

Times Have Changed

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 December 2023

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 0 0] Well, tomorrow is January again. Doesn't feel like five minutes since the last one, does it? I wonder if you know where the word January comes from.

This is your New Year's Eve quiz. Word January. I think I might have told you a couple of years ago. So we'll see who's listening.

It comes from a figure in Roman mythology called Janus. Janus on coins and sculptures was depicted as a person with a head with two faces.

One looking forwards, the other looking backwards. One looking into the past. One looking into the future.

Now, obviously, this person didn't ever exist in real life. But I think that's a helpful picture, not only of what this last day of the year invites us to do, but what we always do as Christians.

[1 : 0 8] It's a natural time, isn't it, for us to look back with joy, with tears, with thankfulness, thankfulness, and to look forward as well with expectation, with fear, with hope.

But I wanted to bring us to these verses in 1 Peter chapter 4 this morning, because Peter says in another sense, as Christians, we're always facing in two directions.

We all have a past to look back on. See that there in verse 3. Peter says, For you have spent enough time in the past doing what the pagans choose to do.

And then he gives a list, doesn't he, of things that the world loves, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, detestable idolatry. But if we have been given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, then we also have a new present and a future to look forward to.

See there in verse 7, The end of all things is near. The last days have come. And a different list then, a new list of things that we now therefore do.

[2 : 3 4] Times have changed. Times have changed for us as Christians. And I don't mean that in the sense that life has gotten harder for us to be a Christian.

In fact, if you read through the letter of 1 Peter, you'll see that in some ways, in that sense, nothing's changed at all. Just if you glance down the very next verse, verse 12, after our passage, Peter says, Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that's come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

That's not new, is it? That hasn't changed. No, times have changed for us if we're Christians because of verse 6. The gospel has been preached to us who were once dead.

So that even though life has gotten harder, perhaps, for us in this world, we now live in the Spirit the way God does.

This morning, Peter gives us two lists, two things to love, two ways to live. And you and me, if we are in Christ today, we have been taken out of one list and put in the other, out of darkness, into his wonderful light.

[4 : 01] But like Janice, we look back at that old life, don't we? At a bygone age, at the same time as we look forward to the new life, the age that has come in Christ, the old way is not out of sight, out of mind, is it?

Sometimes it feels close enough to touch. And sometimes the new way that Christ has given us, it feels too far out of sight for us to reach.

The old and the new are not as distinct, are they, as we want for them to be. In fact, they have meshed in the middle. And it's into that mess, and that mesh of daily life as a Christian that Peter is speaking here.

He's writing to Christians who have turned to Christ, but have found themselves strangers in their own homes. And some of them quite literally, physically, geographically, they haven't gone anywhere, but they're living their new lives in Christ in the same old world that they've always known.

Same people, same parties, same politics, but times have changed for them. Times have changed, and the Christians now need to know how to live this new life in the old world.

[5 : 28] And brothers and sisters, if that's not relevant to us and speaking to us now, going into a new year, then I don't know what is.

What needs to be left behind this year? What do you need to put behind you in the past?

It's not the only time, is it, that we could ask that question, but what a time to ask it. What needs to be left behind in 2023 and not brought with you? Peter tells us in our first point, the days behind us, the days behind us.

He says in verse one, therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.

There it is. It's what needs to be left behind, isn't it? Serving sin. Living for evil human desires.

[6 : 34] And he's going to teach us how to do that. Now, my granddad grew up in the 40s near Newcastle. He told me recently a story about a time where he remembers being maybe four or five and standing on the top of the bomb shelter in his garden watching bombs drop over the city across the river.

And he didn't say, but I don't imagine his mum was that impressed, okay, with him standing on top of the bit of kit that was meant to be keeping him safe inside from falling bombs. He was very young, wasn't he?

But even grown men and women, they had to tell each other, remind each other, remember, remember, there's a war on. Remember, there's a war on.

And if they needed that reminder when their city was burning, how much more do we as Christians need to hear that in our normal day-to-day life? Peter begins this chapter saying to us as Christians, remember, there's a war on.

Just see that verb in verse one. Since Christ suffered in the body, arm yourselves. Arm yourselves with that same attitude.

[7 : 50] Get down off the top of the bomb shelter and get inside. And the bit of kit that he's giving us and telling us to use is what Christ's attitude.

What is that? How do we use it? Well, back in chapter one, verse 11, we read earlier, Peter says, the prophets, they strained their eyes trying to see what the Spirit of Christ was pointing to when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

So see that pattern, suffering, suffering now, then glory. It was the cross and then the crown. And so if you just glance down to four, verse 13, what does he instruct Christians to do?

To rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

See again, suffering, then glory. as it was for Christ. So it will be for us, says Peter. Being a Christian feels more like carrying a cross than wearing a crown.

[9 : 09] And so the life-saving bit of kit that Peter's giving us to put on isn't a silver bullet. It's as simple, he says, as getting the cross and the crown the right way round. Is it glory tomorrow?

No, it is suffering now, then glory. And that sounds so basic, doesn't it? But brothers and sisters, if we just kind of tick that off and say, okay, I've got that.

It's the cross and then the crown. Okay, I've got that. I've put that attitude away and we don't put it on. Well, that is as crazy as standing on top of the bomb shelter as the bombs are dropping.

It's as crazy as going into battle without your bulletproof vest on. Knowing that being a Christian today will bring suffering equips us to keep being a Christian even when we're suffering for it.

Because just like Christ suffered in his body to take away our sins, so whoever suffers in the body is finished with sin, says Peter. In short, it is only if you are prepared to suffer for it that you will be able to go on serving Christ and not serving what everyone else is serving.

[10 : 26] If you forget that there is a war on and you try to carry on and live as if there is not, you won't survive long as a Christian. It might sound really strong, but I guess to flip it around, if you got up tomorrow, 1st of January, and you thought, my life, my life is supposed to be glorious today.

And suffering, if it comes, is easily brushed off. Well, you might not be so keen, might you, the following day to get up and live as a Christian because suffering will come.

By the second, all those resolutions, they might already have finished. You need to be clear, Peter's expectation is not that you wake up sinless one day in this life, that you never sin again.

I think what he's getting at is that if we put on Christ's attitude, we will have stopped serving sin. He's asking, what are we living for? What are you living for?

Verse 2, as a result, they don't live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. Sadly, we do sin, but when we sin, what do we do?

[11 : 40] We turn from it because we're fighting for the other side now. We've changed. We've put on Christ's body armor to do God's will. So we don't live for that stuff anymore.

We don't serve it because for us, sin really belongs to a past life. Times have changed, verse 3. You've spent enough time in the past doing what pagans want to do.

And then that list of what pagans want to do, getting drunk, sex parties, worshipping idols, everything that goes along with that. Now that might feel like a million miles from where you're sitting today, but is it?

If we walked past the clubs later on tonight, what would we see? Or the Christmas dew, where everyone got plastered, or the banter, the rude banter Monday morning about the one night stand at the weekend.

You know, Peter, Peter's not describing a world that's a million miles from ours, is he? He's describing the same world just 2,000 years ago. What he's describing is the sort of glue that holds society together.

[12 : 54] And really, every time and place, the sort of stuff that if you're not part of it and not joining in with it, well, what happens? You could tell me, couldn't you?

What happens if you don't go out and get wasted? Or go home early from the Christmas dew before it gets out of hand? Or don't join in the crude banter and joking?

What happens? Peter can tell us, Luke. Verse 4, they are surprised that you don't join them in their reckless wild living and heap abuse on you. If you've ever not gone with the crowd as a Christian, you'll know exactly what he's talking about.

It's the harsh dig, isn't it, for not being part of the team or the insistence that you come along whether you want to or not or the name-calling the next day or not being spoken to at all.

To us, that feels like an overreaction to the people whose lives this is. Our life as a Christian is a threat to the social order. We are breaking the social glue.

[14 : 02] We're challenging the idea there's no other way to live. The word that Peter uses for join them literally means flock together. So when we don't, what are we saying?

We are not birds of a feather. Peter's put this list here, I think, to illustrate to the church the war zone that they're living in.

For many, if not all of them, this was once the world that they lived in. For some of them, perhaps for all of them, this was still the world that they sometimes wanted to be part of.

There's a pressure, a pull, a draw, and how much harder not to live that way if that world isn't going to let you go without a fight? If you're going to get hurt for not following the crowds, well, the pressure to go back quietly to living that way is going to be even harder, isn't it?

The pull is going to be worse. So where is your war zone? What is it that you worry about not doing or doing for fear of the consequences?

[15 : 13] Maybe you've never been a party animal and that list just feels like the worst night of your life. but it could be as simple, couldn't it, as just stepping back when the gossip starts.

It could be as simple, couldn't it, as saying no to other commitments on a Sunday. Whatever it is, where do you most feel that you could compromise as a Christian because you fear what people would think?

The easy thing is to feel a bit bad but just go along with it anyway. But Peter says Christ gives us a whole new desire to do what God wants and not what the world wants.

