

Standing Firm in God's Glorious Grace

1 Peter 5:6-14

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It's good to worship the Lord, it's good to hear "Amens," it's good to sing, it's good to see children recite scripture and sing songs. It's been a good morning for me. I hope it has been for you as well. Please turn with me, if you have your Bibles or your tablets or your cell phones or your eyes, you can look at the projector. This morning we're gonna be looking at 1 Peter chapter 5. And we're ending our series in this letter. We have been going for some time now looking at Peter's first letter to a group of Christians in a region of the Roman Empire, who were exiles in their own culture. People undergoing various trials and suffering. Due to the fact that they were identifying themselves as Christians, people who believed in the gospel of Jesus, who sought to faithfully live their lives following Him, despite what they may endure. Please follow along as I read this morning's text: 1 Peter 5:6-14. And I'll be only focusing on six through eleven this morning.

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 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. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. By Silvanus," or Stylus as your translation may say, "A faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon," most likely referencing Rome, "who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ."

Let us pray together asking God's spirit to help us understand His word and apply it to our lives.

Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, we sing praises to You, and we are thankful to hear with our ears and to see with our eyes and to see it demonstrated in other people's lives as well, that those things are ways that you communicate your gospel. That we may have faith, that we may have belief that you are true and that we can experience your grace. For you are good and kind and gracious, that is at the heart of who you are. So we do pray by your spirit to empower us, to understand and comprehend these things. But more importantly, may we saturate ourselves. May these things be the very essence of who we are as individuals but also collectively as your people. Would you grow us in humility, may we walk in your grace. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

There's a village in Central Asia, where there lives a man, I'll call Samuel, it's not his real name. Samuel faces a real dilemma. He's under constant pressure to renounce his Christian faith. A group of young men from his village recently intruded into his home and threatened him. They said that he would regret it if he did not renounce Christ. How is Samuel to stand firm in his faith in Jesus? According to the PEW Research Center, over 75% of the world's population lives in areas where severe religious restrictions exist. And many of those people are Christians. Also, according to the United States Department of State, Christians in more than sixty countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors, simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

An organization—and there's many like it—an organization called Open Doors seeks to serve persecuted Christians around the world. And they define persecution from their website this way: "Christian persecution is any hostility experienced from the world as a result of one's identification as a Christian. From verbal harassment to hostile feelings, attitudes and actions, Christians in areas with severe religious restrictions pay a heavy price for their faith. Beatings,

physical torture, confinement, isolation, rape, severe punishment, imprisonment, slavery, discrimination in education and employment, and even death are just a few examples of the persecution they experience on a daily basis.” This is happening now, today. Not just in the first century when Peter is writing this letter to these Christians. It’s happening to Christians who are flowing into refugee camps all across Europe. They’re experiencing it within those camps, from people from their own homelands. And they’re experiencing and facing similar hostilities that they were fleeing their countries to get away from.

It’s happening in Nigeria where Christians have been murdered and churches have been burned. It happens in Serbia, it happens in Palestine, it happens in China, it happens in Mexico; it happens all throughout the world. How are Christians to stand firm in their faith? That’s the question that in some sense is the question that Peter draws our attention to in this whole letter. As he concludes the letter—as we conclude our sermon series here, the question is: how do we stand firm in our faith? Now as you sit here this morning, your personal context, your individual experiences of suffering might be very different than the Christians in this letter. Or Christians who are facing the persecutions that I mentioned just a few moments ago. But the truth of the gospel is the same, and the same question can be asked of you this morning. How are you to stand firm in your faith in the midst of your circumstances?

On our best days we ask that question, but on most days we ask a different question. We ask questions like: how can my circumstances change? When will my sufferings stop? We have glorious visions of our circumstances changing and those visions often entail dramatic ways. Those dramatic ways are often of our own making and of our own imaginations. We desire glory, but usually we desire to receive the glory. We daydream about catching a touchdown pass, or hitting a walk-off homer to win the game in the bottom of the ninth. Or at least I did as a kid, and maybe a couple days ago. At work we desire to land a big project that brings praise, and promotion. At home we work hard for the house, and even the family that we’ve always wanted. In life we retire from years of hard work and sacrificing hoping that it will provide all our needs in our final years. You see, in all aspects of our lives we long to be showered with appreciation and love for our best qualities and our most important accomplishments.

