

1 Peter 5:12-14 “Standing Firm”

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: 11 June 2023

Preacher: Will Spink

- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Besides being a new favorite of mine, which that is, that hymn does a really great job of covering most of the themes of the book of 1 Peter, which we're going to wrap up our study of here this morning.
- Peter has been preparing us for the living and losing and loving that we will experience in a world that is not our home.
- We're going to look at the last three verses today, and as we do that, we're actually going to look back at the whole book. So if you have been gone for a while or you are new here, you're going to get the whole thing.
- You're going to get caught up this morning. The rest of them had to come 20 times to get the book of 1 Peter. But you knew better and you are here on the right. They will cover the whole thing.
- [1 : 1 3] It is really important before we leave this portion of God's Word for us to reflect on what He's teaching us, on how He's directing us today, how He's preparing us for difficult days ahead.
- So let's read these important final words, which are actually going to point us back to the whole letter. Just imagine like a church getting this letter 2,000 years ago somewhere in Turkey, and they're reading the whole thing in one sitting as they certainly would have done, and then hearing these words.
- The very Word of God from the Apostle Peter. This is God's Word. By Silvanus, 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, 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. Thus far God's Word. Let's pray together. Father, we give you thanks again for your Word.
- [2 : 3 9] We confess how quickly we forget it, how easily we wander from it, and so, Holy Spirit, would you write its truth indelibly on our hearts, on our lives, that we might not live fearful, forgetful, forgetful, frantically chasing after the things that will not give us life, but that we would be directed to our Savior.
- Do that even this morning. As we look at it together, we ask in His name. Amen. Amen. I'm not sure that I have ever seen anything stand firm as impressively as a giant redwood.
- These trees. These trees often stand 300 feet tall. 20 feet in diameter. Kids, what that means is that you can't wrap your arms around them.
- In fact, a car could drive through the trunk of some of them with trunk of the tree on either side. It's huge. Each. Oftentimes, they'll live a thousand plus years.

A few years ago, Christy and I got to see some of these glorious, magnificent forests just outside San Francisco. And not too much later after we were there, forest fires came burning through the area, just sweeping through everything.

[4 : 18] And as strong as these trees are, experts were really worried. Ah, what's going to... These forest fires are blazing for months and months.

Fire and wood. Not good. Right? When the smoke finally cleared and they were able to go back in, they peeked out.

And the redwoods stood firm. As they have done time and time again for centuries.

In fact, not just standing, but we have learned that fire actually strengthens the redwoods in some ways. They suffer damage for sure, but they often live on and even gain strength.

They carry scars, some of them so big you can stand inside them. These cavities near the base as the fire burns actually even in the heart, the core of the tree.

[5 : 24] The fire burns hot over and over and over. But the scars left behind help them stand firm. And even have this uniquely majestic look about each one.

The fires clear away other growth competing with the redwoods. The fires burn some of the cones on the redwoods so hot that they fall to the ground and grow new trees.

So there are all sorts of trees around them falling, but they stand firm. And even grow and stand together as this glorious forest in spite of and even because of the fiery suffering.

Pastor Peter's closing exhortation to these early Christians is to stand firm. He knows that the fires of persecution are already being felt by many of them.

He knows that these churches he's writing to are not home yet, so they're going to see more. He knows many of them will face the fire of martyrdom. And his charge is to stand firm.

[6 : 41] Come what may stand firm. He hopes to peek out after the fires, after the suffering has swept through these churches.

And he hopes to see people not just standing firm, but growing stronger through the fires. And to see new trees growing among God's people.

Southwood family, that is my heart for us. There are a lot of different sufferings being experienced just in this room this morning.

A lot of them. More than we could put in a prayer guide. More than any of us is fully aware of. And it will continue. Some of it will get worse.

In a world to which Christianity makes increasingly less sense. Right? That's the reality. My prayer is that whatever comes, we will stand firm and grow through and increasingly share with new people the grace of Jesus.

[8 : 01] The redwoods are a natural picture of the kintsugi art that we talked about a few weeks ago.

Where we saw these broken pieces actually contribute to the beauty of this gold glued hole as they're put back together.

What a beautiful thing it would be if that's what happened here among us as we suffer. As we grieve. As we are misunderstood.

As we are left out. As we hurt deeply. That broken, yes, but held together by the grace of Jesus, we stand firm.

I long for that. I pray for the chance to peek out. As things rage around you.

[9 : 00] As you navigate a challenging culture that is often against you. As you go through the challenges of high school and into college.

