

**ARMED WITH AN ATTITUDE
I PETER 4: 1-6**

NEED: A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST.

PROPOSITION: LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE REQUIRES AN
“ ATTITUDE LIKE THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS
THAT TOOK HIM TO THE CROSS.

OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD EACH PERSON TO MAKE A WHOLE
HEARTED COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST
AND TO LIVE OUT THAT COMMITMENT.

INTRODUCTION:

I acknowledge with gratitude the large number of internationals who are present in our service this morning. It is a special privilege to have you here as our guests. You come from different parts of our world and bring with you different relationships to the Christian faith.

Some of you come from countries in which there is a dominate presence of the Christian faith. You have come to adulthood knowing the essentials of the Christian faith. You may even have brought with you to this country a wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Others of you have come from countries in which the Christians are a very small an insignificant minority. In some instances they may even be the object of oppression and persecution. It may be that in your country to identify oneself publicly as a follower of Jesus Christ could have severe social consequences, it might even involve the loss of life itself.

Some of you probably thought that when you came to the United States you would find a Christian nation. In your mind you had identified Christianity with this nation. It has probably been a shock to you to discover that while there are many Christians in this country, those who actually practice their Christian faith in a consistent manner make up only a minority. While our culture has been influenced by Christianity, it has not in any way ever made a wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

These things should not surprise us. From the earliest days those who have publicly acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Son of God have been the objects of scorn and have experienced sufferings. The Apostle Peter wrote this letter from which we read this morning in order to encourage persons undergoing such hardships because of their Christian commitment. His word of counsel to those Christians was, “Arm yourselves also with the same attitude.” The attitude with which the Christians are to arm themselves is the attitude that Jesus Himself demonstrated through His death upon the cross. In a real sense it is a call to arm ourselves with the cross.

So that those of you who have made a commitment to Jesus Christ may understand what it means to be armed with an attitude or armed with a cross, let us take a careful look at this passage of Scripture. Those of you who have not yet made any kind of commitment to Jesus Christ will find some very helpful insights here in to what is involved in becoming a true Christian.

When we arm ourselves with the cross, there are three things that will be true.

I. WE WILL VIEW OUR COMMITMENT TO GOD AS FINAL.

This is what the cross of Jesus Christ represented in his life. When the issue became saving His own life or doing the will of His Father, His commitment was to the Father. When Peter writes, “Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because He who has suffered in his body is done with sin.” He is holding before us a view of life that puts the cross at the center of everything. The cross in the life of Jesus represented the finality of His commitment to the Father. We are to arm ourselves with the same attitude. Some of our commitments in life may be conditional, but our commitment to God is to be done with finality.

The very message of the cross expresses this. The cross is about death and resurrection. There is a finality to death. Whenever a new believer is baptized as their profession of faith, they are declaring publicly the finality of their commitment to Jesus Christ. They declare that with Christ they have died to the old life dominated by sin, and have been raised with Him to live in newness of life. This must be our declaration and our attitude. We must not be like the woman that Robert McNeil, the former co-host of the McNeil-Lehrer News Hour, public broadcasting system, told about. He met this woman at a well-known social event in New York City. She was about 45 years old, attractive, dark-haired and looking for someone to confide in. She said to McNeil, “I come from Ottawa. My husband I moved here twenty years ago. I love this country. We live in New Jersey.

We have a place in Connecticut. The whole bit. On November 20th we are going to complete our citizenship. It is for tax reasons and I feel very sad about it.”

“Do you still feel Canadian?” McNeil asked.

“Oh, sure. Through and through. I my heart always. But they say I don’t have to give up anything. I can be an American and still keep everything.”

“Won’t you have to renounce your Canadian citizenship?”

“O sure you have renounce it.” She replied. “But you don’t have to mean it.”

I fear that some people have made their declaration of discipleship in that same attitude. With their lips they expressed a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but in their hearts they maintained their loyalty to their old, old way of life. They made this declaration in order to please someone, or because of some perceived benefit that might come to them through such declaration, but not with a whole heart. There was no finality to their commitment.

