

Still More Soundings in 1st Peter

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[0 : 00] Thank you, friends. It's good to be doing this today. Would you join me, please, in prayer that we may work with the Scriptures to our profit?

Once again, I use the Collect for the second Sunday in Advent. Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us, in our Son, your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Yes, this is the third and last in my series on 1 Peter, and I have called it, as you saw me affirming a moment ago, more soundings in 1 Peter.

And you may remember that I explained why I chose the word soundings to describe these studies.

I explained on an earlier occasion that I see us as in a position that's well illustrated by the ways in which people on the sea, in ships, take soundings and the way in which people on the sea, in which people on the sea, in which people on the sea, and the way in which people on the sea are, in which people on the sea are, through the waters that they are voyaging through at this very moment.

[2 : 12] And that's what I hope we shall gain from digging into 1 Peter for this third time, just as I hope we gain something from the first two studies.

You'll remember that I gave the whole set of studies a title of my own, The Traveler's Guide. I thought of that after thinking of soundings.

But 1 Peter, as a letter, well as a sermon in print, a sermon on paper, it really is a message about living one's life to the glory of God.

And we are the travellers who need God's guidance to show us how to do that. And the three studies, I have said before, I think, can be neatly linked or put together.

First study, Look Up. It was a study on the first chapter of the letter and the first half of the second chapter with it.

[3 : 35] And the grace of God, which enables us, sinners though we are, to look up with clear consciences because we're forgiven and with hope because we're the recipient of great promises.

And so, well, the simple phrase, looking up, seems to me to fit very well. And then, for the second study, where we picked up in the second half of chapter 2 and went through to the end of chapter 3, I suggested that the phrase which fits all that we were doing then was the phrase, Look Around.

And the title that I gave it, when it was announced in advance, was, or rather, when I, yes, I should say, when I gave you the outline, which I did give you for the three studies together, was the title, Christians in the Watching World.

And the passage that we were exploring was all about Christians living under the eyes of a watching world, which is not always friendly, not always sympathetic, often suspicious, and often unfair in its treatment of us.

And Peter is speaking to that sort of situation, both, how can I say it, on the public stage and at home, as between husband and wife, and, shall I say, all stations in between.

[5 : 34] Peter is speaking about those relationships in terms of the same perspective. The world watches us, not always in a friendly manner, but watches us out of interest to see what we shall say and what we shall do.

And we need to realize that and seek consciously, day by day, to live to the glory of our Saviour, behave in a way which brings honour to his name.

And now we get to the third section of the letter. And the phrase that fits here, as it seems to me, is the phrase, look ahead.

That's where Peter is going to leave us, looking ahead. And the reason why that phrase and that focus is really important to round off the letter, is because the reality of life with which this final section of the letter is concerned, is primarily the reality of suffering.

Suffering in this world, as we travel the road towards salvation in its fullness in a world beyond. And that's why, excuse me, on the outline sheet, I gave this third section a distinct title, Christians Suffering in the Storms, if any of you have brought that outline sheet with you, you'll see it there, Christians Suffering in the Storms.

[7 : 31] I thought that those were suitable terms in which to describe this aspect of the Christian life, and I still think that, and I wish to begin this morning by hammering away at that point, and saying we have to get clear and realistic on this, because in fact it is basic to the life that our Lord calls us to live.

What do I mean when I talk about the storms? Well, there are all sorts of storms which we have to cope with in life, some of them are physical storms external to us.