But of course there are obstacles to experiencing such glory. There are external hardships that seem to thwart our plans. And there are internal anxieties that keep us up at night. So how do we stand firm? To you, I say, from God’s Word, and the assurance as we can have in the gospel of Jesus, that Christians can stand firm in the grace of God. But how do we do that? How do we stand firm in this glorious grace that only God provides. This morning we’re going to briefly look at three places that God’s glorious grace is available. And the passage we’re going to look at shows that glorious grace is in humility, glorious grace is during resistance, and glorious grace is after suffering.

First, glorious grace in humility. This comes from right out of the gates at verse six and seven: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.” Peter instructs the church to humble themselves. He’s, of course, connecting this command as a transitional element. He’s connecting and tying together what came before it. Especially in verse five. Remember from last week where Pastor Lovelace was talking about eldership and leading the church as elders. And then also, what does it mean for us to submit to God’s leadership in the way he’s designed the church to be led. He moves from that relationship, leaders and congregants, elders and members, to universalizing that with this idea of humility. That that interaction, that interdependence, the body of Christ has to show humility. That idea of putting on, clothing yourselves, with humility. As a virtue that is embedded deeply in the gospel and in God’s character in how He works and how He shows Himself.

He says in verse five, “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” There in verse five he speaks of humility being the attitude and the conduct

for all Christians. So if you're a Christian today, that should be your attitude, should be your conduct, should be the thing that you are pursuing and embodying. Though, imperfectly. Humility is a modest, or low view, of one's own importance. Meekness, modesty, being unassuming, unpretentious, not boasting, not arrogant. Peter references Proverbs 3:34, and in doing so he's reminding us that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. The way we submit to one another, and love one another is through humility. And here he switches in verse six to something that's in some ways experientially incredibly difficult to grasp. Because he's actually—he switches the verb from being active, something that you do. Having an attitude of humility, having a conduct of humility, a meekness, a humbleness to something that's actually passive. Verse six is a passive verb; "become" humble. In a sense, accept that which is humbling you, accept your humiliation. The context of the letter, remember, is hostility, discrimination, from friends and family and neighbors. And Peter is exhorting the church. He's encouraging them to embrace that, to accept that.

Peter extends the call for humility to present sufferings. How do we do that? How? How do we do that? Well it begins with acceptance. It's not done in our own strength. It's not necessarily something we actually do. Rather, we humble ourselves by entrusting ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Just like Israel entrusted themselves to God as He delivered them out of bondage from Egypt. We are to accept present suffering with humility so that we might wait for God's deliverance and His exaltation in His own timing. And that brings us to the second part in verse seven, but what means does God give us to do this? To endure such humiliation? By casting all our anxieties on Him. We take our worry, our lusts for our own vanities, our wounded pride that seeks to self-protect, either by dominating others, or self-protecting by retreating into self-pity.

You see, both of those are boasting. Both of those are a form of pride, because we are consoling ourselves. We're either making ourselves feel better or we're making ourselves feel lower. But Peter points us to the gospel of grace. He points us to a God who cares. We take all of it, all of our worries, all of our fears, all of our burdens, and we realize that they're not our burdens to carry. That we can't carry them. But they're God's alone. That He is able, He is powerful, to carry all of them. It's receiving his care for us. We take our anxieties and we transfer them to God. And here in this passage, from Jesus's own words, as He talks about this dynamic of "not worry," which is like saying "don't think of a pink elephant." Don't worry.

Ok let me start listing the things that I'm worried about. Jesus says in Luke 12:22-34, "And he said to His disciples," he's teaching them about humility, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock," it's always coupled with the things that we're afraid of. God's comforting word of do not fear. "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Jesus is teaching us something about His abundant grace, His abundant care, His abundant provision for us. Do you receive it? do you believe it? Do you know it to be true? By God's grace we

can rest in his abundant care for us. And we have the purpose of this humility too. God's purpose invites us into this path of humility, this gospel path. It's everywhere in scripture. If we had the next several months, we could just unfold the scriptures and just point to example after example after example of where God points us to a letting go of ourselves; our own self-importance, and considering God, and considering others.

