

Live For God

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] on our study of 1 Peter, 1 Peter chapter 4, it's on page 1220 of the Pew Bible, that section that we read together.

And in many ways, I think the section is summarised in the last sentence of the passage, the section that we read, to him or to Jesus Christ, to God, be the glory and the power forever and ever amen.

And what I'd like to do this morning is I'd like to do a little bit of spiritual economics. I'd like us to think spiritually about Jesus Christ and the value that we have, or the value that we give to Jesus Christ in our lives.

How important is he? Does he matter to us? So I'm asking us to put, it's maybe an impossible thing to do at one level, but I'm talking about spiritual economics.

So what value do we give to Jesus Christ? What place does Jesus Christ have in our lives? And then in the same, in other words, who gets the glory? Who's the most important person?

[1 : 14] Who do we focus our time and our energy on and our resources on in our lives? And as a kind of parallel to that, not just the value we place on Christ, but also can I ask us to use spiritual economics to think about the cost of having grace in our lives.

In other words, we know that grace is a gift. We know that we can't earn our favour or our salvation before God, but having received grace, having received this amazing free gift from God that God has died on the cross and we've received forgiveness and life, can I ask then, what is, are we willing to pay the price for being owners or possessors, as it were, of His grace?

And what does it mean for us to put Him first, because we've received this amazing grace in our lives? What does it involve? Because I think Peter here speaks about some of the things that are involved in having participated in spiritual economics, having thought about how valuable Jesus is to us and also the cost of making Jesus Lord of our lives.

And it may be something that we struggle with. And I've completely cheated for tonight's service. I'll not tell you about it just now, but I have entirely cheated and some of the things we're looking at this morning, we'll dovetail very well with what we're looking at this evening.

You may notice there's no questions on the bulletin sheet. I'll explain that this evening. But what is involved in, in terms of, as we think about and weigh up the place Jesus Christ has in our lives?

[2 : 59] Well, the first thing that really I want to speak about is that a need for, in our Christian lives, a single-minded discipline. And verses 1 to 2, he says that we're to arm ourselves, sorry, 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.

As a result, he does not live the rest of his life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. And so we have this language here where Peter is speaking about a need for a single-minded discipline in our lives as a response to his grace. Now, we find that quite a difficult thing to do, love and grace and discipline.

We don't necessarily put the two things together naturally. We think of love as more of a kind of flighty thing, as floating about and it's lovely and it's in motion and it's great, which of course it is of all these things, but it's also something that involves for his great discipline in our lives. Love does that because there's times when love says, no, no, no, I'm not going to do that because of love. I'm not going to walk that way because of love.

You know, it involves discipline, doesn't it? Every level in friendships and in marriage and in relationships and in churches it involves discipline. When we love people, very often we want to imitate them and that involves discipline, trying to become like someone else.

And we recognise and we see that spiritually in our lives as well. If we're going to know the fullness of grace and the joy of being Christians, then there's a cost for us in that we're to be like Jesus Christ and live our lives like Jesus Christ.

[4 : 47] Peter's using a military term here, he says, arm yourselves with the same attitude. So we're to have this militaristic way of thinking about it, we're to be disciplined and serious-minded in living our Christian lives with the way Christ wants us to.

We're to look at Christ Jesus himself, as we're told in these words, who showed in his, you know, who's Jesus Christ? He's the one who is the great example of grace, isn't he?

There's no one more loving than Jesus Christ. There's no one that has greater grace than Jesus. And yet we see Jesus who showed amazing discipline in his life as he walked towards the cross, didn't he?

He showed great discipline and amazing suffering as he walked towards and as he went to the cross and indeed on to the grave. He showed great self-control so that he could come to that place where he was done with sin.

He came with a specific task to deal with our sin. He was disciplined in his love. He walked all the way to Calvary and he was done with sin when he said it is finished.

[6 : 01] He showed that great single-minded discipline in order to be a redeemer. And we are to share that attitude as Christians in our lives. It's a mindset change.

Whatever we're going through, whatever suffering is involved for us, our mindset is to be the same as Jesus which says we're done with sin because we're Christians and because we want to follow the example of the one who gave us spiritual life.