If we had been living on the east coast of Canada or the States during this past winter, we should have experienced enough and to spare of physical storms.

they had terrific snowfalls and tremendous amount of damage done to dwellings and public services and the electrical wiring that keeps the country in electricity electricity and it's only now that the damage has been repaired and there were days when folk living on the east coast were having to manage without the amenities because the storms had temporarily at any rate ruined them.

well that's half the story but only half the story because there are storms concerns storms that arise in relation to our own personal lives our inner lives we call those storms sufferings and sufferings as a matter of fact is a word which recurs and I'm going to show you this before very long it recurs over and over in Peter's letter he is writing to people he knows who face a lot of suffering and he doesn't avoid the theme just the reverse he picks it up and runs with it and keeps making positive points which are intended to fortify his readers against the weakening effect and the hope destroying effect which suffering tends if we don't know how to deal with it to produce what am I talking about well just think pain many of us have to live with pain in one form or another and sickness many of us have to live with sickness that goes on and on we don't recover quickly and we're weakened by the sickness and we have to cope and it's demanding and difficult then there is the matter that we were dealing with in our second study ill treatment from unsympathetic watchers who observe what we're doing and object to it

[11 : 32] Christian consistency in community life often produces that result not everybody appreciates what we're doing some people resent it and they let us know that they resent it all of us I expect have had some experience of that and I can promise you we shall have more and then any form of disappointment there are many forms of disappointment they too I think may properly be classed under the heading of suffering I got used in teaching to offering this general definition of suffering suffering is any and every situation in which we get what we don't want and want what we don't get you think about that well every time that either of those things happen we feel a certain inner distress distress and well inner distress is a form of suffering and as I say

Peter knows all about this and he's dealing with the reality of it right from the start of the letter I'm going to just quote some of the key passages so that you'll realize this is a big deal with Peter Peter is writing to people who are suffering and he knows they're suffering and he wants to make them realistic about it and strong in facing it so chapter 1 verse which is it verses 6 and 7 now for a little while as was necessary why was it necessary well if we simply say it was part of the purpose of God we shall cover it for a little while as was necessary you have been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes though tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus

Christ by honoring God then in such experiences we further his purpose of grace for our lives he wants to show the world what he can do in sustaining us against the world's hostility so there's the theme as early as verse 6 of chapter 1 in chapter 2 verses 19 and 20 you find him saying this is a gracious thing when mindful of God one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly what credit is it if when you sin under beaten for it you endure you deserve you deserve what you get but if when you do good and suffer for it you endure this is a gracious thing in the sight of God so there's the thought again this is part of our calling to honor

God please him and bring him praise and here Peter goes straight on to do what he does a number of times which we'll see in a moment Christ is our example in this he says to this you've been called because Christ also suffered for you every time Peter refers to the work of Christ it is precisely to Christ's suffering that he makes reference Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps let me move into chapter 3 and the theme comes back in verse 17 it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will as from time to time it is he's already said that it's better to suffer for doing good if that should be

God's will than for doing evil and then as the letter goes on towards its end the references to suffering become more frequent and insistent here we are for instance in chapter 4 the first of the two chapters that we're going to work through today and here in verse 12 you've got Peter speaking directly to the trial of which he made reference in chapter 1 beloved don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you but rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed and so on if you're insulted for the name of

[17 : 34] Christ you are blessed he continues because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you that none of you suffer as a murderer a thief an evildoer or a meddler yet if anyone suffers as a Christian let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God under that name and so on and when you get into chapter five well similar things are happening here we are in verse nine and we find Peter saying resist the devil firm in your faith knowing that the same kinds of suffering that you're experiencing are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world and listen to this verse 10 after you've 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 be the dominion forever and ever amen that's the end of the sermon that's the note on which

Peter finishes the God of all grace will himself restore confirm strengthen and establish you yes and that's the perspective that I'll be filling in from well from now on to the end of the study that's the big thing that Peter works up to and wants us to remember after we've finished studying what he says well this I hope you find clear and I hope you find strong it's not something which we can ignore but I hope you find it encouraging because God is giving us great promises for coping with suffering just as he's giving us the great example of the Lord Jesus who suffered for us and now reigns and will work with us to bring us through to where he is so that's the perspective and the suffering in the storms is guaranteed to bring us glory bring us glory so really we have no cause for complaint but every reason to rejoice before he finishes that is in verse 8 of chapter 5 he fills in the final bit of this perspective which to him is a very important bit to fill in he wants us as I said to be realistic about this aspect of

