

# 1 Peter 4:1-11

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[ 0 : 00 ] They were the eerie moments caught by holidaymakers mobile phone cameras on Boxing Day 2004. It was a normal scene by all accounts of a hot winter, high beach paradise when the locals noticed something abnormal, the strange movements of the tide.

They saw the warning signs. The sea began to completely recede away from the coastline, leaving the seabed totally open for hundreds of metres. Unknowing tourists walked out from the coast into the strangely quiet and alluring space before them, hypnotised. An ocean that brought such intrigue and excitement would moments later move to bring devastation and disaster. It felt so attractive to walk out there, and yet it was so deadly. It felt so normal at the time for some. But it was terribly, terribly abnormal. They were the strange and unusual events leading up to the impact of the Boxing Day tsunami in Thailand ten years ago.

There was the odd combination of the attractive power of the sea, followed by the destructive power of the power of the sea. One photograph catches the awful moment where one man who'd walked out into the vacant sea bed was faced with the foaming torrent of the freak wave that followed. He was swept away.

It was the attractive, followed by the destructive. It felt normal for some people, but it was terribly, terribly, terribly abnormal. And isn't that the image that Peter uses to illustrate the awful situation when people mistake the abnormal for the normal? They walk into an attractive and deadly flood. Have a look at verse 4. With respect to this, they are surprised when you don't join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you. So Peter says there is one group of people in the world, in fact most of the world, who has a lifestyle which they think is entirely normal. And they just can't understand, they're surprised why Christians, why Peter's readers don't join in. It feels normal to them, but actually it's terribly, terribly abnormal. It feels attractive to them. They're drawn into this lifestyle, but it's destructive.

[ 3 : 03 ] It's like a flood sweeping them along to disaster. And that's where the problem arises for Peter's readers, where certain kinds of behaviour are normal in the world, by the world's standards. And it's a shock, it's a surprise. It's ridiculous when Peter's readers, when Christians don't join in with that behaviour.

It's just weird that Christians don't do that. It's so surprising that we don't. The subtle social behavioural pressure and expectation of being swept away in the flood which feels so alluring and yet is so destructive.

That is the pressure that Peter's readers face. To mistake the terribly abnormal with the normal in life.

Now a few weeks ago we were in Peter, weren't we? And as we've gone through we've seen him talk about what it's like to live as God's people in a world that they don't belong.

And in chapter 3 he spoke about the persecution that they face in wider society, in the workplace, at home. But now he gets on to something in chapter 4 that I think in terms of God's people and Christians in London today, it's absolutely bang on the money. It's the pressure Christians feel when the world mistakes destructive behaviour for attractive behaviour and the subtle social behavioural pressure to join in with that, to be swept along in a deadly flood.

[ 4 : 55 ] So Peter addresses three myths that make that really hard for the Christian, for his readers. Three myths that once they're exposed they will help his readers to keep going, to be distinctive.

So myth number one, Christians, what the Bible says about sin is actually normal and fine.

Sin is normal, Christians. That is the first myth. Now if you travel a lot you'll know that it's easy to make kind of cultural faux pas, isn't it, if you go to other countries.

Things in one country, which can be considered normal, can be highly inappropriate in other countries. So a short handshake in the UK is good, isn't it? We're a bit more reserved. A little less contact is good. But in Fiji, if you don't shake hands for the whole conversation, it's highly offensive. I don't know if I can cope with that really. Giving someone a thumbs up in this country is polite, isn't it?

[6:02] But in Asia, it's an insult. It's like giving them the finger. As a guest, clearing your plate at the meal table here is a compliment, isn't it?

Whereas in Asia it's an insult, implying that they haven't given you enough food. Our ideas of the norm change depending on who we are and where we are.

The same behaviour in one place is good and right and normal, but in another it's deemed unthinkable. It can be poles apart.

And Peter is saying that's where the going gets really tough for God's people, for the church. Because there's just a total failure to understand why you would not behave in the same way as the rest of the world.

To behave in a certain way. The lifestyle that feels so attractive. And yet it's so destructive. The lifestyle that he describes in verse 2, if you look there.