And He does this so that at the proper time He may exalt you. So you see, in the gospel its humility before glory. Its lowliness before exaltation. And this is modeled in Christ Himself; Philippians 2. He humbled Himself, though He had every right to be on a throne of privilege and a throne of authority, He set those things aside so that He would enter in to life, flesh. That he would enter into humanity. Be one of us, be one among us, and humble Himself, even to the point of death on the cross. This is Jesus's work of redemption. This is, in that, which satisfies us, our sin, but it also becomes our model of how we are to follow Jesus. Humility before glory. And humility begins with repentance. How do you see yourself? Are you ruled by thinking you are above or better than the next person? Or are you ruled by thinking you are below or worse than the next person?

Brothers and sisters, friends, God reminds us that He cares, He cares for you circumstances, He cares for your sufferings, and He draws near to you in the midst of them. Our humility in the midst of present sufferings provides the opportunity to pause and pray. Asking God to search your heart as you endure such sufferings. What are you experiencing? What are you thinking? What are you feeling? What are you doubting about it? What are you angry? What are you fearful? What are you prideful? The list goes on and on. It's endless for the Lord to search our hearts. And after reflecting upon our anxieties, it's an opportunity to, again, go to the One, go to God, Himself, who actually cares, and how He has the power to carry them. We go to Jesus in personal prayer, personal devotional life. We go to Him in corporate worship. We go to Him in fellowship with other Christians that we would share in our sufferings together. Because those things are sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Humility is the direction for Christians to take on God's path to glory.

As one scholar said, "Jesus's humiliation," and that's kind of a spectrum, "Jesus's humiliation from being God, Himself, fully God, born in an animal trough." A sojourner, an exile, a refugee to Egypt. Someone who was fleeing, someone persecuting Him. Even as a crying baby. And on and on in his life, in his own ministry of how he was pursued and then ultimately humiliated on the cross, naked, spread out, killed. That's what is encapsulated in that phrase, humiliation. The cross is no pleasant thing. It's an act of humiliation. It was intentionally humiliating. And despising the shame, He looked to the joy of the glory of His Father. That is our path, as Christians. In His grace, in His power, we stand firm in present suffering by God's grace with humility, as we await future exaltation.

Just a word about that, too. We may get glimpses of that in our life. We may see God appoint in a time where we receive that exaltation. But that is temporary and that is not exactly what Peter is addressing here. He is drawing our attention to that future hope, that future exaltation, when all things will be finished, fully. We'll say more about that in a minute.

Secondly, there is glorious grace during resistance. This comes from verses eight and nine. Peter encourages us toward faith in the Lord's care, but Peter is not naïve to the obstacles that we face. He rightly calls us to be alert, to be watchful, to be sober minded. And if you remember, these are the very words that's he's used earlier in the letter. But it's also not an opportunity toward paranoid hypervigilance. It's a realism about the life that we live in. The—and as he references—the devil, there is a sense of evil that is real. Now discussions of the devil have certainly fallen out of favor in western thought, the last hundred years. It's superstitious or its juvenile, or its ridiculous, or it's dangerous, or it's delusional, and yet, Peter is aware of something very real. That there is a cosmic reality of good and evil. There is an adversary, there is one who is, and the devil is a way of translating it though it is his title so to speak, he is a slanderer. He is an accuser. That is who he is.

And so we have this sense of external circumstances in our suffering, and that gets played out. It gets played out in our own sin, it gets played out in people's actual persecution or hostility. But stay alert, be mindful, that the things that we wage war at—Paul talks about this elsewhere—is not merely flesh and blood. But this is about powers and principalities. These are things that God is taking care of as well. But we, again, submit. We again, entrust our lives to Him with alertness and diligence and watchfulness. As Christians in America, Carl Trueman, who is a historian and a professor at Westminster seminary in Philadelphia, has recently written a great article. I'm sure we actually might be talking about that more throughout the summer. But this idea of our present moment in America. You know, earlier we talked about examples of persecution of Christians elsewhere, and those things are very real. And there actually may be people in this room, who have seen such persecution, or heard of it, or had a family member, or they themselves have experienced it. So again, don't be so naïve that we just are plush, in America, not experiencing these things.