That doesn't mean to say we are done with sin. It's about our attitude, mentality that we're saying, right, sin's no longer going to reign over me. I'm not going to live for sin. I'm not going to live for the desires that separate me from Jesus Christ.

I'm going to battle against it. I'm going to battle against our God vacancy that so often is in my life where I have no reference for God and no time for God and no thought for God.

I'm going to battle against the desires that make me want to live my own way without reference to his grace and love. I'm done with sin. Now that's a disciplined way of thinking. Yes, it's the way of love and it's the way of grace, but it involves that single-minded discipline that will enable us to give God the glory in our lives.

[7 : 15] So that's the first thing, single-minded discipline. And that's something we all need to consider. If you take the name of Jesus Christ as a Christian, if you say you're a Christian today, then that is something that we consider in our lives.

And I really hope that you don't think... I just feel sometimes I'm always nagging from the pulpit. I don't mean to nag. I mean to be encouraging because I just find, as you unfold scripture, these are the kind of things that we're encouraged to consider because I don't feel nagged myself by scripture when we have these passages. I feel challenged and moved and encouraged.

And I hope you feel the same way. Forgive me if you feel... I don't mean... I am imperfect in my delivery of God's truth. So if there's nagging there, obliterate it from your thinking and think only more of the scripture that is encouraging you because of his grace to live differently.

I really don't want to nag. Okay, can I just make that clear? I have. Single-minded discipline. Okay, that's for sure. The second thing is an awareness of time.

This passage really speaks a lot about the person who is giving glory to God has a recognition and awareness of the value of time and the importance of time in their lives, really from verses 3 to 11 in many ways.

[8 : 47] Peter here is speaking about time. And can I go back to the beginning, to the introduction to spiritual economics and relate that to time because you've often heard that phrase, haven't you?

Time is money. Time is money. Well, that's true in many ways in an economic sense. I think this phrase is just giving time a monetary value or giving it value at all.

And as Christians, we believe that as well. We believe that time is valuable. It's God's gift. It's God's precious gift to us. And Chester Cathedral, there's an old clock there, and it has this poem inscribed somewhere on it.

It says, when I was a child, you probably know this, when I was a child, I laughed and wept, time crept. When I became a youth, I waxed more bold and time strolled.

When I was full, grown, man, time ran. When older still, I grew, time flew. Soon I shall find and passing on time gone.

[9 : 56] Oh Christ, will thou have saved me then? You know, this great recognition of the speed of time and the author of that poem was obviously old, er, because those of us who are old are here know exactly about the way that time speeds up as we get older.

Now my daughter has just come back from America and she comes back hip and happening with the language of the streets in New York.

And when I ask her to do something now, she says, YOLO, okay, which means you only live once. You know, that's the slang that's on the street these days, her and Kirsten say that together to one another.

And that's what they do, you know, you only live once. And the general thinking behind that is of course, ah, forget about anything, forget about responsibility, you only live once, have a good time, do all the things you want to do.

And that might be the motive behind it. I actually thought it meant you've obviously lacked originality. But it does mean, you know, you only live once and the Christian takes that also with a different motive and a different emphasis.

[11 : 13] We recognize spiritually, you know, our lives are passing by so quickly. Those who are over 50 and 60 here will absolutely testify to how quickly life is passing for them.

And so Peter says here, because we have as Christians, even I hope as young Christians and awareness of time, therefore we live with insight. We live with insight.

You know, verse 3 speaks, you know, for you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgy, scowling and so on. They think it's strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation.

And that great phrase, flood of dissipation, just says so much. But it's living with this insight as believers we should have and are looking to have, especially as we, when our spiritual economics value Jesus Christ and value the cost of His grace, we should be aware often of the time we've wasted, the time we've been doing things that are involving ourselves in self-absorption and sensual pleasure with no picture, with no concept of the bigger picture and of the shortness of time or of the costliness of what we've been doing and the emptiness and vacuousness of the choices that we've often made in the past.

Now, it's significant, isn't it? What Peter speaks about here, things haven't changed. And we live today in a huge drinking culture. It's the kind of thing that Peter's speaking of here, where it's an absolute prerequisite for a good time, for a good night out, is that there's often an overabundance of alcohol consumption.

