of the guilt they feel when they are around us.

Our culture in the United States is a decadent culture. It is a land filled with dissipation and debauchery. We can see it everywhere. We see it in our entertainment. I was watching, for a moment, a NASCAR race on television the other day. I've never been to one, but some friends were talking to me about what they see there. I thought, wouldn't it be interesting if, for example with NASCAR you were to say, "We've got some new rules here. There's going to be a dress code. No more immoral dress. No more alcohol. No more tobacco. No more foul language." NASCAR would cease to exist. So would most other sports. Imagine if we told Hollywood, "You now have got to adopt a biblical morality." Do

you see where the hatred begins to come? How they perceive us? They don't love what we love and hate what we hate, it's just the opposite. Imagine if our politicians and judges and government bureaucrats were required now to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and their neighbors as much as themselves. Can you imagine that? Impossible.

The point is, they hate us because of our convictions. Therefore as Peter says at the end of verse 4, "...they malign you." It's *blasphameo* in the original language. It means to blaspheme, to curse, to swear, to slander, to smear someone. So what Peter is saying in all of this is this. 'I am trying to give you a contrast of light versus darkness so that you will see not only how they will treat you and therefore how you need to love them so that they will come to a saving knowledge of Christ so that you will also walk obediently before the Lord, remembering that you used to be just like that. This is why they persecute you. Remember your past. You used to be enslaved just like them. Let those memories drive you to godliness and cause your heart to rejoice.' Those of us who know and love Christ, can't we rejoice, knowing what He's done in us? What a miracle, the miracle of the new birth.

But also he reminds us of the tragic judgment that awaits the lost in verse 5. "But they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." My, what a staggering and sobering statement. One that should cause sinners to tremble and saints to rejoice. God will not be mocked. Every sin must be punished because God is holy. Those who reject His gift of grace and persecute those who belong to Him will not escape His wrath. Paul vividly describes the horrors of divine judgment that awaits those who persecute the saints in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. There he says, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." I shudder to think of the terrors in store for those who hate God, those who persecute and murder those who belong to Him.

But Peter also reminds those saints of that early day, and those of us today as well, to not only remember the Lord, live for the Lord and remember the past, but fourthly, to hope for the future. Notice in verse 6 he says, "For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead," which is a reference to believers that had heard the gospel and had believed but were already with the Lord by the time Peter was writing this. He goes on to say, referring to their martyrdom, "that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God." This must have been a great encouragement to those early saints who had lost loved ones to martyrdom. Imagine those who had lost a child, a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister. He's saying here, 'they may have been judged in the flesh as men, but their eternal spirits were instantly transported to that place where sin has ceased and now they exist in the glorious land of paradise, in the glories of God. In that place that we cannot comprehend.'

Friends, the very thought of this causes my heart to skip a beat. Child of God, what power is ours when we hope in the future, especially in an hour of persecution. When we allow the Spirit of God to bring to our remembrance the truths of Scripture, pertaining to heaven especially. And then mingle them with the farthest extremes of our imaginations, until suddenly we find ourselves joyfully at a loss as we try to contemplate the infinite wonder of the glory of heaven. Herein is the divine armament available to every saint, the weaponry that God has given us so that we can have victory in a day of persecution. It's little wonder that Paul would contemplate such truths as he reflected on the high cost and the

infinite value of knowing Christ, and the “Power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings,” as he says in Philippians 3:13-14, “forgetting what lies behind.” There he’s saying, ‘I don’t have any confidence at all in my past accomplishments, my past religiosity, all that is rubbish to me.’ “Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Don’t you know that when these early saints that were scattered abroad, these spiritual aliens, read this letter, especially those who had lost loved ones to martyrdom, don’t you know tears of encouragement and joy had to be streaming down their faces? Don’t you know that somehow they had to break out in song as they contemplated the essence of Peter’s words as he said to them, ‘My friends, you too may face martyrdom. I know I will. We must arm ourselves, brethren, for the day of battle. We must remember the Lord. We must live for the Lord. We must remember our past and hope for our future.’ Don’t you know that possibly there were times where some great man or woman of God stood amongst a group of terrified believers as they awaited their time in the coliseum? Don’t you know that he remembered the essence of these great texts and said to them, ‘Friends, we are about to face our death. But remember, death has no sting to us. We must remember the Lord and what motivated Him and the glories that awaited Him. When we can be in that place where there will be no more sin. And in a few minutes we’re going to be there. We must also remember that we have lived for the Lord. We have abandoned that old way of life when we were slaves to sin and by the power of God we were transformed so that we could begin to live in His grace and in His knowledge. Because of that, right now the Spirit of God is comforting our hearts. We must also remember all of the miseries of our past and use that as a contrast as we hope for the future. So take heart. We are about to enter into the presence of the Lover of our Souls.’

That is at the heart of Peter’s message. Oh child of God, we must all arm ourselves with these glorious truths, with a blessed hope. As the writer of Hebrews 4:9 said, “There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” That’s what heaven will be, a place of rest. All of the sin is over. All of the pain is gone.

Spurgeon poignantly put it this way. “Ah! Christian, the day shall soon be over, and thou shalt no longer have to toil; the sun is nearing the horizon; it shall rise again with a brighter day than thou hast ever seen before. There, up in heaven, Luther has no more to face a thundering Vatican; Paul has no more to run from city to city, and continent to continent, there Baxter has no more to toil in his pulpit, to preach with a broken heart to hard hearted sinners, there no longer has Knox to ‘cry aloud and spare not’ against the immoralities of the false church; there no more shall be the strained lung, and the tired throat, and the aching eye; no more shall the Sunday school teacher feel that his Sabbath is a day of joyful weariness; no more shall the tract distributor meet with rebuffs. No, there, those who have served their country and their God, those who have toiled for man’s welfare, with all their might, shall enter into everlasting rest. Sheathed is the sword, the banner is furled, the fight is over, the victory won; and they rest from their labors.”

Oh dear friends, I challenge you this day to remember the Lord, live for the Lord, remember the past, and let’s all together hope for the future.

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