

“Crisis Mode”  
I Peter 4:1–6  
Pastor Randy Thompson  
October 15, 2023 • Sunday Morning Sermon

It is good to be among brothers and sisters in Christ. The ministry of Briarwood has touched our church for many years. Harry Reeder has preached two conferences for us, one before my tenure and one after. Your pianist Daniel Cason has helped us in a very special way and we love him dearly as well. If you are a member at Briarwood you need to be praying every day for the staff here at this church. Harry Reeder was precious to me as he was to many. I was in my earlier career excited because since I met him in 1983, talking about revitalization of churches, which is what I have been about all my whole life, as well as him, I got to know him better and I would get excited because whenever I saw him at the General Assembly or conferences, he always knew my name. I thought ‘I must be in his top 20 if he knows my name’ because I only know like 40 people by first name. Then I found out that I wasn't in the top 20. I was in the top 20,000 because Harry had a phenomenal memory for people and we're grateful for him. We're praying for all of you here. We know that you have gone through a crisis in this church.

I'd like to talk a little bit about crisis today. We will be looking at I Peter 4 and this is a book of crisis. We are in crisis, are we not? Or you might think things are going pretty well at church and they might be going pretty well for you, might be going pretty well for the city of Birmingham, the state of Alabama, then again, maybe not. Crisis is all around us. Indeed, we have already heard our brother pray for the crisis cropping up in the Middle East. My grandson is on an aircraft carrier heading in that direction right now. We trust you will lift us up in prayer. Crisis is something we all get. We all go through crises from time to time. Some of us love crises. Some of us are drama queens. We kind of can't live without crisis. Some of us are drama princes. There are no kings in this sanctuary, but One, but some of you enjoy crisis so much you can't wait to talk to anybody about it; “Did you see this crisis?” There's drama in everything we do. We often overuse the term and we often think we are in crisis when we simply aren't, and sometimes we are in crisis.

Last Sunday, I go to church much earlier than my wife does. When I get to church, I get in my office, get my long, tall drink of water, sit down for a time of prayer and reflection, take my keys out, take my billfold out, put them on the shelf and take my cell phone out. But interestingly enough, I took two cell phones out. My wife's cell phone looks just like mine. Mine is blue, hers is pink but somehow, I put them both in there. Now, that's a crisis. I'll just call her, can't do that. I'll text her, can't do that. I'll email her, can't do that because she reads her email on her phone. My daughter calls. “What happened? You took her phone.” We got all worked up about that. She was coming to church, driving, praying and singing Psalms, hoping that the phone would be here when she got to church.

We can go in a crisis for almost no reason at all. I go in a crisis if I don't have half and half for my coffee. I don't want to use the powder or milk. I want the good stuff. We can create those crises but in I Peter they had the real thing. Peter writes from Rome, from Babylon, as he calls it, and he writes to a people, a church that we're not exactly sure where it is, but a church that was undergoing suffering and crisis. Four times in the book of I Peter, he takes up the issue of crisis and directly speaks to it but it is the overarching umbrella of the whole book. Every passage in this book is in a context of suffering, persecution, insults, slander, a possible physical

beating. As I have been studying this book, this particular passage touched my heart and maybe it's because I've been in some crisis and that's when we tend to pray, isn't it? The crisis comes as it came to these people. As I did some commentary work in the last week, I found a commentary by one of my old professors and he says "This is the one of the most difficult passages in all the Bible." I hope we can work through some of the difficult parts and find in it that which touches our hearts, that which enables us to go forward.

This is God's Word. Listen for God speaks. I Peter 4:1-6 says *[1] Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. [3] For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. [4] With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; [5] but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. [6] For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.* This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God.

There are three things I want to tell you about crisis, because I think this is the context of crisis. It is not three ways to go hide when trouble comes. It is amazingly basic. It's something that can be applied to us when we're not in crisis. In fact, most preachers would preach this passage just as typical Christian living but crisis is typical Christian living.