[13 : 02] It's a form of release, a form of escape, of where we can depress our inhibitions and can act in a way where we don't need to think about the consequences or indeed the dullness of our week-to-week lives that require us to obliterate it from our mind and from our memory.

And yet, we somehow, in the same vein, ignore the well-documented social and medical and above all, personal cost of a life of abandonment and abuse in this way.

The hurt and the violence and the pain and the division and the suffering caused by so, caused so much by the abuse of alcohol.

And so as Christians, we look to be in the place where we have recognised that, saying, I've spent enough time doing that in the past, and we recognise so that we say no.

Not saying that we become teetotal, not saying that we never go out socialising, not saying any of these things, you know me well enough to know that that's not the case, but we say no to plunging into the same flood of dissipation as those who have no hope and are living for that Friday night.

[14 : 32] So that they will look at us, and think, you're strange, and some will maybe even heap abuse on us because we will not go with them down that road.

But as Christians, as we have an insight into time and into the time we've wasted in the past doing things like that, we are willing to accept the strange conclusions that others make of us in order to glorify God with our lives.

Time is precious for us. Our bodies are precious. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We're not to abuse them. We're to take as good gifts, but we're not to abuse them.

And life for us must have come to the place where it's more than just the reflection at the bottom of an empty glass. And it's significantly more important and more precious than that because Jesus

Christ has been nailed to a tree, the Son of God, to redeem us, to buy us back, to give us life. And yet we sometimes find it easy to drag Him back into the gutter of a hopeless way of living. Living with insight, but also, I think, living with accountability in verses 5 and 6, Peter recognizes that as we give glory to God, we recognize who He is.

[15 : 53] We recognize Him as the judge of the living and the dead. For this reason, the Gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men and the body, but live according to God and the Spirit.

So we live with that sense of accountability, Romans 14-12. Each of us will give an account of our lives to God. And we recognize, as Christians even, that our life is a gift from God, that His grace is a gift to us, and He asks us to use that in the right way.

And interestingly, the judgment in the Bible is very often, although we're saved and redeemed by grace, it's very often couched in terms of how we've lived, what evidence there is, in other words, of grace.

So if we believe in Jesus Christ, if we believe we've been saved by grace, then God is saying, well, I'll be looking for evidence of that on that great day.

Evidence of my work, evidence of the Holy Spirit, evidence of change, evidence of newness, because we all have to give account, none of us are autonomous as believers.

[17 : 03] And He's looking for us, He's looking for lives that are lived with a desire to please Him. That's okay, isn't it? He's allowed to do that, isn't he, because of what He's done on our behalf?

Is it wrong for Him to look for a spiritual fruit, spiritual life from us in return? Or do we say, thank you so much for the astonishing, astonishing cost of your salvation.

I'll just stick it somewhere here in my back pocket, and I'll just carry on living as if sin is meaningless, and if our relationship is not blighted by my choices.

He wants us to recognize grace and live accountably. And as Christians also, that reminds us of the reality for us when we have all our friends, that it's not just Christians that will face God, that we believe every human being will face the living God.

They might not think so, they might not believe so, and we appreciate and we recognize their choices, but we believe that they will meet with God, therefore we don't plunge with them into the places of danger that we know they're heading to.

[18 : 19] Isn't that right? We know something is dangerous spiritually, something is unhealthy, something is going to be damaging to our lives spiritually and in our relationships with God. We don't hold people's hands and walk down that way, do we?

We show them a different way. We say, no, I can't plunge with you into that flood of dissipation. I can't walk down that road, and we seek therefore humbly and graciously, I hope, to have opportunities to remind them of who God is and who he reveals himself to be. So we live with insight and we live with accountability, but I think we also live with the right priorities, therefore, as Christians.

We live with a certain set of priorities. Now, we're all individual, we all have our own gifts and talents and beauties and uglinesses. But we do have certain things that remind us of who we are and we have certain priorities that we share and in that last section, because again, with this perspective of time, the end of all things is near, Peter says here, therefore, be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

So that's part of the fruit of living, taking spiritual economics and weighing the value Jesus Christ has to him. The value Jesus Christ has to us and the cost of his grace in our lives that we're willing to be clear-minded and self-controlled, insightful and alert. Now, dear Peter was very aware of this teaching, wasn't he?

