

1 Peter-Humble, Watchful, & Called—1 Peter 5:6-11
College Baptist Church
May 16, 2021

I invite you to turn with me to 1 Peter, chapter 5. 1 Peter can be found toward the end of the New Testament, just after the book of James. If you didn't bring a Bible, there are Bibles in the pew racks; I believe you will find 1 Peter 5:6 on p. 1017. Today's sermon text is also printed in the bulletin along with space for taking notes.

As you know by now, the theme of suffering with hope has been prominent in the book of 1 Peter—especially in chapters 3 and 4. In chapter 5, Peter doesn't so much leave the theme of suffering behind as he offers some concluding exhortations and encouragements to his readers in light of their state of suffering.

Last week, Peter had a specific word of exhortation to the Elders of the church—to *shepherd* the flock of God during their time of suffering. As the letter draws to a close, Peter directs his attention once-again to the entire flock—not just the Elders. And he offers some words of exhortation and encouragement. Let's listen to 1 Peter 5:6-11.

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Humble

We have to constantly remind ourselves that the original recipients of Peter's letter were a beaten down Christian minority living in the increasingly hostile Roman Empire. They were mistreated and scorned for their viewpoints. They were on the receiving end of ridicule and persecution. They were beaten down and battered.

So, you might expect Peter's final exhortation to be "get up and "fight back! Stand up for yourselves!" But that's not how Peter ends this letter. To this beaten down and battered group of Christians, he says, "lower yourselves." That's what "humble yourselves" means—"lower yourselves." It's a bit shocking. But this act of intentional humility isn't an act of defeat. Peter is not encouraging them to roll over and die...to just give up.

To the contrary, this act of humility is the key to ultimate victory in the face of suffering and persecution. Because it is a call to lower themselves "*UNDER the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time HE may exalt you.*" The call to humility is a call to "fall in." Like soldiers "fall in" to the proper military formation under the leadership of their commanding officer, these Christians under fire from the enemy are to "fall in" under the mighty hand of their sovereign God, who will lift them to victory at the appropriate time.

Instead of fighting their own battle, they must rely on the incomparable might of God's hand. This phrase, "*the mighty hand of God*," harkens back to the Old Testament, when the LORD God brought Israel out of Egypt. Listen to Deuteronomy 5:15.

"You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand..."

The Israelites were familiar with suffering. They had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. And they could do nothing of their own strength to bring about their release. They were suffering...seemingly without hope. Until God brought them "*out from there with a mighty hand*." Do you remember the display of God's might—10 powerful plagues, a miraculous crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground, utter defeat of Pharaoh's chariots? They were suffering slaves, but suffering did not get the last word. God exalted his people at the proper time.

By using this language of "*the mighty hand of God*," Peter is encouraging these 1st-century Christians (and 21st century Christians too!) that as bleak as things might look in the here and now, there is certain victory on the horizon. For all those who come under the hand of God's sovereign might, exaltation is yet to come. And if you need more evidence of God's mighty hand than on display in the rescue of the ancient Israelites, then look at the mighty hand of God in the life of his son, Jesus.

Maybe Peter was comparing notes with Paul. Because in Philippians 2:8-9, Paul uses the same language of humility and exaltation to describe Jesus. "*And being found in human form, [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him...*" That's the ultimate display of God's mighty hand—Jesus' resurrection from the dead and exaltation to his heavenly throne.

All this to say, we have great reason to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. The track record of God's might is unmistakable. And he will orchestrate the exaltation of his humble people at just the perfect time—whether in this life or in the life to come—lifting us up by his mighty hand.

But our God is not only mighty. He is also caring. And this is important to remember, especially when suffering seems too difficult to bear. Suffering produces anxieties and worries. You know this from personal experience, don't you? When you are suffering medically, your mind is pulled into a thousand different worse case scenarios. When you are suffering financially, you are worried how you will make ends meet. And so, in those moments of medical and financial anxiety, we turn to people who care. A doctor—who offers a genuine care for our physical well-being. A financial counselor—who shows the appropriate concern for our retirement account. When we are anxious, it is good to know there is someone who cares—who has our best-interest in mind.

Can you imagine how anxious these first-century Christians must have been about their life and well-being? Perhaps they worried about being disowned by their families for becoming a Christian? Perhaps they were anxious about being imprisoned—or even killed—because they worshipped Jesus, not the Emperor?

Suffering produces anxieties. In fact, it seems that Peter expects Christians to experience anxieties and worries. But Christians ought not hold on to those anxieties. We shouldn't attempt to carry our worrisome burdens on our own. Instead, we should be humble enough to throw all those burdens on God, who cares for us. Like unloading all your worries on a caring doctor, we should cast ALL our cares on God, who cares for us.

No anxiety is too little. No worry is too large. God is concerned for you—and he welcomes us to toss those concerns—small and big—on him in prayer. Remember what Paul said to the anxious Philippians?

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Anxiety hangs onto things—with a death grip. When we are anxious we attempt to control things on our own and we deny that our caring Lord is at hand—close by and ready to help. So, the antidote is to let go of those anxieties—to let them be known to God in prayer and supplication...to humbly and confidently cast those cares upon the one who cares for us that he might orchestrate peace in our lives. So, when we suffer, let's be people of humility. Humbling ourselves—lowering ourselves—under God's mighty hand and under his fatherly care as we wait for him to lift us up.

