

The Posture of the Persecuted

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 May 2021

Preacher: Keith Knowlton

[0 : 00] faithful evermore. Well, now we get to turn to the preaching of God's Word.

And if you've been with us for the last few months, you know that we've been walking through 1 Peter today. We complete that series. We're going to be looking at 1 Peter chapter 5, taking it in its entirety today.

So if you have your Bibles, you can turn there or look on the screen behind me. I don't know if you are fans of history. History was always one of my favorite subjects in school growing up.

I continue to love to read historical books and watch historical documentaries. Admittedly, I don't know much about Scottish history. That's on my list of things to read for the summer.

But I do have a great love for American history. And one of the great icons in American history is George Washington. So whether or not you are familiar with American history, you've likely heard of Washington.

[1 : 01] You probably know that he was the first president of the United States. And something interesting when you study Washington is something particular about his legacy was not necessarily something that happened during his presidency.

But at the end of his presidency, he gave this farewell address. And in this address, he was basically saying he was stepping down from public service.

He was ready to retire and to live on his farm, but he wanted to address the public. And he didn't do so with a speech. It was actually more of a letter that he wrote to the American people, commending them for building up this country.

But also, and more importantly, he was warning them of the dangers that he perceived that were a threat to the unity of this very young country. And so he said, if we are going to maintain our independence, maintain our liberty and our prosperity and our safety, we must be unified as a country.

And he pointed out several of these dangers that threaten the unity. Things like sectionalism, this regionalism that would divide people into different areas of the country. He warned against political parties that could divide people, that could be divisive, that tear people apart rather than seeking the good of the country.

[2 : 23] And so these remarks were actually something that continue to be of value to Americans today. There's actually his address is read annually on his birthday on the floor of the Senate in Congress.

And so while we think of that farewell address of Washington, this actually relates well to our passage today because Peter, although he's not retiring from ministry, gives a very passionate plea to his audience here.

He's talked a lot about suffering and the role of the church in this new environment after Christ's ascension. And he points out some of these dangers that he sees that threaten the viability of the church.

And so in this last passage, this is what he's focusing on here. So this is what we're going to see as we read chapter five today. So let's turn there and study it together.

First Peter chapter five, starting in verse one. To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's suffering who also will share in the glory to be revealed.

[3 : 35] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them, not because you must, but because you are willing as God wants you to be, not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to the elders.

All of you clothe yourselves with humility towards one another because God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time.

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and sober-minded. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Resist him, standing firm in the faith because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of suffering. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

[4 : 55] To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God.

Stand firm in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings. And so does my son Mark. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

This is the word of God. Let's pray together. Lord, again, as we come to your word, we ask that you open our eyes, that you soften our hearts.

May the truth of the gospel sink in deep. And may we be transformed by your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So again, if you've been with us these last few months, you know we've been walking slowly through this letter from Peter.

And we see a lot of these themes that have popped up over and over again. The fact that we as Christians are called to be exiles. That we as Christians are called to suffer, not lives of comfort, but to recognize that tribulation, that suffering, that persecution will come and that we should expect it.

[6 : 13] And we can anticipate that because we know that God can use these experiences to refine us and to purify his church. So now in concluding this letter, Peter's giving some final instruction, some final encouragement to the church in light of all that he's just said.

And it's interesting what he focuses on. He's focusing on our mindset. He talks about what our posture of the persecuted church should be. And so I want to look at three postures that Peter talks about today.

A posture of humility, a posture of vigilance, and a posture of trust. So let's look at that first posture of humility together.

This is where we're going to be spending most of our time this morning. You may think, though, that it's kind of strange that he would talk about humility. I mean, he spent this whole letter talking about persecution and suffering.

You'd think we've got the humility part down based on our circumstances, right? But he's making a point here to say that our humility doesn't come simply by our circumstances or our surroundings.

[7 : 19] Our humility comes from the inside and grows outward. Our true humility is a matter of the heart. And so as he talks about humility, he's really talking about it in two forms here.

He talks about horizontal humility, humility that we have with one another, brothers and sisters in Christ, but also vertical humility, humility in our relationship with Jesus.

And so let's first look at this horizontal humility, this humility that he speaks of first in this passage. And he does so by addressing himself. He calls himself, in verse one, a fellow elder and witness of Christ's sufferings who will also share in the glory to be revealed.