He's the one with the other disciples who fell asleep in Gethsemane when Jesus wanted him awake. Could you watch this? Just for one hour? He fell gilly about that.

[20 : 16] He remembered Christ's great need and so he was sensitive about watching and praying, being insightful, clear-minded and self-controlled.

So that's Christians. We're thinking Christians. We're aware. I'll say a little bit more about this tonight, maybe aware of temptation, aware of our behaviour, aware of our morals, our ethics, our choices, our language, how we act at home, how we act at school, how we act in the lab, how we act in the classroom, in the place of employment, whatever it happens to be in the street.

We're aware of these things. We're watching and insightful, thoughtful and disciplined, alert, self-controlled with regard to all of our lifestyle and all of our desires and all of our choices. Peter makes clear, I don't need to go into great detail about the kind of desires, the different desires that we have that can take us from God.

So we have to be insightful and disciplined, not as an end in themselves. This is really important, I think. We're not saying, let's be disciplined. Let's be insightful.

[21 : 37] Let's know the Bible and how to live as an end in itself, so that we can pray. In other words, he's saying, live your lives in such a way that you're making time to pray.

That's the spiritual economics of the situation. You know, how important is Jesus Christ to us? Will we therefore make time to pray to Him? He's self-controlled and disciplined, clear-minded, so that we can have the time for Him.

You know, the things that are important to us, we spend time doing them. We make the time for them, don't we? We make the time for our hobbies, for our interests, for our abilities, the things that are important to us.

You will make time for the things that you love. You will. And I will, and we do. If we make no time to pray and somehow just cast it aside, saying, oh, well, I only do that when I feel like it, or I haven't got time, God understands anyway, we're missing the point.

He wants us to recognise how important prayer is to us, because He wants us to have a sense of spiritual economic value, that Jesus matters and grace matters.

[22 : 52] And He wants us to develop the relationship, the other stuff, you know, the morality and the ethics and all of these other things, our behaviour, it's just a by-product.

It's not an end in itself, it's a by-product of a relationship with Jesus Christ. If we spend no time in prayer, all the other things will become self-righteous and vacuous. That's what they will.

They will be proud and will look down their noses at other people and say, well, look at how good I am and look at how well I live. If we're not, they should be a by-product.

We shouldn't really even have to think that much about them, because it's the relationship, it's the value that we place on the beauty of Jesus, and His purity and His love and His perfection that enables us therefore to live that way.

So it's all in order that we can pray. Is it going to be that this month there will be the same drip and drab of people who will come in to pray?

[23 : 53] Well, it will be the same one and two, and I don't mean that people are dribs and drabs. They're very valuable, precious and important. But I just mean, will everyone, will we just think, well, that's for someone else to do.

And we can't really challenge me on this area because I just get a time, energy, things to do.

Someone takes, you only need to be five minutes, you don't need to stay for the hour.

Will it reflect at one level our priorities, our understanding of the church and of the kingdom, and of our need for Christ as a church? We can't do anything as a church without Christ, can we?

As a church? He's the head of the church. He's the King of kings, I'll speak about at Origen tonight. He's the King of kings. Are we quite happy just to drift along without any reference to Him in the church together?

We can all pray in our own, I'm not denying that. But I'm saying, do we have the value of recognising kingdom work and the gospel work by coming together?

[24 : 52] Do we not need Him to revive us? Do we not need souls to be saved? Are people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ? Do we not need the resources? We don't have anything. We want everyone to be involved at that level.

We want to be clear and self-controlled. But then He goes on to speak about, above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Isn't that great as well?

That as a reflection of the value we place on Jesus, and the willingness to pay the cost of grace in our lives, we will put others first.

We will recognise the place of Christian community in our lives. We are just lone rangers for Jesus. But we are part of this loving community. Love each other deeply.

For love covers over a—that's a great phrase—love covers a multitude of sins. It doesn't mean that we are hypocrites. It doesn't mean that we avoid people's failings and faults. It really is talking about not exposing them to other people.

[25 : 56] So when we see people maybe in our churches or our lives doing things that are wrong, we don't just rub our hands and say, I can't wait to tell what down the road, what they've done now. You know, that we'll—so our nature is to love to tell other people about other people's mistakes and sins and failings.