Watchful

And let's also be watchful. Verses 8-9 paint a frightening picture of the devil as a loud and blood-thirsty lion looking to gobble up God's suffering people. You see, just as Peter knows suffering produces anxiety, Peter also knows that suffering creates spiritual vulnerabilities. And the devil would love to capitalize on our weaknesses. Now, I'd like to point out two things about the devil before we proceed.

First of all, the devil is real. The devil—also known as Satan—is the chief of the fallen angels—more commonly referred to as demons. He is the head of an unseen, but real, cosmic rebellion against God. And he is determined to lure men and women into that rebellion against God through his lies, even as he tempted Eve and Adam into rebellion so long ago. And he does so with the help of his army of demons.

Second of all, the devil is a created being. He is not eternal, like God. And, therefore, he does not share God's unique attributes. For instance, the devil is not omnipresent like God—he is not able to be present everywhere at once. So, even though Peter paints a picture of the devil as a prowling lion—he isn't capable of prowling the entire globe at once. And the devil is not omnipotent like God—that is, he is not all-powerful. He is on a leash, so-to-speak. Remember, God had to grant him permission to strike righteous Job.

So, the devil is real and created. Some of us fail to acknowledge the reality of his existence and his supernatural power. Others of us tend to grant him more power than he actually possesses. Peter seems to recognize both the reality and the creaturelike qualities of the devil. And we would do well to listen to Peter's exhortation.

We must be watchful because the devil would love to devour us. And one of the key ways that the devil seeks to devour us is by undermining our faith in the Lord Jesus. We need to always be alert and vigilant about the devil's lies—especially in times of suffering. Because when things are going poorly in our lives, we are prone to question the care and might of God. Like Adam and Eve, we are tempted by Satan to question the Word of God. Satan loves to plant seeds of doubt by asking, "*Did God actually say...this or that.*" And if we aren't sober-minded and watchful, we will begin to fall for his roaring lies. Can't you just hear him and his minions roaring....

- Did God actually say he loves you?
- Did God actually say you are forgiven?
- Did God actually say you have an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, kept in heaven?

Brothers and sisters, if we are not collectively watchful, the devil will eat us up with those lies. But if we are united in our watchfulness, we have the power to resist him—even in times of suffering. You see, we need to remember these are not singular commands—they are plural commands. *All y'all* be watchful. *All of you* resist him.

The devil wants us to believe that suffering is a sign of God's abandonment. And the devil wants us to believe that we suffer alone. But Peter reminds his readers that we are not alone in our suffering, and, therefore, we are not alone in our resistance. In fact, suffering is universal to the Christian experience according to the second half of verse 9—*the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.* Knowing this should produce a sense of sympathy, but it also should produce a sense of solidarity in our fight to resist the devil and his lies.

I had the privilege of going on a safari in Kenya about 15 years ago. And as we rode around the Masai Mara in our SUV, we were looking especially for the big cats—the lion, the leopard, and the cheetah. We saw lots of lions—and they were pretty lazy, not prowling to devour on that particular day. We think we saw the tail of a leopard in a tree—but I'm still not sure. And we also saw a group of cheetahs—which is called a "coalition," by the way. And unlike the lions, these cheetahs were hungry. In fact, we watched them actively stalk a herd of gazelles. And here was the amazing thing. Though the cheetahs were faster—and had the advantage of sharp teeth and claws, the herd of gazelles successfully resisted the prowling cats. And they did it through solidarity. They didn't try to out-run the cheetahs. They literally created a stand-off. There must have been a hundred or so gazelles and five hungry cheetahs. And though they were vulnerable as individuals, they stood strong and resisted in solidarity—and not one little gazelle was devoured.

Brothers and sisters, we may be vulnerable to the devil and his lies in this hostile age, but if we remain collectively watchful, we can resist him together. That's why it's so important to keep gathering Sunday by Sunday—and in smaller groups like Sunday School and Growth Groups and Bible studies so that you think clearly and biblically—keeping a watch out for the devil's lies. And that's why you must not attempt to resist the devil's temptation to sin on your own. You need to invite others to join you in resisting him. You won't likely resist the devil's temptation to lust and addiction on your own. You won't likely resist greed or pride or selfishness or worry or apathy on your own. You are too vulnerable—like a little gazelle who drifted from the herd about to be lunch for a coalition of cheetahs.

So, let's be alert and watchful—praying for one another and standing with one another when the lies of Satan and temptations to sin are too difficult to resist on our own.

Called

And most importantly, let us remember that while we may experience suffering temporarily, we are called to eternal glory. Listen again to verses 10-11.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In the midst of our suffering it almost never feels like just “a little while.” But in light of eternal glory it is. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians,
¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...

We may be exiles and foreigners and sojourners in this world, but we have a glorious eternal home awaiting us...all because God has graciously called us to be his children by the power of his Holy Spirit through faith in his Son, Jesus. In the midst of our temporary suffering, we must not forget our eternal calling—a calling that rests on the grace of God himself, not on our own doing.

All winter and spring, I have been leaving you with this benediction from verses 10-11 each Sunday. “[May] the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, ...restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

That was purposeful. Because I wanted to remind you that your eternal calling rests on God—not on you. *He* will restore you, when you stumble. *He* will confirm you (that is, fix you), when you are broken. *He* will strengthen you, when you are weak. And *he* will establish you, when you are wavering. *He* has called you to eternal glory in *Christ*. And he is, therefore, committed to bring you to eternal glory through faith in Jesus. Your eternal glory rests on Jesus, not on you. And for that reason, all the dominion belongs to Jesus—who has secured our eternity by his shed blood and glorious resurrection.

Benediction—1 Peter 5:10-11

[May] the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ,
...restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and
ever. Amen.