And we wonder how you're going to respond to the tensions that you face. As you weather marriage struggles. And battle dementia.

And wrestle with depression. And I could peek out and could see you take on the fire. And take on some scars. And stand firm together gloriously.

That's what I long to see. That's what Peter wants for us. That's what our Father who sent us this letter wants for us. If that is to happen in the midst of suffering that's too much for you on your own.

Peter says it will be because we stand in the true grace of God. That he's been telling us about for five chapters.

[10 : 05] True grace. The undiluted, unmerited blessing of God to his people. It's his grace that sustains your faith.

That shapes your faith and your life. It's no counterfeit of our own invention. There's no other way or place to stand firm than the true grace of God.

Peter's referring here to his entire letter. I hope it will be a letter that you will come back to in the days ahead as you walk through suffering and struggle.

This morning I want to look back over it. I want to give you three words to remember. There's a lot of words in 1 Peter. In fact, it is a book that you can easily read in one sitting.

When times are hard, I commend that to you. But for this morning, to help you stand firm in the true grace of God, three words, identity, eternity, trinity.

[11 : 14] First, identity. How is that a part of the true grace of God? How will our identity help us to stand firm?

Well, there's a counterfeit message that's out there all around us these days. And it's really easy to believe. It says the good life, the way really to stand, the safe place to find yourself, is in avoiding suffering.

That's how you'll be secure and know the good life. It's what makes you feel good. Peter says no. No, no, no. The true grace of God is finding your identity not off on your own, but in Christ.

That's the safe place because suffering will come. You can't avoid it altogether, even if you try, he says. It's coming. But you are beloved, treasured by the God of the universe, the King of glory himself.

If you're going to stand firm, you must know that you were brought into his family, rescued from a life living for yourself and making it up on your own with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 43] He must be the treasure of your heart. Christ is mine forevermore, right? That's where your treasure is. This is all over Peter's letter.

That though we haven't seen him, we love him. 1.8 We're united to him, in fact, even more deeply in our sufferings.

You are immensely valuable. You are infinitely secure because the safest place to stand in suffering is in Christ.

If you haven't yet experienced that, it is such a great comfort. It's the only real place you'll find that where you can actually stand and rest and be firm is in Christ.

It's a place where you're not merely surviving, but you actually find yourself to be on a mission with eternal significance. Remember?

[13 : 44] We're all pastors. That's chapter 2. God, by his mercy, made us his people, our new identity, that we may do what? Declare his excellencies.

All the time. When it's easy and when it's hard. All of us are pastors who pray for people. Remember? You remember the three names? You're praying, right?

Three names, at least. And point them to Jesus. We're praying for people. We're pointing them to Jesus in the hopes that, verse 12, friends and neighbors and loved ones will glorify God eternally.

And suffering is no hindrance to that. In fact, suffering itself provides an opportunity for that to happen as we share with others how we possibly could have hope in the midst of such difficulty.

Always be prepared, chapter 3, verse 15, to give that answer. Where's your hope? How are you still hopeful? So far from avoiding suffering in order to find purpose in yourself.

[14 : 59] No. Suffering actually helps us grow to accomplish the purpose for which we exist. This, Peter says, is the true grace of God.

In Christ, you are secure. In Christ, you are sent. No matter what happens around you. Listen, if it is the true grace of God, you can and must boldly, confidently, passionately share it.

It's not just for you. God, help us to do that. He assures us that it is true so that we might know we're not misleading people.

We're rather pointing them to the living hope that we all need. Right? One final part of our identity in Christ is we are connected not only to him, remember, but to one another.

We've talked about that this morning. We belong in God's family. We have a community of very different people bound together forever because we are being built into a holy temple, a house for God.

[16 : 08] Remember chapter 2? So we are, how do we treat one another? We are to love one another earnestly, 4-8. Especially when the fires rage in our lives and we desperately feel the need for one another.

Peter reflects this theme here at the end in the verses we read this morning. He brings greetings from their brothers and sisters in Rome. That's what Babylon means.

Babylon, the word for Rome, right at the heart of the world that stands opposed to God and to his people. The Christians in that church, the ones who they're going through suffering like you, they send their greetings.

They are standing firm like you, with you. So love one another deeply. Whether it's demonstrated with a kiss or a 60-second greeting time, hopefully somewhere in between those two extremes, we find the way to love one another earnestly, right?

Yes, you don't want to stop at 60 seconds. We don't want always kissing. There are other ways. The point is, you are not just individually precious and significant.