But, there are realities that are different here, but he writes this: "Perhaps what has been historically normative for over 1500 years in the West—a Christianity enjoying worldly power and influence, broadly conceived—is in fact theologically exceptional." Meaning it's rare, it's not the norm. He goes on to say, "As such, what we are witnessing is not the overthrowing or the jeopardizing of the church but rather a return to "business as usual" as the Bible and the nature of the gospel and of the church would lead us to expect." Maybe our current problem is therefore not that society is secularizing, but rather the opposite. That the American church is finally being forced to de-secularize. This will be painful. It will involve hard choices. It will involve increasingly obvious differences between the church and the world.

It will not allow for compromise, but in the long run, these will be good things, as Carl Trueman writes. Now you may have a different opinion of the world around you, that's okay. There's space for the conversation of that. But the question that Peter draws our attention to, is how are we to stand firm in our faith in Jesus? As Peter connects suffering with forces of evil, he also contrasts what appears to be the devil's power, in his condemnations, in how he seeks to destroy, as he seeks to devour, as he steals. This picture of a lion—the scriptures have various examples of discussing that image of a lion. Even if you've never seen a lion, you've heard about them. You don't wanna be near a lion, unless there's a car or a fence between you. It's a very potent image of being devoured. Peter connects suffering with the larger story of suffering in the global church. Look with me at verse nine: "Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." He is drawing our attention in the midst of our own alertness, being sober minded, that there is an aspect of being mindful of—you're not alone. You're not isolated on an island to yourself. And likewise, a fellow believer elsewhere, who might be enduring such sufferings—they're not alone, they're not isolated.

One writer points out four advantages to knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world, and I'll just mention it quickly. One, encouragement that you are not alone and isolated as I mentioned. Number two, the bond that unites you to Jesus Christ, also joins you to the family of God throughout the world. It's just not you and Jesus. You get to be a part of his church, and that church is across the world. Number three, a reminder that suffering is inherent in the Christian faith as part of our fellowship in Christ's sufferings and a way for our faith to be strengthened. We die with Christ, we are raised with Christ, we suffer, not in the same way as Christ—he suffers in a unique way for our salvation. But there is something that, what it means to demonstrate that humility before glory is a demonstration of the gospel to each other, but to the watching world. That we are embodying our Christianity. That we're not defending ourselves, but we're pointing to the one who is powerful to defend us. And who will? Not only will he defend us, but there will be a time when we will experience vindication and exaltation. Jesus speaks about this on the Sermon on the Mount:

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. There is a sense of promise for the future. Number four, it stimulates hope in the future glory of God’s promises. This moves us to prayer. This moves us to singing. This moves us to crying and lamenting. This moves us to being strengthened, putting on the armor of God, Ephesians chapter six. That we’re not just tossed about. That we’re not without defenses. That the armor of God, our rootedness in Christ is our shield. Our faith is the mechanism, if you will, of resisting the devil.

We entrust ourselves to the Lord, and by grace, we continue to walk the path that He gives us. And we get to say as we sang today, “Your will be done.” And that’s when we get to experience, in glimpses, of Paul when he said in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to be weak. I don’t want to appear weak—maybe that is one of the greatest sins of America, I don’t know.

We think we’re powerful and in some ways we are, but we conflate that with our Christianity. And I think, I don’t know for sure, but I think the present time there is a moment for us to grasp God’s word and to submit to Him, and to search God and ask Him to say—to search our hearts, to allow us the grace to embrace the humility that comes with being a Christian. The social utility of being a Christian has been a long time, but increasingly more and more of that is going. So the question remains: how will you stand firm in your faith? Will you capitulate? Will you compromise? Some of us will. And in some ways, that’s to be expected, because we’re weak. But are we resting in His strength, on our behalf.

