

1 Peter-Stand Firm—1 Peter 5:12-14
College Baptist Church
May 23, 2021

I invite you to turn with me to 1 Peter. 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. Today's sermon text is also printed in the bulletin along with space for taking notes.

But even as you turn there, I want to let you know that we are going to do something a little different today. Today will be the 15th and final sermon in our 1 Peter sermon series that we began back on February 7th. And while the sermon text for today is 1 Peter 5:12-14, I will actually be preaching more of a summary sermon of the whole book. But before doing that, we are going to listen to the reading of this entire letter. Now, thankfully, this is a "*brief*" letter, as Peter calls it in verse 5:12. But why would we take the time to read this letter in its entirety?

Well, in 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul gives this charge to young Timothy: "*devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.*" At College Baptist we take this command very seriously. And, in fact, we attempt to do this each and every Sunday. We always have Scripture readings in our services. And whoever is preaching does his best to exhort and teach from that Scriptural text. That's what we call expository preaching—explaining God's Word by teaching and encouraging through exhortations from God's Word. That's why most of my sermons start with an invitation to turn to a particular passage from Scripture—because I want you to know the ultimate source of my sermons is God's Word itself.

But in the first century, sermons didn't start with the phrase, "turn with me to such and such a passage." Because in the ancient world, Christians didn't have the luxury of owning their own copy of God's Word. And there were no pew Bibles or bulletins. So "*the public reading of Scripture*" was the primary way that God's people consumed God's Word. And the public reading of Scripture was almost certainly not short readings before songs and then maybe a slightly longer sermon text. Rather, it was reading long passages—probably even entire books.

With this in mind, I thought it would be appropriate and beneficial to read 1 Peter in its entirety this morning. This should remind us of the overarching context of each passage we have studied. It should remind us of all that we have learned these last 4 months. And, hopefully, it will set us up for a final exhortation and teaching.

And since we learned in 1 Peter 5:1-4 that it is the privilege and duty of the Elders to shepherd the flock of God, I have asked two current and two former Elders to join me in reading 1 Peter aloud this morning. (Brock, Scott, Jared, and Leonard—please come up.) You might want to follow along in your Bible OR you might want to just listen—as they would have in the ancient world. Either way, this exercise of listening to God's Word has value in itself. This should take less than 20 minutes. So, please listen attentively.

1 Peter Summary

In your bulletin, under the sermon text and title, you will see this phrase.

May we stand firm in God's true grace in the midst of sanctified suffering as we await the hope of certain salvation. That's my summary exhortation from this brief letter and this 15-week sermon series. Listen to it again. *May we stand firm in God's true grace in the midst of sanctified suffering as we await the hope of certain salvation.* In the next 10-15 minutes, I plan to walk us through this summary, in three phrases.

May we stand firm in God's true grace

If you look at chapter 5, verse 12, Peter says, *"I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it."* The command is *"stand firm in it."* And the *"it"* refers to the true grace of God that Peter has been writing about. So, we could summarize Peter's command, *"stand firm in God's true grace."*

But what does Peter mean by standing firm in God's true grace? Now you might think that Peter is exhorting his readers to stand firm in the true grace of the Gospel—that is the fact that we are saved from our sins by God's sheer grace, not by our own human initiative. And while that is absolutely and fundamentally true, I don't think that is the only *"true grace"* that Peter is talking about in this context. Because the true grace of the Gospel isn't God's only true gift of grace to us. We know that God gives other graces—other gifts. And one of those true gifts is the gift of suffering *before* salvation.

And Peter wants his readers to stand firm in that true gift of suffering before salvation. I know that suffering doesn't sound like a gift. And maybe that is why Peter calls it a *true* gift—to assure us that he is not joking. And since suffering is a true gift, we should *"stand firm in it."* As Ortlund said in the meditation, we shouldn't *"cut and run."*

Suffering is one of those gifts that you don't want, but that you really need. It's like the true gift of grueling pre-season workouts that *must* come before the glory of a regional championship. It's like the true gift of the challenges of childrearing that *must* come before the joy of your child's birthday or graduation. It's like the true gift of difficult exams that *must* come before receiving the diploma. It's like the true gift of manual labor that *must* come before the finished product in the factory or the kitchen or the yard.

And the same is true in the Christian life. Suffering must precede salvation. The cross must come before the crown. As Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* This is the true gift in which we must stand firm. We can't wiggle our way out of it. We can't take a detour. We must stand firm—fixed and steady—like Jesus, who went to the cross before receiving the crown.

In the midst of sanctified suffering

This brings us to the second phrase of my summary, *"in the midst of sanctified suffering."* You see suffering can seem senseless at times. And we have heard in 1 Peter that there is such a thing as senseless suffering. It is senseless to suffer the consequences of sinful behavior. Peter says Christians should be done with sin. Since Jesus has paid

for our sins once-and-for all, we should not keep dabbling in sin and experiencing the sorrow of sins consequences. That is senseless suffering.

In contrast, Peter is calling us to stand firm in “*sanctified suffering*”—that is suffering that produces holiness. Suffering is God’s way of purifying and proving our faith—like gold is purified and proven in the furnace.

Some of you know the name George Muller. Muller was a Christian evangelist who directed an orphanage in Bristol, England in the 1800s—serving over 10,000 children over the course of his ministry and starting over 100 schools. Muller was a man of remarkable faith; and he understood the fundamental connection between suffering and faith—between trials and trust. Listen to Muller’s thoughts about the inherent connection between suffering and faith. “*The only way to learn strong faith is to endure great trials. I have learned my faith by standing firm amid severe testings...God delights to increase the faith of His children. We ought, instead of wanting no trials before victory, no exercise for patience, to be willing to take them from God’s hands as a means. Trials, obstacles, difficulties and sometimes defeats, are the very food of faith.*”

There is purpose in the pain. There is sanctification in the suffering. And so we must stand firm in the midst of it. But as I have said time and time again, suffering does not get the last word for Christians. Suffering, yes...but suffering which leads to salvation.

As we await the hope of certain salvation

This brings us to the final phrase of my summary: as we await the hope of certain salvation. Christians are people of hope. That is a key theme in this brief letter. And biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It is counting on something that is certain.

It’s dry outside. And with crops in the ground, farmers are *hoping* that it will rain. But they can’t count on the rain, even if the meteorologist forecasts rain. So, when Peter talks about hope he is not talking about wishful thinking—like *hoping* that it will rain.

Peter’s hope is more like hoping that the sun will set this evening and that the sun will rise tomorrow. You can bank on that. That is a certain hope. You can count on a sunrise and a sunset each and every day.

And to his suffering readers, Peter holds out the hope of salvation—the certainty that Jesus is coming back to rescue his followers finally and forever from this world of suffering and sin. He offers them the certain hope of an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance kept in heaven for you.

As I said earlier in this sermon series, “eschatology drives ethics.” When you have the hope of certain salvation in the future, you choose to live differently in the present. That is to say, if you know with certainty that Jesus is coming back in the future, then you will live in ways that please him in the present. You see, if there was no hope for salvation, then all suffering would be senseless. But *because* we are waiting for the hope of certain salvation, we can stand firm in the midst of suffering that sanctifies.

Brothers and sisters, the future for Christians in America looks rather grim at times. But the future for Christians in eternity looks absolutely, unmistakably, and certainly bright. So, College Baptist, *May we stand firm in God's true grace in the midst of sanctified suffering as we await the hope of certain salvation.*

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.