Christian life the suffering aspect and in order to be realistic about it well this dimension that he's just going to mention needs to be there on a regular basis listen as I read be sober minded be watchful your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion just think of that prowls around like a roaring lion this is not a lion in the zoo this is precisely a lion that is not in the zoo prowling around and roaring your adversary the devil is doing that as he says seeking someone to devour resist him etc etc etc but the first and basic thing that you must do is remember that he's there and be realistic about his hostility and the cunning with which he pursues his hostility and the malice with which he pursues it with a firm resolute purpose of bringing us down in flames in our discipleship you see when we become

Christians we walk into a war the war between the creator and the the well it's the angel and then the army of angels who following him went astray there is war in heaven and just as God has a purpose of salvation so Satan has a purpose of ruining disciples and destroying faith praise God the devil is a defeated foe and that's a great part of the meaning of the meaning of the cross and we must remember it never forget it I'm going to stop a little bit on this thought to make quite sure that we are realistic about it that we do take seriously the fact that the devil is our adversary because we are on the

Lord's side you see and his war is against the Lord and so by extension against all the Lord's people and he's cunning so we need to be sober-minded and watchful just as Peter says what does the devil do well his basic technique is deception he fools us in other words if he can fools us into doing something which we think is right or at least harmless when actually it's ruinous that's one of the first things we learn in the Bible it's there on the large scale for our study in

[24 : 31] Genesis 3 Adam and Eve were fooled and Adam and Eve fell and so we are all of us in the condition in which we are needing to be saved from sin that was a what shall I call it a score for Satan but now as I said as I've said already he's a beaten foe that's part of the meaning of Calvary you remember the Lord Jesus said now is the judgment of this world now is the prince of this world that's Satan who in one or two places in the New Testament is spoken of as this world's ruler at surface level indeed so he is but now is the prince of this world cast out it's a rather vivid verb it expresses a very decisive achievement he is a defeated foe he is no longer even at surface level in appearance let alone in reality he is no longer in charge and that is something to hang on to but his method as I said always was and continues to be the method of deception fooling people he's very cunning at it and he uses our fellow human beings he could use the person sitting next to us you see in this room as his tool we with the best will in the world lead each other astray that can happen because

Satan is orchestrating that sort of event over and over again well this is inescapable so we have to ask what are we to do about it what are we to do about it later on we'll be reminded of what it is that our Lord does about it for us what are we to do about it well let me offer you a number of words which together form an alliteration my mind as you know I think does alliterations without my asking it to really and this is what my mind came up with when I posed that question Satan deploys doubt unbelief of something or other that God has said that was the trick in the

Garden of Eden and it remains his trick today amongst millions of people who call themselves Christians and who call themselves liberal Christians and who think themselves leading the pack as liberals because they're confident that being a liberal from every standpoint or every theological standpoint anyway is a very good thing well I'm not going to talk at length about that I'm only going to say Satan generates doubt of the word of God and that's where his deception starts recognize then that deception is the name of the game and be on the watch for it we all of us I suppose have had the experience of being very sincerely committed to points of view which afterwards we came to see were not wise not godly not points of view really to be commended from any standpoint at all but for a time anyway we were persuaded of them and we urged them in discussion and debate and so on and we were on the wrong side

Satan was using us as his tool it's something that we ought very much not to want to do or not to want to happen and we do need actually to pray that we'll be kept from this kind of deception this kind of trickery which Satan is so good at so remember he deceives he he uses or deploys desire misdirected desire on our part he leads us into depression depression which leads us to distrust God again he's very good at that and all of this is his well it's his permanent strategy because all of this is his constant aim see his prime enemy is the creator if you've ever read