And the only way that we will follow through and do it is if we have Christ's way of thinking that prepares us to suffer now for doing God's will.

it is the cross before it is the crown. And to reinforce our armor, he adds verse 5, almost as if he's topping and tailing this list with Christ's suffering at the start and Christ's glory at the end.

[16 : 29] Look, the world is surprised, we are despised, but they will have to give account to him who's ready to judge the living and the dead. You know, I don't know about you, but the word I find most surprising in that verse is the word ready.

Ready. You know, we typically think, don't we, of judgment as being a long way off in the distance, but Peter says he is ready to judge. The time between Christ's resurrection and his return is not study and training in how to judge the living and the dead.

He is ready and waiting. It's a big hint in our passage, isn't it, that glory then, it's not a throwaway consolation for suffering Christians.

Christ suffered in his body. He was nailed to a cross, but where is he now? He is seated on the throne ready to judge the living and the dead. For him, it was the cross and now the crown.

That is supposed to lift our heads and our hearts as Christians as we suffer in this world. But it also comes as a warning, doesn't it, to those who do live like this now and put pressure on us to live like this now and to us if we do live like this now.

[17 : 53] If you're here this morning, you don't know what it is to follow Jesus, but you follow the way of the world, the path that has been laid for you without worrying about it.

Maybe it doesn't feel too bad, but Peter says, listen, on the last day you are not going to give an account to your friends and family for the way that you've lived, but to the judge of the living and the dead, Jesus himself.

Those of us who do follow Jesus, do our lives, do our lives really testify to that reality? Or are we quite happy to be pulled along in that direction, to go with the crowd, not to be different, and not worry about what others will have to say to the Lord Jesus one day?

The days are behind us, says Peter. They are long gone when that was any way for us to live. Times have changed. Christ suffered in his body once for sins, and now he is glorified as the judge of all people.

So arm yourself with that. put that on, pick it up, and you will be done with serving sin. You will be done serving your evil human desires, and you will live to serve the will of God.

[19 : 21] Here is your Christian armor. It is still worn from when Christ himself wore it. It is his way of thinking. It is suffering now, glory then, so put it on today.

Put it on tomorrow, says Peter. Put it on, because you will need it for the days we live in. This is our second point, the days we live in.

Today we're judged by the world on our outward life and behavior. Then the whole world will be judged by Christ on its every thought, motive, and desire. But just look again at verse six, the first eight words of verse six.

For this is why the gospel was preached. This is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that is, those dead in sin, so that even though they live under the scrutiny of the world today, though they are judged in the body, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

Now, of course, that is true of us as Christians, isn't it? We heard and received the gospel when we were dead in sin. And even though we are being judged by the world, we now live a new life in the spirit.

[20 : 39] But that's not quite what Peter says, is it? Since verse three, he's been speaking about what the pagans do, what people outside in the world do.

When they live, they are surprised by Christians, they make life hard for Christians, they will stand before Judge Jesus, he says. But that is why the gospel was preached. So that though they were dead, though they will be judged, they might live in the spirit with God.

That is why the gospel was preached. So what's the game plan today, the days that we live in? It is that the gospel is preached to the very people that are making life hard for us now.

So that despite the fact that life will get harder for them, they might too live in the spirit with Christ. That's actually been Peter's game plan ever since chapter two and verse twelve.

He says, live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they might see your good deeds and glorify God on the day that he visits us.

[21 : 50] so that though we and they might suffer now, God would be glorified by those who today stand against him. It's an incredible thing to be able to tell yourself when you feel singled out for being a Christian.

In a world that's often harsh to those who don't conform, this is why the gospel was preached. This is why the gospel was preached. preached. You were once on the other side of that fence, weren't you?

Living the world's way, doing what you wanted to do and the gospel came to you when you were dead in that and gave you new life in Christ. So who's the gospel for now?

Those surely who are still on the other side of that fence, who make life hard for you, who go the way of the world, do what they want, who themselves will one day be judged by Christ.

So we don't suffer do we with gritted teeth, just willing ourselves through to the other side, hoping that things get better. We suffer with open mouths, ready to share the good news that we suffer for with those at whose hands we suffer.

[23 : 04] Brothers and sisters, God's game plan in a hostile world is the gospel. By sticking with Christ through your suffering for him, keeping, serving, and honoring him, we show Christ's opponents that the gospel really works, that they would see our lives, hear the good news, put two and two together, and receive the life transforming and forgiving message of Christ and the gospel and glorify him with us.

That is what it's all for, isn't it? We're not Christians because we want an easy life. We live, we suffer, we serve so that others would see and hear the gospel and have life with God in the Spirit.