[7:07] It's a lifestyle living in the flesh for human passions and not God's will.

Verse 3, doing what the Gentiles or non-believers, the rest of the world, wants to do. Now he follows that with a list of behaviours, doesn't he?

If you look there, verse 3, sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, lawless idolatry. Now I don't think it's true that the whole of Ealing thinks it's normal to go to orgies and drunken parties all of the time.

I don't think that's what he's saying. But in first century Roman culture that was quite normal. And in fact it was a sign of a higher class of person. And the principle of that lifestyle it remains.

Driven by desires. Particularly in the area of fulfilling strong human physical urges. Urges which are good.

[8:12] Put there by God to be used and enjoyed. In the way that he lovingly explains to us. But not good to rule over us.

Those desires which use us. They are great servants, these desires. But terrible, terrible masters. Desires for sexual and physical gratification rule the roost.

Rather than God's will. So we bend God's rule to fit the rule of our desires. Living that way is normal to the world.

Totally normal. It's just unthinkable that you'd live in any other way. Now one easy example of that. Is the recent laws about same sex marriage, isn't it?

Putting it quite simply. It is bending God's rule. To suit the rule of our desires. And isn't it just ridiculous when anyone says anything different?

[9:17] Christians, they tread on eggshells, don't they? To get the Bible's view across. It is just so abnormal. So crazy. Such a surprise.

It's just nonsense to the world. That's just one issue. If you think about sex outside of marriage. Christian students who don't join in when they say why. It's just a no-brainer to the world.

So surprising. But what feels normal to the world is terribly, terribly abnormal. The attractive gets mixed up with the destructive.

It's an attractive yet destructive flood sweeping along. Sin is normal. That's the first myth. Even saying it sounds weird, doesn't it?

That sin is not normal. Who even uses the word debauchery anymore anyway? How different though that is to Jesus' teaching about sin and his thinking about sin.

[10:20] If you remember a few weeks ago, back in chapter 3, look at verse 18. Jesus suffered once for sins. It's the other way round with Jesus, isn't it?

So alien and warped and abnormal is that way of life, his sin. He suffers to get sin removed for his people.

To throw it out. To cease sin. Water is in the boat, isn't it, with Jesus. It's in the wrong place. So he responds in suffering to remove it.

And in verse 1 of chapter 4 of our reading, That's the thought that Peter says the church has to arm themselves with. It's like a war. By suffering in this mixed up world, keep getting rid of water out of the boat.

Seeing the destructive in the attractive will mean you will suffer. But in the subtle social behavioural pressure to join in with that.

[ 11 : 22 ] But don't believe the myth. Sin is normal. That is a myth. Myth number 2 though. Christians, death is the end.

Death is the end. That's myth number 2. The attractive gets mixed up with the destructive. The abnormal for the normal. Because people believe the myth that death is the end.

People keep thinking that how they live has no bearing on eternity. There's no consequence. Because death is the end. The world lives as if sin were normal.

Because they believe death is the end. But Peter says no. Verse 5. They will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

We can live lives ruled by desire. We couldn't care less about the will of God. Because we believe the myth that after death it all ends. There is nothing.

[ 12 : 28 ] But straight after death there is a very real conscious awareness of being under assessment. By the one that we've ignored.

They will give an account to him who judges the living and the dead. The subtle social behavioural pressure to join in with that is harder when you believe that myth.

Death is the end. People carry on doing what they want to do. Living by their own desires. There's no consequence. Why not join in? There's no judgement. If you can't beat them, why not join them? Nothing seems to be going wrong. Death is the end. And if I don't join them, well they could malign me. Couldn't they? Peter says. And sure, they could even kill me.

And that's terrible. If you believe death is the end. But that's a myth. It is appointed, Hebrews says, for all men to die.

[ 13 : 33 ] And after that, face judgement. After death, the real end comes. There is an assessment by God.

The end, he talks about in verse 7. The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded. Death is not the end. Jesus' return is the end.

And to know the truth about that myth is incredibly encouraging for God's people. Death is not the end. I think that's what he's getting at in verse 6 there, if you look there.