Milton's Paradise Lost you will know that whatever other questions might be raised about the theology of that poem there's no question that he got this bit right Satan is against God and he's manipulating everything in order if he can to destroy the work of God spoil it bring it to nothing that's the whole of his purpose and the focus of all his thinking and acting all right so take Satan seriously but then we may move on happily I think to look now at the promises which Peter delivers in

[31 : 25] God's name as to what we can look for to sustain us in face of these attacks says Peter in verse 10 of chapter 5 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 those are pictorial words in Greek just let me spend a moment celebrating the pictures he will restore you the Greek verb there means rebuild something that's ruined complete something that's incomplete prepare something for use which isn't fully prepared for use yet but the thought is that whatever disorder remains the

Lord will put it straight and put us in other words into order at the points where we are still out of shape and our lives are disordered so he will restore you that's the rendering as good a rendering as you can get for a word which has all those associations and the ESV I think is right to use it he will restore you he will confirm you he will make you firm he will establish you so that you don't wobble just to use that word makes me think of the days in which I think some of you were able to observe me when my left hip was coming to pieces and I was wobbling like nobody's business

I walked first of all with a cane and then with two canes I needed to do that in order to keep my balance and stand upright and move around tall and if you've had close contact with people whose hip has come apart as mine came apart well you will have seen this in their life just as here at St. John's people were able to see it in my life shall I say for free because there was no hiding it but today by the shall I say by the grace of God and as a result of good surgery I am able to stand upright I've got my balance back almost complete I'm able to stand firm well that's the picture of this second verb that is used confirm as it's translated in the

ESV and then the third verb which is translated strengthen it means what it seems to say and strengthening is implicitly a comparison word which tells you that with the strength that you've got having been strengthened you can overcome that which is against you and which was seeking by its strength to ruin you think of a tug of war one team wins because it has greater strength well it's the one person tug of war against this that and the other opposition that Satan offers and what Peter hopes for and what Peter promises in the father's name is that we shall be strengthened to win each battle and triumph in each tug of war with Satan and then the final verb is a word which means lay a foundation and it's translated establish you could be translated ground you

I suppose established is a better word really than that so let establish stand he will confirm strengthen and establish you give you a firm foundation we live in a part of the world where periodically we are threatened with what they call the big one and it's a question how many of the foundations of our buildings will stand if and when the big one comes you know that we all of us live with it though we don't talk very much about it but the foundation that our God is going to give us through the experience of being tried and tested as the letter says will be an experience of being established and so at the end of the experience we shall be standing upright praise the

[37 : 19] Lord these four verbs between them are a strong promise of victory and I needed I thought to hammer away at that before I did anything else in exploring these chapters because having spoken of Satan there was shall I say a sporting chance that being as we labour in to be realistic about Satan we began to get frightened and that is not the proper way to react to Satan's reality and Satan's active cunning no we need not be frightened indeed we shouldn't be frightened and indeed it would be a failure of faith if we were frightened we are on the victory side we are on the

Lord's side and the Lord is the conqueror so Peter is very strong and emphatic in finishing the letter on a note of hope and confidence and certainty of victory in the ongoing battles with Satan in this world and in the world to come now having all of that clear in our minds we are I think equipped to look through the two chapters starting at the beginning of chapter four and treating them section by section the way that my outline sheet did where as I told you and if you got the sheet with you you would have already seen though somehow or other

I imagine that most of you haven't got the sheet with you why should I think that well you can answer that question for yourself but here we are at the beginning of chapter four let me read you chapter four verses one through six with minimum comment I headed these six verses live in the will of God that's the point that Peter is enforcing here since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh he writes arm yourselves with the same way of thinking that is the same willingness to suffer for the glory of God knowing that you're on the victory side arm yourself with the same way of thinking for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin that's the happy byproduct shall I say of the victory that the