Now through this series, we've talked a lot about Peter and his interactions with Jesus. We know that he denied knowing Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested. We know that he pushed back when Jesus said that he would have to suffer.

And so we see how Peter has grown and developed and there's actually one more interaction with Jesus that I want us to look at today. After Jesus' resurrection, Peter and some of the disciples are out fishing and Jesus meets them on the shore.

[8 : 30] And they come in and they have a breakfast together and Jesus turns to Peter and he asks them a very pointed question. He says, Peter, do you love me?

And he asks him this three times. And each time, Peter says the same thing. He says, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. And so Jesus gives him a command. He says, Then feed my lambs.

Care for my sheep. And not only that, he actually foretells of Peter's death that will come as a result of his ministry. And so now Peter, in talking about himself, he's really expressing solidarity with his audience here.

He's telling them, I'm not instructing you to do anything that I haven't been told to do myself. The calling that you have to suffer is the same calling that I have to suffer.

And so we, as leaders of the church, this is our responsibility. And what is that responsibility? Verse two, To be shepherds of God's flock. And it's interesting whose flock it is here.

[9 : 36] It's God's flock. In verse four, it talks about the chief shepherd. That's Jesus. And so we see this analogy used throughout the Bible of Jesus as the shepherd that we are the sheep of his pasture here.

And so the elders of the church, you may think, well, this is kind of weird. Why is he talking about church leadership at the conclusion of this letter? It goes to show just how important it is for a church to be led well, especially when we have that wartime mentality.

And so here, he's talking about the need for shepherds, for leaders of the church to shepherd well. And it's interesting. If Christ is our chief shepherd, then the leaders of our church are under shepherds.

And that's actually, it would be a title or a position that someone would have had back in that day when you had a shepherd who had a large flock. A lot of times he would need help caring for and gathering this flock together.

Certainly God doesn't need the help of anybody to care for his church, but here he welcomes in leaders to do the duty of leading the church.

[10 : 43] And so what does this include? What's the role of a shepherd? We know that a shepherd has to defend the flock. We know that the shepherd leads the flock and cares for the flock and feeds and nourishes the flock.

This is hard work. A lot of times you may think of, when you think of a shepherd, you kind of look at this maybe a landscape painting of a shepherd kind of leaning on his staff and the sheep grazing peacefully in front of him.

But that's not really what the work of a shepherd is. It's not about serenity. It's not about solitude. The work of a shepherd is hard work.

And so the reality of this is that Peter points out, well, how are these leaders to work? How are they to lead their flock well? And he says, first of all, the shepherd watches over their sheep willingly.

You know, if you're a parent and you told your child to do something, maybe you are a child and you've been instructed by your mom and dad to do something, and you kind of roll your eyes and you drag your feet and you do what they've told you to do, technically you did what they wanted, right?

[11 : 52] You followed their commands, but was it done willingly? No. Did it bring pleasure to your parents? Probably not. In the same way here, he says that the elders should not serve begrudgingly.

It needs to be done willingly. And it's not because the sheep are always lovable. We've got to remember that sheep are smelly, stupid, stubborn animals here. And so the elders, as they lead the church, it's not primarily done out of a desire and a love for the church, so they should love the church.

Their primary motivation comes through a loyalty and a love for the shepherd. He goes on to talk about not seeking personal gain in leading.

And so as the leaders of a church, they're not to see what they can get out of their leadership, but they should be eager to give instead.

And lastly, he talks about needing to lead, not lording over others, he says in verse 3, but leading by example. And so as elders in the church, they lead by example.

[13 : 04] They are also following the example of Christ who said, I didn't, he says, he didn't come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. I actually read an article not that long ago and it was on the topic of leadership.

And it was actually using the same analogy talking about shepherds and how do you lead your sheep well, how do you lead your people as a leader well. And it actually interviewed this shepherd and he said, well, the one thing you don't want to do in leading sheep is bullying them.

You're not going to get what you want by bullying your sheep. But he said something interesting. He said, the best way to lead your sheep is to create a desire within the sheep to do the things the shepherd wants them to do.

And I think that same principle applies for leadership within the church as well. We don't lead in such a way by bullying, by just forcing people to be obedient to you.

We lead in such a way that God's will looks attractive to the church. That God's desires becomes our desires as church members.