Stories from the underground church in Russia some years ago were always a challenge to me. I came across such a story from that period some time ago. A house church in a city

of the Soviet Union received one copy of the Gospel of Luke, the only scripture most of these Christians have ever seen. They tore it into small sections and distributed them among the body of believers. Their plan was to memorize the portion that they had been given, then on the next Lord's Day they would meet and redistribute the scriptural sections. On Sunday these believers arrived inconspicuously in small groups through out the day so as not to arouse the suspicion of the KGB informers. By dusk they were all safely inside. Windows closed and doors locked. They began by singing a hymn quietly but with deep emotion. Suddenly the door was pushed opened and in walked two soldiers with loaded automatic weapons. One shouted, "Alright - everybody line up against the wall. If you wish to renounce your commitment to Jesus Christ, leave now!

Two or three quickly left, then another. After a few more seconds, two more left.

"This is your last chance. Either turn against your faith in Christ," he ordered, "or stay and suffer the consequences."

Another left. Finally two more in embarrassed silence with their faces covered slipped out into the night. No one else moved. Parents with small children trembling beside them looked down reassuringly they fully expected to be gunned down, or at best, to be imprisoned.

After a few moment so complete silence, the other soldier closed the door, looked back at those who stood against the wall and said,, "Keep your hands up but this time in praise to

our Lord Jesus Christ, bothers and sisters. We, too, are Christians. We went sent to another house church several weeks ago to arrest a group of believers” the other soldier interrupted. “But, instead, we were converted! We have learned by experience, however, that unless people are willing to die for their faith they cannot be fully trusted.” That is what we are talking about!” That is a commitment with finality! This is the attitude that you are to arm yourself with - I have made my final commitment, and it is to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

II. WE WILL VIEW THE WILL OF GOD AS SUPREME.

This is really the result of the commitment with finality. “As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life with evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do - living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry.” Two potential centers for life or motive for life are presented by the Apostle. On one hand is “the will of God”; on the other hand is “evil, human desires.”

The mind set that the Christian is to cultivate is one in which the will of God and doing the will of God is the supreme thing in life.

When ever a person makes their decisions of life based on, “evil, human desires,” then the outcome of those decisions is predictable. It is the kind of living that leads to this dark list that the Apostle shares with us. This is an ugly list of human behavior that the Apostle presents to us. Chuck Swindol has described it as being typical “animal house”

behavior in our day.

Consider the list - debauchery, some would translate the word lasciviousness or life sensuousness, or sensuality. It involves an open outrage against all standards of decency. When ever you begin to make all life decisions on the bases of “I will do what I want to do” this will be result. “Lust” is the gratification of unlawful appetites of any kind but is probably a reference to sexual desires in this context. When one gives themselves to following the desires of their fallen sinful nature, all kinds of sexual desires will surface in their inner being. “Drunkenness” is indulgence in alcohol or drugs to the point of excess. It is allowing ones life to come under the control of these mind altering and behavior affecting drugs. This again is the result of making your own desires the bases for decisions rather than the will of God. “Orgies” or drinking parties in which all of the behavior goes to excesses. It is the kind of behavior that is celebrated in some places in our culture today. It is the result of making decisions on the bases of your own desires. “Carousing” also involves over indulgence in the use of alcohol or the use of drugs and the bizarre behavior that goes with that. “Detestable idolatry” is actually unlawful idolatries. It is placing some thing or someone in the place that belongs only to the sovereign and eternal God of this universe. Making your desires supreme in your life will always lead you to the altar of another God. It will never lead you into devotion to the one true and living God.

In contrast to that is this attitude that we are to arm ourselves with - making the will of God supreme for our lives. We sometimes make the “will of God” seem so other worldly

and mysterious that we can not see it as a part of our lives. It might help if we simply understood the word “will” in terms of the “pleasure of God.” This is the basic idea in the word. To do the will of God is to do that which pleases God.

The life and death of Detrick Bonhopper during the Second World War is one of the high inspirations from that war. He died at the hands of Hitler’s soldiers in an execution just a few days before the fall of Germany and Hitler’s death. His opposition to Hitler and his plans for Germany began early. He became openly opposed to all that Hitler was seeking to impose upon Germany as early as 1933. He went to England for safety for a while where he taught and preached. However, in 1935 he felt compelled to return to his homeland even though he knew it might cost him his life. In his famous book, The Cost of Discipleship, he had taught that when Christ calls a man he bids him to come and die. Bonhopper clearly realized that “Ones own will must always be abandoned to the divine will, that one’s own will must be given up, if the divine will is to be manifested.” His making the will of God supreme in his life in the end cost him his life.