Lord leads us into as we suffer following his example whoever whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin so as to live for the rest of his time in the flesh it is in human life no longer for human passions but for the will of God in other words the suffering experience furthers sanctification in our lives he goes on to amplify that point the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do living in sensuality passion drunkenness or just drinking partisan lawless idolatry with respect to this they are surprised when you do not join with them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you well maybe we have we've had first-hand experience of that it does happen and they malign you but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead and then a verse which is a bit tricky to explain but I think it's fundamentally clear although the expression is clumsy for writes

Peter this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead means to Christians who have died since they came to profess faith the gospel was preached even to those who are dead that though judged in the flesh the way people are I don't think that that's brilliant translation actually but that's what the ESV said though judged in the flesh the way people are judged that's what Peter really means all of us are judged in the flesh I mean we all of us before the throne of God from the beginning of our lives we are guilty sinners and God judges this isn't the day of judgment this is simply God's verdict on us in the present moment every present moment so that though judged in the flesh the way people are they might live in the spirit the way

[43 : 05] God does well might live in the spirit according to God's grace would be my way of my way of glossing that phrase which means that I think the ESV hasn't quite expressed at all as one of those who produced the ESV I'm pointing at myself you see when I say that well honesty will out we did the ESV 15 years ago and we are heading for another meeting of the people who worked on the translation in the first instance meeting will come in the near future and perhaps we shall adjust this phrase I don't know but anyway that they might live in the spirit according to the grace of

God is the thought that I'm pretty sure is there in the Greek they are in other words justified sinners and you mustn't suppose that the fact that having become Christians now they died you mustn't suppose that's any form of divine judgment or any form of satanic victory no no they live in the spirit according to the grace of God that's why the gospel was preached to them so that they might enter into that life and that's where they are now so as I say it still is a bit clumsy in expression but that I'm pretty sure is what Peter means now he goes on to another paragraph which I headed love and serve for the glory of God and it reads like this the end of all things is at hand therefore be self controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers that's a word of wisdom for all

Christians at all times be self controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers above all keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins not covers in the sense of making them vanish but covers in the sense of sweeping them aside as a guide to how you're going to react to this person yes maybe this person or these persons have been involved in a multitude of sins but love doesn't determine itself in light of that fact love determines itself in terms of the need that people have so keep loving one another earnestly since love which covers a multitude of sins does prompt you to meet people's needs best thing you can do show hospitality to one another without grumbling as each has received a gift that's a gift for ministry as you see as each has received a gift use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace whoever speaks as speak as one who speaks oracles of God whoever serves serve as one who serves by the strength that God supplies in order that in everything

God may be glorified through Jesus Christ to him belong glory and dominion forever and ever amen this is Peter doing what Paul in his epistles periodically does he bursts out into doxology what a happy and healthful thing he bursts out into praise to him belong glory and dominion forever and ever amen and let everyone know that yes now he goes on to another paragraph after love and serve for the glory of God comes a paragraph which can be summarized in the title cope with the trials from God yes it isn't just that

Satan imposes tests trials circumstances that may mislead and draw people into mistakes of belief and behavior cope with the trials that come from God God overrules all of that and overrules it for the purpose of strengthening us through testing as Peter said in chapter 1 and I read that if you remember when this talk started and he says here beloved don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that's vocational reality for all of us you you share

[49 : 10] Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed if you're insulted for the name of Christ you're blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you discipleship involves that so embrace it with both hands so to speak and be happy in it because of the glory that you know lies beyond it but let none of you suffer he goes on as a murderer a thief an evildoer a meddler but if anyone suffers as a Christian let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God under that name for it's time for judgment to begin at the house of God if it begins with us what will be the outcome for those who don't obey the gospel of God clearly what Peter is talking about when he speaks of judgment there is circumstances that sort us out circumstances which show what

God thinks of some of the things that we've been doing other people have been doing time for judgment to begin at the house of God God may sort us out like this in his church at any time he's sovereign and all that Peter says about it is well we may expect it to happen and if it begins with us just imagine what will be the outcome for those who don't obey the gospel of God if the righteous is scarcely saved what will become of the ungodly and the sinner so let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good that's the right path that's what we're to do through thick and thin and thus we cope with the trials that

