

Intro

What does it mean to be church in difficult times? As we have seen before in our readings from 1 Peter, the churches he writes have their own difficulties. They were suffering as people who are not in the high ranks of society is this was augmented by suffering for being Christians in a society hostile to Christianity. Although their situation was very different than our current situation, we can draw parallels between them and us.

Structure

We have read quite a long passage and it will take too long to delve into all the nuggets we can find in here. Instead, we have to limit ourselves to overall message, and see how God is speaking to us through it in our time.

The *first headline* (4:11) **[Slide 2]** could be phrased as follows: “The end is near: so do not stop but be alert and try the best we can do”. Peter touches on praying, being alert, loving one another, providing hospitality, serving each other, and to do this to the best of their ability, or even better, to the best of the ability that God gives us: Speaking as if they were speaking God’s words (I would have to think ten times before I would say anything, if I said anything at all), and serving one another with all the strength God provides. Peter does not like a half way house – for him being a disciple of Jesus is a 100% commitment. Not just a little bit – but everything that we can give we should give. This was then, but this is still today too.

The *second headline* (4:12-19) **[Slide 3]** is about recognising that they suffer as Christians. Peter recognises that they suffer not because they do things wrong – in that case suffering would be just. No, they suffer because people know that they are Christians. He does not expect them to complain about this, or moan that this is wrong, no, he tells

them that they should not be surprised and that they should be joyous as through their suffering Christ's glory is revealed. They should not be ashamed of being Christians and even though they "...suffer according to God's will [they] should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (4:19). As God will both judge them as Christians as well as those who do not want to know God.

The *third headline* (5:1-7) [**Slide 4**] is that they have to suffer together and support each other. First, he focuses on the elders. It is unclear if he looks here towards the leadership of the church or to older people as the Greek can mean both. We have to assume that at that time those who are older were automatically bestowed with leadership, which is not the case now. In these words Peter makes clear that the being in leadership in the church – even if it is automatic – is not a reason to claim status. No, instead they have to be willing examples to the congregation, caring and watching over them, and eager to serve. Again here Peter also expects 100% dedication.

To the others, but I would also include the elders here too, he calls them to be humble to one another, as God opposes the proud but will lift up the humble.

But he finishes this section with "cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (5:7). Peter is not only addressing individuals here, but the whole congregation. While he charges elders to care for the congregation, he recognises that this is not enough and that only God's care is sufficient. So instead of casting their anxieties on the elders, he calls them to cast their anxieties on God. He recognises that human care cannot replace God's care. That is good for both elders and the others to know – there are limits of the care that elders are expected to give – but God gives limitless!

The other aspect is that this sentence uses the plural form of you in Greek: it is the whole congregation that has to cast their anxieties on

God. It is a corporate activity and not only a individual activity: we must help each other to cast our individual anxieties on God as well as our fears for what might happen to our congregation as a whole

The *final headline* (5:8-9) **[Slide 5]** is that Peter recognises that there is an opposing force to God in the world: “the enemy the devil, who actively looks for someone to devour” – strong words. It is not only that the congregations were opposed by people but they were opposed by a spiritual entity. But, instead of giving ground to the devil, Peter calls them and us to resist him and to stand firm in our faith. And he reminds them that they are not alone in this but that the whole family of believers are undergoing the same sufferings as them. And he repeats is earlier charge: be alert and of sober mind.

And finally (5:10-11) he reminds them that God will restore us to him and makes is strong, firm and steadfast. Christ had to suffer like they have been suffering, but that God will call them with Christ to eternal glory with him.

Application [Slide 6]

As I mentioned before there are parallels between our situation and the situation as the Christians in what is now Turkey experienced. In a way they had it probably worse then we today. Yes, as a nation we are suffering due to Corona virus and starting economic recession. There is still no full equality between people, as the Black Lives Matter protests indicate. As Christians, we may grieve the decline of Christianity in our country, and that it seemingly has become so much harder to be a voice for Christ in our society. On the other hand, we are not yet socially suffering because we are Christians, even though we may now find that the more outspoken Christians are ridiculed and marginalised. Especially those of us who try to live in the workplace according to Christian values and proclaim Christ in these settings will find that they may loose career opportunities or even loose their job.

But recognizing that we still do not suffer as much as they did, the four headlines in this passage are still as valid for us as they were for them:
[Slide 6]

- 1.** The end is near: so do not stop but be alert and try the best we can do. Being a disciple of Christ is not a part-time job: Jesus calls us to 100% commitment. And maybe we would suffer more if we took this seriously.
- 2.** Recognise that we should be joyful if we suffer because of our Christian faith. Many Christians bemoan that we are not accepted in society any more or listened to. But we should not be surprised that this happens when we live out our Christian lives. So our attitude such be one of joy – we are the ones who get it and get him and will be judged favourable – as long as we really live according to his will for us!
- 3.** We are together in this. This is not an individual struggle, no, we are here to support each other. In our live group we prayed last week for each other as God put non-Christians on our minds to pray, love and witness to. We need each other in the charge that he has given us – and we need each other to cast our anxieties on him.
- 4.** Be aware of the devil, but do not give in to him, but stand firm in our faith. He has not won and he will never win – so put Christ first and he will not have any footholds in our lives. And again, Peter reminds us that we do not do this alone, but together as congregation and as well as the wider family of God.

And finally for Peter's message is for us too: "the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen." (v5:10-11).