[17 : 28] You are part of the most eternally secure and powerful organism ever, the church of Jesus Christ.

Though she falter, he will rebuild her strong. Don't leave her. Love her. These are your people. You belong. What an identity we have.

An identity to remember when everything else is falling around you so you can stand firm. Perhaps our picture of the Ukrainian violinist, maybe some of you can still hear the music.

There she is in the bomb shelter. Maybe this will help stick with you that you must remember who you are. Chaos all around you, right?

You are not defined merely as one who runs and hides and just your whole life seeking to avoid being hit by an enemy bomb.

[18 : 31] No, no, no. Remember who you are. It's more than that. You are secure in Christ. No matter what is happening to your so-called home. Yes?

No matter what happens to it. It's not your final home. You are a person with a purpose. No matter where the music of your story is being heard.

You are on a mission. You are a member of a courageous people standing together, not perfectly, but persistently against the enemy.

That is who you are. Identity, Christian. The second word I hope doesn't surprise you if you've been here with us for 1 Peter.

Eternity. Peter is constantly turning our eyes, pointing our hearts to what really lasts.

[19 : 29] That's how you know something is valuable in Peter's economy, right? What really lasts? Peter first mentions our inheritance.

Kept in heaven as we are kept for heaven. There we will be. Eternal relationship with God. Full life. True joy. Peace that can never be taken away or diminished or lost.

Because Jesus is alive. Risen from the dead. And you will be with him. But that's not all he tells us we have. That's imperishable.

He uses that same word, that same concept to speak of our faith that won't perish in the fire. Of the precious blood of Christ.

It's not like perishable silver and gold. Of the good news of God's word. Even of the beauty of our inner character that God is forming in the suffering.

[20 : 28] These are the valuable things. Not the stuff that disappears so quickly that's burned up by fire. That's how you can know what really matters. Does it last? When the fires come, does it last?

So he tells us at the end, there's an eternal glory that far outweighs the suffering we face here for what is comparatively just a little while.

That is the true grace of God. From the God of all grace. It's not the counterfeit that we hear all the time.

We hear this in so many ways. This world is home. In fact, this is all there is. Right? That's the message that we hear. And sometimes we hear it like that.

Sometimes we hear it saying, so protect yourself. Treasure your stuff. Live for today. No.

[21 : 29] Peter reminds us we are exiles. Aliens. Strangers here. Maybe feeling strange or left out. But with an eternal, unparalleled home that awaits us forever.

As a result, even if the worst comes, even if you are actually burned in the flames of martyrdom, you will live. And not just kind of make it through.

You will live with an eternal inheritance. He doesn't want us to lose hope when the suffering seems to go on forever. Because sometimes it does. And some days you are pretty sure that you are not going to see a day in this world without the pain you are dealing with.

That you will never feel the same again. That you will always have this ache or this emptiness. And Peter doesn't want you to lose hope. He says, no, even then, when it feels like it will never end, the glory to come will far, far outlast it.

[22 : 42] In fact, in ways we can't even comprehend, it makes the glory that much more glorious. Your suffering will not even compare with the glory to be revealed in you.

In light of that eternity, we ought to live today as God's holy people. Practicing for the real life that we will enjoy with him.

He says, why not? This is all the things he tells us to do. Peter is basically saying, why not start living like that now? What are we waiting for if that's where real life is? Remember, it's not all of our holy living here that gets us up the stairs to heaven, right?

But rather, it is eternity that should come back and get into our lives, so to speak. So that we live wholly because our hope is set fully where?

Where's our hope? Fully on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus comes back. That, remember, is the true grace of God.

[23 : 51] The kind that doesn't run out, that doesn't end here in this life and on the day of your funeral. No, that meets us with more grace and grace upon grace.

When we don't think we can stand another moment under the weight of the suffering we're dealing with, then we think, oh, eternity! And we look forward to more of his grace with him forever.

See, this is the wonder of the true grace of God that enables us to stand firm. Listen, we may at times lose sight of eternity.

You ever lost sight of eternity in the midst of the weight of life today? And the day in and day out routine, it presses in on you heavily and we lose sight of eternity.

We may at times struggle to remember who we are. Paul Tripp calls this identity amnesia. I was talking with a couple here recently about how our minds can so fade that it would be possible for us even to get to the point that we forget God and his love for us.

[25 : 06] We're that frail and fragile and broken. But we think, no, how would I possibly stand firm if I didn't remember God and how much he loves me?