First of all, get your head straight. Are you in crisis right now? In the midst of crisis, get your head straight. I Peter 4:1 tells us to arm yourself with the same way of thinking – it's not smart, it's not unintelligent talking. It's talking about how every Christian has to be able to kick in to his mind. The old preacher said "Christianity begins in the noggin (the mind)." William Hendrickson, the great commentator, said that the biblical heart is made up of the mind, the will and the affections. So it begins in the mind. This is what has to happen when you're in crisis, particularly – you have to get your head straight. What does it say to do here? In the same way of thinking, arm yourselves. In the Greek language, 'arm yourselves' is a military word. It is how the warriors would grab up the spear, the sword and the helmet before they would go out and fight because crisis is always a fight.

Suffering is always a task. Providential events that you did not know were coming is always a challenge and you have to, as it were, lock and load, get yourself together and face the crisis head on. How to face it here, is have the same way of thinking that Christ had when He suffered in the flesh. I Peter 3:18 says it this way; *[18] For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit.* Jesus was killed, and suffered in the flesh. I Peter 4:1 says He ceased from sin. He defeated it, He killed it and forever and ever sin was defeated by the righteous and perfect life of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 4:1 says, whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. I don't think that really means that if you've gone through persecution, you don't sin anymore. I think that means that like Jesus suffered and dealt with sin, the Spirit of Jesus Christ is placed into our hearts when we become Christians. John Murray, the great Westminster theologian, called this definitive sanctification whereby the Holy Spirit is placed into our lives when we become Christians. When we become Christians, we are a new creation the old has passed away. The new is come. The Spirit brings it. He indwells us and we become one in Christ – Christ in us and us in Christ. Whoever knows Jesus Christ, whoever is one in Jesus Christ has ceased, made a

clean break with sin. Peter says that in crisis you have to have that mind that you made a clean break for sin in trials, in suffering, in crisis – you have to grab onto the mind of Christ.

How can I explain that better to you? You know that when you become Christians you are placed in Christ. A little thing that we've used with our children, I'm sure every preacher in this pulpit has used this, but imagine yourself to be the ring that's in my hand right now and when you become a Christian, you are placed in Jesus Christ and Christ is the One you see. If you would look at my ring right now, you can't see it because you see Jesus Christ, so to speak. We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and in crisis frequently the devil tells you this is all your fault. You are the reason this is happening. Yes, there is such a thing as Biblical chastisement, but there is a sense in which suffering comes to all of us. These people that Peter was speaking to, they were Christians. That's why they were suffering.

We also suffer for other reasons. We suffer because sin is in this world. Death and illness are in this world, and none of us are excluded from that which will end in death. Nevertheless, if we are covered by Jesus Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit, we are safe from those accusations that say, 'you are not worthy of heaven, you are the problem.' Whenever I hear you are not worthy of heaven, I heartily agree but then we say Jesus died and I am in Him. Not only do we have all of what Jesus won for us, that is our position is firm, justified by faith, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, but this concept of being in Christ, the concept of knowing that we are in union with Christ, has a vital living dynamic day to day. Calvin called it the Duplex Gracia – the Double Grace Union of Christ not only puts us in a position whereby we are seen as righteous, but we have at our disposal the same Holy Spirit that filled Jesus. Jesus lives in us and we live through and in Him.

When we come into a crisis and we say to ourselves, 'I am in Christ. I am safe from the accusations of Satan and Christ lives in me so I can face this. I can change, I can do, I can persevere because I am in Christ.' Paul said it this way in Galatians 2:20, *[20] I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* When you're in crisis, you are still in Christ, and when you are in Christ, you do not listen to the siren call of temptation. When we are at our best in walking with the Lord Jesus Christ and are using our provisions of His strength and power in our life, we can fight temptation because we have what He had to fight temptation with – the Word and fullness of the Spirit. When in crisis, you need to remember that you are in Him and He is in you.