[14 : 16] And so Peter then concludes, well, what's the reward for the leaders of the church? Verse four, when the chief shepherds appear, you will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away.

So the leaders of the church don't do so for personal gain. They don't do so for personal glory, but they are able to share in the glory of Christ. Peter uses that imaging here.

We know in Roman times when you'd have athletes, they may win and get one of those wreaths that they can put on their head. That's what he's referring to here. Except with, instead of using leaves and things that die, he's talking about this, this red flower that never fades.

We have this everlasting glory when we are in Christ. And so that's really only half of the horizontal relationship then, right? We know the responsibility of the elders, but what is the response of us as a church?

He says in verse five, in the same way, you who are younger submit yourselves to your elders. And so it's, this term here, younger, kind of needs to define that a little bit.

[15 : 24] You may think, well, this doesn't qualify. I'm not an elder and I'm not young, so it kind of, I'm out of the picture here. No. When he's referring to those who are younger, he's basically saying everyone who's in the church but not in a position of leadership.

So he is talking to everyone here when he says submit to yourself to the elders. And that's kind of difficult, right? We don't always like that word submit because a lot of times we've seen how leadership is done really poorly and how it can hurt people.

But when he's talking about submitting here, it's not simply of mere respect. It's more than that because if God has called the leaders of our church to lead willingly, then he has called us as the body of Christ to follow willingly.

And so that doesn't mean just kind of going along with decisions that the leaders make in the church is actually an active, willing participation in the life of the church. If we are to follow the example of the elders, then we want to be committed to corporate worship.

Then we want to treasure the teaching of God's word. We want to participate in community. We want to engage in ministry because that is the work and mission of the church.

[16 : 40] And so when we do this, we need to remember how we are to act then. It's not done begrudgingly like we've talked about, but also needs to be done without complaining or passing judgment.

We see that often in our lives. When something happens that we don't like or isn't done how we want it done, we can grumble and complain, right? We can start to grow resentful when things aren't done our way, but that's not true humility.

Humility comes when we are under God and we are willing to put others first. And so this is a great challenge for us as a church body to think about the leadership here at Bucleu.

And I want us to think personally, when was the last time you earnestly prayed for the leaders of our church? When was the last time you encouraged them with a note or a pat on the back?

When was the last time you commended them for their servant leadership? I don't say this because the elders of this church need your encouragement or they want your praise.

[18 : 00] But they do so because of their love for Christ and I guarantee that your prayers and encouragement will be well received, that they will do many benefit, they will have a beneficial effect on our leadership of our church.

And so Peter goes on to talk about how this humility is really a two-way street here. In verse 5 he says, in the same way, or the second part of verse 5, all of you clothe yourselves with humility towards one another.

And so when he's talking about this, when he says clothe yourselves, he's actually, this Greek term means to actually to tie on. And so when we think about leading or submitting to one another, when we think about humility, we can remember Christ.

When he was with his disciples during that last supper in that upper room and before they ate, what did Jesus do? He took off his outer garment and he tied on that towel in order to wash his disciples' feet in the same way in our humility we should be willing to serve one another.

And so then Peter moves on from here we've talked about horizontal humility then he talks about this vertical humility that we need with Christ. Verse 6, humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time.

[19 : 28] This phrase under God's mighty hand is really only used in this passage throughout the New Testament. We see it in the Old Testament a lot and it's actually used in the book of Exodus where it's talking about God's mighty hand and delivering his people Israel from the nation of Egypt.

But this is really when he's saying it here he's talking specifically about how our mindset should be when we are humble it's out of a recognition for what God has done for us how he has delivered us.

And so when we think about humility it's what's really needed here is a recognition of our proper position before God. There's an American comedian who I really like and he has this bit where he just complains about people who are all about themselves who talk about how great they are and how wonderful they are and all the things they've done and when someone tells a good story they have to come in and tell their story which they think is better.

And he calls these people me monsters. He says because all they think about is me, me, me. And so he has this social fantasy that he wishes that he could be one of the 12 astronauts that have walked on the moon because that story and that experience trumps anything else that anyone else has ever done.

And so when he was in a social setting and someone goes on and on about how great they are he can just kind of sit back until they're done and then look at them and say well I've walked on the moon and put them in their place.