That's one purpose Peter gives us for our suffering as Christians, and there couldn't be a better purpose, could there? For your suffering, for mine, as a witness to the power of the gospel to change our lives.

Jesus. Now, if you're not yet a Christian here this morning, perhaps by this point you're wondering why you ever would be.

If life doesn't get easier, well then what's in it for me? But look at the people around you who have given up their lives to follow Jesus and see and see that they have something better than an easy life.

[24 : 36] An inheritance kept in heaven that can never perish, spoil, or fade. A crown waiting for them that is worth more than the cross that they are carrying now.

That is why the good news was preached, so that one day you would not have to face Jesus as judge, but bow to him as your king. Jesus changes our lives in every conceivable way, but it is worth it for that great big change.

From darkness to light, from death to life, from judgment to salvation. Brothers and sisters, times have changed for us. Life is different, and the days we live in now, it brings with us this whole new way of life as Christians and as a church.

You're that witness to the world isn't all looked. Just look at that list in 7 to 11. That stands in contrast with that list. Earlier in verse 3, Peter said the time that's passed was enough for living as the world wants to, because now, verse 7, the end of all things is near, and this is how we live in these days.

Now, there's quite a lot of instructions there, but just glance down to the end of verse 11 and see why they're all there, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

[26 : 00] So what kind of a life is it that brings praise and glory to God, is a witness to the world around? Well, a life, verse 7, that's alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.

Interesting, isn't it, that he puts our preparation for prayer at the start of this list. You know, as ever, isn't it, the battle is won or lost, not in our behaviors and habits, but in what happens in our hearts, our inward preparation.

And then we get three one another's. It's a reminder, this isn't stoic, solo Christian living, it's the life of a church family. Above all, he says, above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.

Again, following Christ's pattern. That means putting others first. It means like he did, taking the hurt, taking the insult and the offense, taking the sin on himself, rather than be offended, rather than be vindictive, rather than retaliate.

You know, it is so easy to take offense, isn't it? But love covers a whole heap of sin in a church family like this. And you've heard that before, but no, says Peter, look again, verse eight, keep loving one another deeply.

[27 : 33] Really, love one another like you mean it, he says. He does that again in verse nine, offer hospitality to one another. Yeah, we know about hospitality, Peter, without grumbling.

Peter knows what we're like, doesn't he? We're so quick to tick the boxes, so slow to think, what does it really mean to love this person, show hospitality to that person in a way that looks and feels and smells and tastes like Christ to them.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms, verse 10. God has given each of us something precious to put to good use in his service.

Now, God doesn't run out of gifts to give, but here Peter specifies speaking gifts and serving gifts. And if life involves suffering and the game plan is the gospel, well, that makes sense, doesn't it?

It really matters then how we speak to one another, how we serve one another. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.

[28 : 47] If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides. Again, he's not letting us tick the box as lightly as he. Have we really put God's gifts to good use this week?

Speaking God's very words to one another. Serving one another in God's very strength. He's pushing us, isn't he? He's stretching us as Christians, as a church family.

Not to be complacent in the way that we live together. Not to potter around like we've got a free Saturday, but to do all things that God might be praised through Jesus Christ.

Let me say, I was so encouraged as I was working on these verses. Because I could think of so many times in the past year when I had seen people loving one another deeply and showing generous hospitality and speaking God's words and serving each other in this church family.

I hope you know, I hope you can see that, that this list is real, that this is real life here in this church, that it is happening. And we praise God for that.

[30 : 01] And in the same way we've looked back and we've asked what needs to be left behind. I want us to ask what needs to be taken with us? What needs to be carried into the new year?

Well, it is this life, isn't it? Life of verses 7 to 11. Friends, don't grow tired of doing good. Keep loving one another.

Keep serving one another. Keep offering hospitality without grumbling. Keep speaking the words of God into each other's lives. And if you know that there are gaps there for you, and your love has fallen off, or you are holding back from others what you could give or serve or share with them, or whatever it is, this is an opportunity, isn't it, to take stock?

What do I need to take with me into the coming year? What do I need to grasp more tightly in the Christian life? What do I need to let go of?

So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. Because he has done it all first, hasn't he? He suffered once in his body for sins.

[31 : 23] He was despised. He suffered. He died. And he rose again to give us new life with God. And now he lives and works with all his power for the glory of his Father in this world.

And he does that through you and me. As we walk with him, through our suffering for him, through our rejection for his name, through our words, through our service.

So arm yourself with his attitude. Put on Christ today so that in everything God might be glorified through him.

Let's take that into this new year as a church family and to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. Let's pray together for that now.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.