It's just we're hardwired to do it. But grace says, no, look, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to protect it. I may speak to them individually, because we're close, because they're my brother or sister. I may say, well, that's out of order.

But we don't display it in the screens. We don't tell people. We're not quick to pass on bad news and failure of other people, because we love them.

You do it in your family. You do it with people that you love. You protect them. You protect them. We show a different way as a community. This is not to be a community of judgmental cliques of people.

That's not what we're to be. There's a cost involved in being a Christian. And it says, don't pass on bad things about people. Put others first. Open your homes willingly.

[27 : 09] Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Use our gifts to serve in whatever form. Open our homes. Great cost to opening our homes.

But Christ has opened His eternal home to us freely and fully. And when we are able to do so, can we open our homes to one another?

There's the RUF team coming in the summer with Hunter Bailey and his family. Are we going to be able to house them? Are we going to be able to open the homes? That's going to be painful and costly, like someone else living in the house.

But will we do that for Christ's sake? Because we love them. See, seeing new people in the church, will we be willing to give up the peace and quiet of our roast on a Sunday and share it with others to get to know them?

So we love one another deeply. We also serve, as we're reminded here, within the church, using our gifts faithfully, faithfully, serving others.

[28 : 19] Serving others. A lot of our thinking of gifts is really about us, isn't it? How can I use my gifts? And I want to show my gifts to everyone.

But really, gifts is biblically, is more about using what God has given us in the service of other people. And last week in the Bulletin Sheet, there was lots of things that are needing to be done as part of this growing community.

And many people have responded, and for that I'm very, very grateful, as leaders, we're very grateful. It may be that there's more of us willing still to see the needs, to see the need for servants, for organisers, for grace-motivated people to do the invisible, unappealing, undramatic acts of grace in the church.

So this passage really is just all about value, isn't it? The value you place on Jesus Christ in your life, and how that expresses itself.

And the cost that you're willing to bear to hold on to that grace that He's given. Because there is a cost, a real cost, salvation we know is absolutely free.

[29 : 40] But to be a child of God is a huge privilege and a great responsibility. There's a cost involved in that. And therefore, as we, I would encourage you, as I have to challenge myself to think about the value I place on Jesus Christ.

And I can only do that really, not by saying, oh, I've got a really warm, fuzzy feeling in here about Jesus. A warm, fuzzy feeling that no one knows and no one can see and touch and feel.

But in my life, how does it, how does my, the value I place on Christ reveal itself in the way I spend my time, or the way I serve Him? Now, I'm not just, I don't mean to be, I'm just a kind of cold pragmatist.

Because there is feeling involved, there is emotion. There must be, but it must reveal itself also in the lives we live and what gospel we are, what story people are reading when they read our lives, what message they hear, what understanding do they gain about the value we place on Jesus and the preciousness we regard grace as having in our lives.

I mean, let's power heads and pray about that. Lord God, we ask and pray that we would understand a little bit more about Jesus Christ and about His grace.

[31 : 09] And I would pray today very much for us as Christians that we would not treat that grace cheaply, or in a self-absorbed way, a selfish way or a wrong way.

I also pray and ask that if there are any here today who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, they would be amazed, amazed at the reality of Jesus Christ in our lives, and not also amazed at the truth of the gospel and amazed at the offer of forgiveness and new life and a new start and overwhelming love and belonging that brings with it not only responsibility but empowerment to live that way.

So, forgive Lord if sometimes the message comes across as imbalanced or one-dimensional. But Lord God, we pray that as we seek to unfold Your Word, that You as we come to You would give us the insight into it and into applying it into our lives in a powerful and real way, not just in the pew but much more importantly in the lives that we live out of here.

But do bless us, may we be equipped to serve You in this church and also filled with a huge love for one another that covers over a multitude of sins.

Keep us Lord, we ask in our lives, however difficult and however tempting it is, keep us from just plowing, plunging into the same flood of dissipation as a world around us that have not been touched by Your grace and who reject Your sovereign lordship in their lives.

[32 : 59] Or don't know about it at any shape or form. Help us to be ambassadors for You, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.