[21 : 03] They would be silent because they recognize they're not so special anymore. So the same happens when we think about our humility is recognizing our proper position before God.

We need to recognize the gravity of our sin and recognize the greatness of our God. Jesus tells a parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee who come to the temple to pray and he says that the Pharisee when he came in what does he do?

He prays and says Lord thank you that I'm not like all these other sinners. I tithe and I fast and man I'm a good person. And then the tax collector comes in beating his chest and says Lord have mercy on me a sinner.

Jesus says it's the tax collector who went home justified that day for those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted. and so again we turn back to this picture of recognizing that God has delivered us.

There's nothing that we contribute to our own salvation our own position before Christ. And so when we recognize that God is our deliverer that he is in control of our circumstances and our life then that kind of that frees us when we think when we put it in the context of suffering.

[22 : 29] it's going to prevent us from when people persecute us or when bad things happen because of our faith we don't have to push back against it we don't have to try to get even or upset at people because we can trust in the Lord.

In the same way we don't have to always question when bad things happen God why are you letting this happen to me what have I done to deserve this? No because we recognize that the path of suffering leads to exaltation.

He says because God is our sufferer in due time he will lift us up. And it's interesting this isn't just in the future sense but this is the here and now that God cares for us.

Verse 7 cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. You know there's probably not been another time in your life perhaps where you've had so much anxiety as this past year with the pandemic.

There's many of us who might have been crippled by fear in early on wondering what this virus was all about. How dangerous was it? Am I safe by wearing a mask?

[23 : 34] Am I able to go in public? Can I see my family? Is this vaccine going to be affected? Have I washed my hands enough? The list goes on and on. The same occurs when we may experience suffering.

These anxieties that creep up. How are my co-workers going to receive me? Am I going to lose my job security? Will my family reject me?

Will my friends leave me? Will my classmates make fun of me? We need to recognize that when we have these anxious thoughts and fears, it's not simply because we have some level of uncertainty or whatever it may be in our lives that causes us fear.

anxiety goes much deeper than that because this anxiety is really based on the fact that we are prideful, that we have this desire to control our situation, that we have placed our hope in ourselves.

So when there's a problem, we feel like we should be the ones to fix it. And so when we think about humility, humility comes when we release those anxieties, when we can let go of that false sense of control that we think we have and turn everything over to God.

[24 : 51] And so I want to just pause and think about this for a second because this verse is so familiar to some of us that we can kind of just gloss over this truth that God cares for you.

That God knows what's going on in your life. And we have a chief shepherd in Christ who is willing to lead and to protect and to nourish you.

So there is no one in this world that cares more for you than our all-powerful, all-knowing God. And so this kind of leads us then to the second point when we recognize the humility that we need in our life.

We also need this posture of vigilance. It says in verse 8, Be alert and sober minded. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Throughout this letter, Peter's talked a lot about suffering as we've said, but this is really the first point where Peter is identifying the source of this suffering. A lot of times we think of our suffering and we think, well, it's coming from that person or because of that situation, but we don't recognize the spiritual warfare involved, that Satan is behind these attacks.

[26 : 05] And so how does Peter describe him here? He says that he is a roaring lion. When we lived in the States, we were in this neighborhood that was on a hill that overlooked this park.

It was a good-sized park with trails and green spaces and playing fields. And on the north side of the park, there was a zoo. And it wasn't a very big zoo, but our family liked it. We could walk there.

We went there all the time. And one of the exhibits that the kids liked the best were the lions. There were two large male lions. And so not only could we go and see the lions, but actually from our house, you could hear the lions roar.

You could be lying in bed in the morning and you could hear the roar of the lions. And it was interesting because that was really the only time in the day that they would roar. Rarely would they roar at another time.

And so one time when we went to the zoo, I asked one of the workers there, why do the lions only roar in the morning? And he said, well, that's because the zookeeper comes in the morning and that's when he feeds the lions.

[27 : 07] And so that's what we see here. That Peter is describing this roaring lion, not simply a lion who's sunning himself on a rock. This is a lion who is anxious and irritable and impatient and ready to feast.

And so that's the image of Satan that we need to have in our minds here, that Satan is our adversary, that he wants nothing more than to destroy the church and to defeat us as Christians.