I would imagine when Harry preached through Romans 6 which was about six months ago, he would tell you that when you're in Christ, you are delivered into a whole other sphere of life. It is like having a job, leaving that job and going to another job. It's like having a girlfriend, leaving that girlfriend, going to another girlfriend. It is like being on a team and leaving that team and going to another team. Satan will constantly try to like a boss from the old job saying 'I want you in here at 8:00 tomorrow morning.' You say, 'No, I'm not on your team anymore. That's not my job anymore. I'm working for a new employer. My new employer is the King of Kings.' It is like the old girlfriend who calls and I never had a girlfriend that ever called back. They were usually happy to get rid of me. I haven't heard from any of them for years and years, but if one would call, I would say, 'No, I'm not in a relationship with you. I don't have to go where you want me to go. I go where she wants me to go.' I'm under new management, shall we say. A Christian who comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, goes through crisis and is open to all kinds of temptations yet he says, "I am safe in Christ. I'm under new management and I can persevere in Him."

When I'm in crisis, do you know who I think about? I think about me – why are they doing this to me? Why is this happening to me? One of those old girlfriends that will remain nameless used to say, 'Nobody loves me, everybody hates me. Think I'll go eat worms.' You've heard it before. Did you know her? She would pour that on when I was being a little recalcitrant, a little tough but that's the way I think. I think when crisis comes, it is poor me sometimes, but number one, first and foremost, I'm in Christ, a new creation.

Secondly, in crisis, focus on obedience. When you're in the midst of crisis, the first thing you have to remind yourself of, is who you are, what your resources are and the next thing you have to do is to turn those resources in to the way you live. I am shocked that Peter talks to people who are suffering and tells them to get themselves right. It's like the football coach who used to call out to me when I was daydreaming, 'Get your head in the game.' It's the first thing Peter tells us, and then he says, "Okay, now do it." Do what you're told to do. Isn't that what we see there in I Peter 4:2 that says *[2] so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.* That's what you do in crisis of all times. You live for the will of God.

What does Peter say the will of God is not? I Peter 4:3 says [3] *For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.* This sounds like a weekend for some people that I know and yet, what's the thing that is the common thread there? Notice how each of the sins that are mentioned here are sensual sins. There are things that make you maybe feel better for a moment or two. That's what they do. That's what the world does. They kick in to all the sensuality they can get their hands on. In crisis, Peter is telling us to resist the selfish tendency, to resist the tendency to pour yourself back into yourself, to be self-indulgent, to say and sing that glorious song that we all know so well when we hit that same and only note, 'me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me.' I tell my Vacation Bible School kids about this song every year and that song will not get them where they want to go. Yet I do it. Not only do I do it, I'm an expert at it.

I had a friend in seminary tell me that his spiritual gift was criticism. Anybody have that one here? My spiritual gift is whining. I have top quality. I was in the finals one year. It's not a gift you like to have. Some of you like to curl up at night with your two favorite friends, Ben and Jerry after some tough days. A little more exotic would be to bring your Dutch friend in – Haagen-Dazs. Maybe you're just pure Alabama so just give me that Blue Bell. Give me that court, give me that pizza. The family makes two pizzas and the second one's always got three quarters of it left. When crisis comes don't let that pizza be in the fridge. I'm taking it down. As silly as those examples are, it tells us about the core of our tendencies. 'God, I've had a hard time and without really saying it's Your fault, I am saying I think a little me time is needed here.' Yes, I'm saying that you sometimes need to relax. Sometimes you need to rest, sometimes you need to recover but it is glorious in the midst of a crisis, suffering, difficulty, bad news, providential darkness that you are able to confuse your unbelieving friends.

I Peter 4:4 says [4] *With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.* Remember the context here, they're not talking just generally, though they are. Unbelievers are always criticizing you for not coming along with them but in crisis, in difficulty, in persecution, in pain, you hear 'Come on, be one of us.' No, Peter says to be countercultural. I had a friend one time tell me, 'you know, anybody can act like a Christian when times are good.' I don't know if that's true or not, but he went on to say, "where we really find out what happens to you is when the pressure is on, then we find out

what's in that teabag when the boiling water hits it.” We are called to show the world that greater is He who lives in us than he who lives in the world. We are called to show the world what Christ is really like because when we live in obedience, in selflessness, going to church, reading our Bible, serving, saying ‘no’ to the sensual sins, that's when the world sees and thinks “maybe, there's something about this silly religion.”