This is why the gospel was preached 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. Now he's saying there that when Christian people are even murdered for being distinctive, which they are, death is not the end for them.

The gospel preached to them, which they believed in, provides life which goes beyond death in the flesh. So killing you is the worst that they can do.

[ 14 : 39 ] But death is not the end. And although they may not feel as if there are consequences now to their actions, death is not the end. What feels normal and attractive by living by our own desires alone is terribly, terribly abnormal and destructive because actually death is not the end.

And accounts will be given to God eventually. Christians, why don't you join with us? Because sin is normal. And death is the end.

But then there's myth number three. Myth number three, Christians, you're alone. Christians, you're alone. The new Russell Crowe film, Noah, is coming out soon, isn't it, if you've seen it on the bus advertisements.

I'm not sure how accurate it's going to be, looking at the trailer. But Ray Winston is the bad guy in it, so it can't be bad, can it? And it's just struck me actually that reading through these passages, that the story of Noah features quite heavily in Peter's mind.

If you remember last time we looked at 1 Peter, back in chapter 3, he uses the experience of Noah and his family to illustrate the life of a Christian. Being brought safely through water.

[ 16 : 02 ] Have a look at chapter 3, verse 20. They formerly didn't obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared in which a few, that is eight persons, were brought safely through the water.

And now I don't think it's a coincidence that he uses the image again of floods and water in chapter 4. So we're getting a picture of life on the ark.

During the flood, back in Genesis, to show you the Christian life in the world. It's a small group of people on the ark, isn't it?

Peter says eight persons. A very insignificant little group. But nonetheless, it is a group. There is a myth that you are all alone as a Christian.

You're the only one who has all these alien ideas about what is good and how to live. The world is so big in comparison to you, you cannot beat it, you might as well join it.

[17:09] You're all alone as a Christian. The church is dwindling, isn't it? And one day it will disappear. And you'll be all alone.

It's even more surprising when you don't join in, because you're so alone in the way that you live, trying to be distinctive. But that's a myth.

The importance of the corporate nature of the Christian life has been a feature of Peter's whole letter, actually. So at the end of every section of teaching, he reminds them of their obligations to each other in the church.

Look back at chapter 1, verse 22. After his great first chapter there, he ends it, doesn't he? Purify your soul's obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love.

Love one another earnestly from a pure heart. Then after the end of his section on submitting, chapter 3, verse 8.

[18:17] Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love. A tender heart and a humble mind. And now in chapter 4, verse 8, he says, Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly. Life on the ark, in the flood, in the community of God's people, is the first line, above all, of defence against the subtle, social, behavioural pressure to join in with the world.

Loving each other comes in with the world.

Loving at maximum speed or like an elastic band just before it breaks. It's at full stretch. Love each other and push it really hard.

Love each other at full stretch. The assumption being that there will be many sins that need to be covered up. Many, many mistakes that we make within the Christian life.

[19:54] Many things that taint us. But love at full stretch is to cover those things. Hospitality, he goes on to say, without grumbling.

The assumption being that actually we'd all rather just do our own thing. And it is an inconvenience, isn't it, to open our homes. Especially to folk that we wouldn't ordinarily get on with.

Hospitality. Serving with gifts, verse 10. Serve one another. The assumption being that we naturally want to use our gifts for empire building and ego massaging.

But you're not alone. You need each other. You have obligations to one another in the ark to keep the water out.

Life on the ark should be full of love and service. Because the more living for God becomes normal to you, the more abnormal you will seem to the world.

[21:03] And you need each other. You're not alone. Love at full stretch. For subtle social behavioural expectations, the pressure to confuse what is destructive with what seems attractive in life feels so alluring.

That is always there. And you will hear those myths time and time again. Sin is normal. This is just the normal way to live.

Death is the end. And Christians, you're alone. So you can't beat the world. Why not join it? But how easy it is to mistake the normal with the terribly, terribly abnormal.

To get swept away in the flood of destructive behaviour. Peter says to his readers, Sin is not normal. Death is not the end.

And you're not alone. Let's file our heads as we pray. Let's file our heads. Let's file our heads.