Christians. And so how do we go about defeating this lion? Well, it says to be sober-minded, to be alert, to resist and to stand firm. This is the third time that Peter has used this language in his letter.

And James in his letter also says similar things. In James chapter four, he says, submit yourselves then to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.

So we resist not out of our own willpower, but we can resist being grounded in our faith. We draw near to Christ, knowing that Christ will draw near to us.

[28 : 16] So if you're familiar with the story of Pilgrim's Progress, you may remember that Christian, as he's on his journey to the celestial city, he encounters two lions on the path.

And he'd heard about these lions before. Other travelers had seen them and actually had turned around out of fear. So when Christian approaches these lions, he really thinks his death is imminent.

And as he considers turning around to go the other way, he hears his voice call out ahead of him. A man who's standing on the steps of the palace in front of him. He calls out and he says this, are your strength and courage so small?

Don't be so afraid of the lions since they are in fact chained. They're being there for the purpose of testing your faith at this point in your journey as well as to discover those who are not faithful.

So keep in the middle of the path and you will not be harmed. And so that's what Christian does. He follows this advice. He goes on the path and though the lions are at either side of him growling and snarling, he's not harmed and he makes it safely to the palace.

[29 : 23] And so what a wonderful way to illustrate what Peter is talking about here. When we face trials and temptations, we need to be grounded in our faith.

We need to recognize that Satan is bound, that there's no lasting that harm that can come from his attacks. And so then that leads us to our third posture, that posture of trust. Because when we continue on this journey, we recognize that we can trust God, that he will protect us and that he will lead us to glory.

In verse 10 it says, and the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you've suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong and firm and steadfast.

So Peter finishes his letter the same way that he started talking about the glory that we have and share in Christ. He's emphasizing, yes, you will experience in suffering. This life will not be easy for you, but we can trust that we have a God who is full of grace.

We can trust that we have a God who protects and preserves us. We can trust that our suffering will be temporary and the glory that we will experience has been secured by the blood of our Savior.

[30 : 39] And so if you are a believer, I would urge you to remain in this trust, to focus on the victory that we have in Jesus, to allow the suffering and the persecution that we may experience in our life now to be a refining time.

where God may purify us because we see the end result here. He says that he will restore us and make us firm and strong and steadfast. What security that is that we have in Christ.

And then what's that going to compel us to do? It's compelling us to doxology, to the praise and glory of God, as he says. But maybe that's not you.

Maybe you're not a Christian or you think the idea of suffering for your faith is kind of a silly concept that seems really uncomfortable. Well, I want you to consider this. When I laid in my bed in the morning when I lived near that zoo and I heard those lions roar, I had no fear.

I didn't have to worry about them coming and attacking me because I knew that they were contained, they were caged. But there is no such security for those who aren't in Christ. And in fact, not only if you're not in Christ, you have to worry about the devil roaring like a lion, seeking whom he may devour, but we also face the judgment of God, which has far greater lasting implications.

[32 : 06] So I urge you to turn to Christ. We have a good shepherd who wants to lead and protect and nourish you. And ultimately, Peter ends with this. He says, peace to all of you who are in Christ.

That is peace that is offered to all. And that's a peace that's available to you today. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you offer us peace, that you are willing to share your glory with us.

And so we ask God, as we continue on this journey, that we will have a posture of humility and vigilance. that we will be able to trust you and all that you have done for us.

Lord, we thank you for your great love. We thank you that you are the good shepherd. We thank you that our salvation is secured by the blood of our suffering servant.

Lord, may this truth penetrate our hearts. And may our response be one of praise and doxology and joy.

[33 : 18] we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we will sing together our last hymn, How Firm a Foundation.

How firm a foundation. How firm a foundation. How firm a foundation.

you saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in his excellent word.

What more can he say than to you he has said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled.

Fear not, I am with you. Oh, be not dismayed.

[34 : 23] For I am your God and will still give you weight. I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand, upheld by my gracious, omnipotent hand.

love you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. When through the deep waters I call you to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow.

For I will be with you, your trouble to bliss, and sanctify to you, your deepest distress.

When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, my grace all sufficient shall be your supply.

The flame shall not harm you, I only desire your trust to consume and your gall to be found.

[35 : 53] Will you stand with me to receive the benediction taken today from Hebrews 13, verses 20 and 21. Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. You may go in peace. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. People Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.