The third thing is in crisis remember the big picture – in trial and suffering, in difficulty, when right now hurts, when you have walked in to the doctor's office and said, “I've got some bad news.” Peter says ‘when now hurts, look at the ones in the past’ as he talks about in I Peter 4:6 and then fast forward to the future. Lennon called this the opiate of the people. Some have called it some kind of pie in the sky concept that really doesn't go with the real world. But we can see what God has in mind. I'm not telling you that if you're in the midst of trial and difficulty, if you're in the midst of one of those sentences that a doctor can give, that you can walk out and pipe up and say, this is happy, I know exactly why God is doing this. I don't think we can know that always, but we can know the big picture.

I Peter 4:5-6 says [5] *but they* (the milliners, those that want to push you down) *will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.* Does that mean we're all excited over the fact that all those bad guys in our lives are going to get it one day - God's going to get you. No, look at this in the totality of what it's saying there as he continues in I Peter 4:6; [6] *For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.*

People have stumbled all over this phrase, ‘people who are dead’ but I think it's pretty clear what it means. It means those who have gone before you who are now dead, they had the Gospel preached to them. They became Christians, they were under pressure, they were judged by the world, they suffered and now they live forever. What does this tell us about crisis? It means every crisis shall pass. I believe that one third of this congregation is in the midst of a crisis right now and if you think for a few moments, you can probably think of some others. I have four children and eight grandchildren. I cannot tell you a day where some of them are not in crisis. We have a very high maintenance family. My grandson is on the way to the Middle East. That's today's, tomorrow it'll be different. I have to remember that it's just for a while. Andre Crouch, had a song back in the sixties, that said ‘It won't be long till will be leaving here. It won't be long till we're going home.’

A lady named Eleanor at my church back in Tuscumbia was the wife of a pastor in the 1940s, and after he had gone on to different churches and he had passed away she decided to come back to Tuscumbia and retire. She had three daughters, all three married PCA pastors, which is fascinating, I think. Eleanor had a million things wrong with her. I remember going to see her and she would tell me about things. Eleanor was one of those who would occasionally show me something on her which just overwhelmed me. She had all kinds of problems, but she would always say at the end of a discussion as she smiled, “This too shall pass.” You see, she got the big picture. She knew that those things were just a little bit of time. The crisis will pass because God is just and He will fix it. He will judge those who are fighting against us. He will write it. He will get to the bottom of it and now or later it will all get fixed.

My wife, Kathy and I like to watch a lot of mysteries, and I can't tell you how upset I get when I watch a mystery with her, especially the British mystery, and they come to the end of it and they do not solve it at the end. I was shocked. We went to the next one, and it was a new mystery. They didn't solve it. God solves mysteries and when we get to the back of the Book,

we'll know it's all right. This, too shall pass. The crisis will not last forever but you will remember that.

Some people might say that I'm just talking about that great other world to take your mind off of the difficulties that you're in. I am talking also about that but when times get difficult, when pain comes, when you are rejected and you, who are young people know what that means. I was never so rejected in my life as I was as a teenager – rejected even when I didn't know I was being judged too silly, too stupid, too tall, too fat, too skinny, not funny, not smart enough. When rejection comes, yes, it'll pass but real life is later as we see at the end of I Peter 4:6 which says *they might live in the spirit the way God does*.

When we were with Harry last spring, just weeks before he died, we went to see a lot of things in Scotland and Greyfriars Cemetery was a place where the Covenanters died. You may or may not know much about the Covenanters or the later portion of the Reformation. These Presbyterians in Scotland who decided that no matter who the king says he is, he is not the head of the church and because they would not allow the king to be head of the church, they wouldn't say the king was head of the church. They were hunted, persecuted, thrown out of their churches and they were killed. In the Greyfriars Cemetery where some of them are buried, was almost overwhelming to me. Donald Cargill, a great covenanter for who died in flames, said this in his last few words; 'Farewell, all created enjoyments, pleasures and delights, farewell, sinning and suffering. Farewell, praying and believing, Welcome, heaven and singing. Welcome joy in the Holy Ghost. Welcome, Father, Son and Holy Ghost into Thy hands, I commit my spirit.