Listen, the true grace of God that Peter tells us about is so good that even if you forget God, you know what will happen? He will remember you, the Trinity.

Last word. Trinity. Here the counterfeit message of our culture is that it is all up to you. You are only as valuable as you are able.

Some of you feel that. And if you can't perform the way you used to, push aside. Whether you will stand firm when things get hard depends completely on your strength, your grip, your tenacity.

That's what the world is telling us. The true grace of God says it is the strength of God's grip on you that empowers you to stand firm. Nowhere in 1 Peter, or anywhere in the Bible for that matter, are we told to stand firm in our own strength.

[26 : 29] That's not the true grace of God. And if the fire has been turned up hot enough on you, you know you can't stand it alone in your own strength.

It's a lie from Satan to pull you away from the feet of your father who promises to hold you tight and hold you fast. And Satan wants you away from him. That's why Peter started here at the very beginning of the letter to suffering strangers by telling us that the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is together for you, with you, committed to you, so that grace and peace and grace and peace and grace and peace keep being dumped on you.

And then he ends the letter the same way. Talking about the God of all grace. Bringing peace to all who are in Christ.

Christ. Verse 14. By himself, verse 10, restoring, confirming, strengthening, and establishing you.

How are you going to stand? Listen, you may be wavering this morning. You may be weak this morning. You may be weary this morning.

[27 : 53] He will not let you fall. He brings grace to hold you fast so that you stand firm. And in fact, when Peter gets into the details of our fiery trials, he reminds us that even there, when it might most feel like we'll never make it, it's actually that we are sharing Christ's sufferings.

That the Spirit of God rests upon us for that specific situation, for exactly what you need. He's there with you for it so that you can entrust yourselves to your faithful God.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If you are suffering today from beginning to end, the reason you can stand firm is the Trinity together with you and for you and holding you up and never letting you go.

See, your identity and your eternity come from the Trinity. See, Jesus' life and death and resurrection that secure your eternity.

The Father's love eagerly invites you into his family and to his table, and the Spirit's presence ensures that you make it safely home for dinner with them.

[29 : 08] That, Southwood family, is the true grace of God. That, that kind of God, brothers and sisters, is how you stand firm.

When we feel like little twigs on the forest floor and a fire is blazing and we're going to be consumed in moments, we're disheartened by our struggles, we're discouraged by the mockery of this world, we're disoriented by the confusion of this world, and we feel like nothing.

I don't know what will come to you personally or to us together in the days ahead, but I do know that God will see us stand like a mighty forest of redwoods as he gives us his word to go back to, to first Peter and identity and eternity and Trinity so that we can stand firm, not because we're that great, but because he is that great.

He will see you stand, and I don't know what you'll look like, but in his eyes you'll be standing firm. This is why our gracious God meets with us again today, to feed us with his flesh and blood that we might be strengthened by our Savior to stand firm in the true grace of God.

If you have given up hope of being strong enough on your own, if you've decided that your hope is only in this Savior and in the grace of this God, then come and eat and celebrate him with us this morning.

[31 : 02] This is not Southwood's table or a Presbyterian table. This is the Lord's table. And so if you are our brothers and sisters by faith in him, come and eat and have your faith in him strengthened so that you can stand firm held by him.

If that's not your hope, if you haven't publicly declared that hope by being a baptized member of his church, then I encourage you not to come and take these elements this morning and say outwardly in that way something that you haven't believed yourself and declared outwardly already, but I would invite you to come.

You can come to these tables with us and observe. Ask us to pray. We would love to pray with you. Or especially to consider the invitation of Jesus to you who invites you to come to him and find his grace to be what truly fulfills you so that you will never hunger or thirst again.

He invites you. We'd love to share about him with you. He is the one who on the very night he was betrayed to the worst suffering ever in the world took bread and he broke it and he gave it to his disciples.

As I ministering in his name, give this bread to you. He said, take, eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And then after supper, he took the cup and he said, this cup is the new covenant.

[32 : 39] It's in my blood, which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it, all of you. As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

That that's where your hope is. That your trust is in one who's coming back for you to take you to be with him where he is. Let's pray and then we'll come together.

Father, thank you for the gifts of these common elements because we're not okay on our own and we need to taste that you are with us.

Would you set them aside to a sacred purpose this morning that they would build faith in our hearts, that they would strengthen faith that is being attacked by the fires of suffering in this world, that we would be anchored in you.

Would you feed us this morning as our good shepherd? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.
For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.