However, those who knew Bonhopper during those years of imprisonment and suffering bear witness to a life that was full of peace and joy. They indicate that even until his hour of death he seemed to be covered with a profound awareness of God. Witnesses to his sufferings wrote of being deeply aware of the presence of God. They indicate that even up until his hour of death he seemed to be covered with a profound awareness of God. Witnesses to his sufferings wrote of being deeply aware of the presence of God every time they were in his presence.

If you would arm yourself with the cross then you must view and regard the will of God as supreme in your life. You die to your own will and embrace God's will for your life.

III. WE WILL VIEW THE JUDGMENT OF GOD AS CERTAIN.

This is the third profound insight that Peter shares with us in this passage. "They think it is strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse upon you. But they will have to give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

When ever our pursuit of the will of God as supreme brings an adverse reaction from the world around us, we do not feel compelled to defend ourselves. We rather take the position that Jesus took at the cross. When He came to the cross under the abuse of those around Him He committed himself to the righteous hand of God and anticipated that God, the judge of the living and the dead, would make all things right in His own time. This is to be our attitude. We are to live with confidence that God will be our defender and that God will do that which is right in the end.

The judgment of God is certain for all of those who oppose His purposes. In His own time and in His own way God will bring all men to judgment.

The one whose made the life transforming commitment to Jesus Christ, and armed themselves with His attitude, realize that ultimately the only judgement that really matters

is God's judgment upon their lives. They live with an awareness that either at death or at the second coming of Jesus Christ they will stand before the judge of all the earth. Peter adds this word of encouragement, "For this is the reason the Gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body but live according to God in regard to the spirit." This verse has been something of a mystery to some interpreters of Scripture. But it seems to have a rather simple message in this context. It may be that the world may judge us like Hitler judged Bonhopper that we are not worthy of life. They may infact put us to death as an expression of their judgment upon us. But in the end their judgment doesn't matter. In the end though they put our bodies to death, we can still live according to God in regard to the spirit." So even while they are crushing our bodies with stones, or destroying our bodies with guns, God is receiving our spirit into His presence to be preserved until the day of resurrection. The only judgment that really matters in the end is God's judgment. To be armed with this attitude that was in Christ Jesus, which was demonstrated in His suffers in His body, is to view the judgment of God as being certain.

I am sure that our International friends have probably heard about the Alamo and its strategic place in the history of Texas. During the war for Texas Independence from Mexico, about 150 Texas soldiers under the command of Col. William Barry Travis held the fort against 5,000 Mexican troops led by Gen. Lopez De Santa Anna. Refusing to surrender, even when their ammunition was exhausted, the Texas patriots fought the enemy in hand to hand combat, using their empty guns as clubs. Finally, all of them were killed, including the famous border heroes, James Bowie and Davy Crockett.

Out of the drama of that historical battle has come the legend of a last hour conference within the Alamo before the final Mexican attack. Gen. Travis told his men that they had no ammunition and no chance of surviving another attack. Taking his sword, the Col. drew a line in the first floor of the mission. He declared, "I have promised we will never surrender, so if you wish to remain and fight to the death, step across the line. Those who do not may escape under the cover of darkness tonight." One by one, each courageous soldier stepped across the line with Travis. There was even one fighter who was wounded and asked that his cot be carried across the line to be on the side of those heroic martyrs. Even the Mexican soldiers were awed by the courage and determination of this little band of Texans. No wonder the motto for the War of Independence became "Remember the Alamo!" They armed themselves with an attitude - an attitude that said "We will not surrender. We will not turn back. We will be faithful to our cause if it cost us our lives." This is what Peter is calling for in a greater cause. He is calling for an attitude that says, "I will not surrender. I will not go back. I will be faithful to Jesus Christ to the end. I will do His Will and not my will unto the end of my life!"

Let me ask you armed with this attitude? If not, why not?