I find that when I think about heaven, it makes crisis smaller and that's not my imagination, that's the real world. A friend who was having a missions' conference at a Baptist church nearby put something on Facebook about one of the missionaries who was in the Middle East, and some of the teenagers said, 'But what if they try to kill you?' He said the following words; "The worst they can do is send me to heaven. This is my God, who I know in the midst of every crisis, invites me to have the mind of Christ whereby I will not react to that crisis in an inappropriate, ungodly or sinful way. I won't act like the rest of the world does, for I am in Christ, I am safe, I am held, I am washed by the blood of the Lamb, filled with the Holy Spirit. I'm able to do all that I am called to do. I am in this world in the midst of crisis able to obey God in the midst of it, and show the world that I am different. I can say that even in the midst of the most painful part of my crisis, I know that this is not my home."

How about you? I have to tell you, I am lousy at crisis. I'm preaching this to me. I'm preaching it because when I came across this in the midst of crisis several weeks ago, I began realizing how badly I needed what these words were. I'm asking you now, how are you? If you do not know Jesus Christ at this very moment, I have nothing to offer you in crisis. It might go away and it might not. Might be better days ahead but it might not. Go get your Haagen-Dazs for it might be all you have but if you know Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, He will hold you fast. If you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you know you're going to heaven, not on your own merit, but on the work of Jesus Christ substituted for you in the Gospel and by faith and repentance if you know Him not, you can come to Him and say, "Jesus, save me, make me a new creation" and crisis will be tough from then on but it will never be the same.

I call upon you now. Maybe you're reading this today and you just happen to stumble upon this sermon and it seemed like a good day to read one, but if you don't know Jesus Christ, today I am here to tell you this is your time. This is your opportunity to ask Christ to save you from your sins. This is your opportunity at this moment, at this time to say, "Jesus, save me." It might be a crisis that has awakened you to your desperate need of something that is not in you.

Very honestly, that's how I came to Christ. In the midst of walking through a world and the shifting sands under my feet threw me off and I was looking for somewhere solid to stand. It is Jesus. Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart, but call upon Him in prayer in the day He might be found and say, "Jesus, save me" then tell somebody about it. Tell your elders, tell your parents, tell your kids, tell somebody that you know is a Christian today.

Church people do you do crisis like everybody else does? You can't. You can be forgiven for that Ben and Jerry's because I don't do it very well myself. Remember my spiritual gift of whining? But I hear the voice of Christ within me saying, 'Don't you realize how much better it is when I'm walking in you and you are walking in Me?' Christianity is a lot of pretty talk unless it changes the way you deal with crisis. You can be older, you can be sicker, you can be struggling at school and you can live with confidence.

We're involved in a school up in Tuscumbia where the former headmaster got sick while he was still headmaster, and after he left being the headmaster, there has been one crisis after another. He is Job walking and in his early sixties, shockingly, he died Friday. But I say to him and I say to you, "He will hold us fast" In crisis, Jesus will hold you fast. I Peter 4:2a says 'so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh.' The rest of the time – I don't know how many years I've got left, but will you with me acknowledge that I've been pretty lousy at dealing with crisis most of my life, but for the rest of the time, God, please live in me in crisis for the rest of the time. What will you do with it? Let's pray together.

Prayer:

God, our Father, we ask that You would teach us how to live in crisis. Father, I have been so negligent with the means of grace whereby Christ would live in me in the midst of my suffering. I have been so poor at doing Your will when I feel as though I am being attacked and Father, all I can think about is now help me to see heaven. Help me to remember this too shall pass. Help me to remember that my Lord Jesus Christ has suffered for me and I will see Him on the other side. God, help us, Father. There are people reading this today, right now who are in the midst of suffering that I can't even imagine. Help them to find Christ within them, in Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.