And lastly, we experience God’s glorious grace after suffering. There is a future reality that’s here. Verse ten: “And after you have suffered a little while,” that little word, a little while, you remember it was actually at the beginning of the letter, or early in the letter. At the end of chapter one or the beginning of chapter two, but this idea that our present suffering is temporary. And he says, “, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ,” another call-back to chapter one. Paul is crescendoing here in this letter. He’s putting an exclamation point at the end of this letter saying, remember what I told you in chapter one? I’m looping back. I’m reminding you again. I’m putting a book into this, because it’s important. You who’ve been called to His eternal glory in Christ, this is what God will do. This is what God’s going to do in that future time. I don’t know when, but it’s promised. God will restore, He will confirm, He will strengthen and establish you.

Now there’s something powerful about all of those four things being taken together. Think about them in some ways as four walls to a building. That together the framing of the house stands sure, stands firm. Restoring is to cause to be in a condition to function well, to put to right, to put in order. It’s— the image actually is kind of this picture of an athletic trainee, restoring the body of an athlete. Or a surgeon even, setting the bone of a broken leg. He’s putting it to right, he’s restoring it. And the middle two words, confirm and strengthen, are very synonymous, they’re very close together. But this idea for God to cause us to be inwardly firm and committed, strengthened in the sense of unchanging attitude and belief. It’s to cause someone to be or become able, more capable. God is amplifying his intentions here. Making his people more able to engage in, or to undergo difficult circumstances.

And lastly, to establish, to provide a secure base for the inner life and all its resources. To provide that firm faith, that basis of how we live and have our being. And all of this crescendos in an exaltation of sorts, a benediction, a doxology, a praise, and a good word— to Him be dominion forever. He mentions it earlier in chapter four, let me see if I can find it. There he adds the word glory though, chapter 4:11; “To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” He repeats himself, cause he’s been concluding his letter, and he can’t help but praise God. God is the one in control. God is the one who’s able. God is the one who can strengthen you and make you able to stand firm, cause you can’t stand in your own strength. But God will. He is sovereign, He is

capable, and He is powerful. So again, as I close, I'll ask the question: how are you to stand firm in your faith? The reality is, your circumstances may never change. Your suffering may never end in this life. But we stand firm in God's grace, hoping in the life to come, the life everlasting where there will no longer be any suffering. In that time and in that place we will see with our eyes, we will experience in our bodies the full measure of the victory that Jesus declared in His words "It is finished." Trusting Him in the midst of our suffering shapes our hope of the glory to come. It directs our focus in participating in the how he provides in those glimpses of glory even now. The way he cares for us. Our hope is shaped by Jesus, who accepted his humiliation. Even humiliation on the cross, to bring about his full glory so that we might share in it with Him. Samuel, the man I mentioned at the very beginning, the man from Central Asia—as far as the writing of the article that I read, he refuses to renounce Christ by accepting his situation with humility. He says this, "I might be kicked out of my village. I could be beaten, but Jesus went through it all. If my Lord faces persecution, who am I to not expect the same treatment?" That's a disciple. He's read Matthew. He's read that persecution will come if you seek to identify as a Christian. Samuel looks to God, the one who cares for him and the one who provides the means to resist. Samuel seeks glory, but not his own, but his Savior's. He stands firm as he rests in the glorious grace of God, awaiting that time when suffering will be no more. Peter ends this letter, just as where ending our sermon series, by highlighting something that is incredibly important. It was important to them then, and it's important to us now. That is, standing firm in God's glorious grace, as you live your life, even as you suffer for the name of Christ, to Him be dominion forever. And may he give us grace to endure, because he is good, and kind, and he is gracious. Let us pray.

God, You are good. Even when the world says You are not, even when our experiences fail us and tempt us to say that You are not good. You are. We do pray for Your grace and Your mercy to stand firm in our faith. May we grow in faith, may we grow in perseverance, may we grow in joy, enduring whatever circumstances we may have. May we accept them as Your will, but may we also lament that it is evil and in some ways not your will. But You provide the way out, the way to resist, the way to endure. And we fall on our faces, begging You to give us Your faith to stand firm. We pray all these things in Jesus, who was firm to the very end and continues to be forevermore. Amen.