God permits in our lives then come four verses in which he's addressing elders in the congregations and he does so he says as a fellow elder I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that's going to be revealed shepherd the flock of God that's among you exercising oversight not under compulsion not as if it was an unpleasant burden pastoral care is not like that real pastoral care anyway but doing it willingly as God would have you not for shameful gain but eagerly not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock this is for pastors be good pastors loving pastors faithful pastors committed pastors and when the chief shepherd appears he continues you'll receive the unfading crown of glory and then likewise oh wait but it's another paragraph now paragraph five through verses five through seven

I gave it a distinct heading on my outline sheet and I'm getting it a distinct heading now those three verses I had practice humility before God and that's a word for everybody so let me read it from verse five likewise you who are younger be subject to the elders and clothe yourselves all of you with humility toward one another for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble I don't think I need comment on that the meaning is perfectly obvious and the question is whether we have room in our hearts to take this admonition too hard meantime on we go verses eight through eleven of chapter five these cover what we said about Satan earlier on in the talk the heading that I've given to these verses as a paragraph is stand steady against the enemy of God yes I'll read them again 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 that is constantly the way things are casting is a present participle this is something we should be doing every day of our lives casting all our anxieties on him because he cares for us and then be sober minded be watchful your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour resist him firm in your faith knowing that the same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world there's a point of devotion there

I think we're none of us on our own we're none of us as much on our own as we sometimes feel we are we all are part of a fellowship and there's enormous strength available to us if we make full use shall I say of the support of those in the fellowship with us just as we are penalizing ourselves if we keep our troubles to ourselves and are not humble enough to ask for help in terms of human support and prayer but anyway he hopes that we take the point there and he continues and after you've suffered a little while the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in

[56 : 06] Christ will himself restore confirm strengthen and establish you and then once again doxology to him be the dominion forever and ever and so the message part of the letter comes to an end and there are one or two personal points made to round it all off by sylvanus faithful brothers i regard him i've written briefly to you i've written briefly to you as reference to the letter and sylvanus is the chap whom peter used as a secretary or amanuensis i talked about this i think in one of the earlier talks the regular way of writing letters in the ancient world was to dictate them to a person who did the secretary's job of putting it all down on paper and on occasion knocking it into shape when that was needed for clarity and good style and clear order and so forth and then you who did the dictating would sign the letter just like well shall i i'm not sure that i that i dare say like a modern boss i can i can only say like the bosses were in the days when i was so high a young man um seventy years ago eighty years ago but uh yes that's how it was done and so rhenus is the person whose hand you see as having written all the words on the papyrus and i peter doesn't say i signed it paul does say with some of his letters here is my signature um he says that because in his case spurious letters from purporting to be from paul were going the rounds um it's a sort of a inverted compliment when people imitate you to your disadvantage to their advantage it does sometimes happen um peter isn't that distinguished a writer but he wrote his letter the way that letters were written in those days and sylvanus is the man who used the stylus to inscribe the papyrus by sylvanus i've written briefly to you exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of god stand firm in it and then there's best wishes from the church she who's of babylon that's that's the church at rome pretty certainly where peter is at the time of writing the letter calls it babylon because as in the book of revelation rome pictures all the worldliness that was embodied in babylon in the old days that's what the image is intended to project she was of babylon who's likewise chosen just as you are sends you greetings so does mark my son this is mark who wrote the gospel greet one another with the kiss of love peace to all of you who are in christ well that is peter addressing christians as they suffer in the storms no doubt i think as to which is the victory side very heartening i think to go through it and see how confident and encouraging peter is able to be and once again i am beginning to overrun so i must stop but i hope you'll agree with me it's a great letter and it's a very happy thing that we've been able to work through it together here to be kind of to be like when we