

Stand Firm

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Date: 15 May 2022

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[0 : 00] We're going to jump into our sermon. We're at the end of a sermon series on the book of 1 Peter, and if you want to turn there in your Bibles, it's 950-something, and that's close enough.

You'll be able to find it from there. And we're going to be looking at the very end of it. And just as an introduction, if you want to talk to me about Silvanus and whether he's a messenger or an amanuensis, you can come talk to me after the service. And if you want to talk about Babylon and why Babylon is mentioned, come talk to me after the service. We're not going to deal with those things because I think that at the end of this book and what I want to do as we tie up this series is to hear from the heart of Pastor Peter to his church as he's writing the words of encouragement that he wants us to hear. Because Peter is writing to a church that's struggling to figure out how do we stand out as different? How do we navigate feeling odd and foreign and alien in this world?

What kind of distinctive life does God call us to? And how do we do that even in the face of suffering and persecution and trial? Peter is writing this letter because he's afraid as a pastor that people might be losing heart, that they might be in the face of the trials, in the face of the confusion and dislocation of their situation, that they might falter in faith and fall away.

He's writing to a church that needs encouragement and truth and instruction on how to live. He's writing to a church embattled. And I don't know about you, but if that doesn't sound familiar, Amanda, thank you for your testimony as a testimony of the fact that this is an ongoing reality.

It's not just the first century. This has been the situation of the church for all ages, and it is a situation for us today as we face similar challenges and trials and pressures. So that's what we're going to look at today. We're going to read the end of the book. We're going to focus on verses 8 through 11, but we're going to read from 8 to the end of the book, and then we'll pray and we'll dive in and look at this for a few minutes. So 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 8. 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.

[2 : 37] And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who's 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. 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, as does Mark my son. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word and that you have spoken to us in it and through it. Lord, thank you that you have given us your spirit so that we might understand it. And Lord, we pray now for minds to comprehend and hearts to receive and wills to move, Lord, at your bidding. Lord, I pray this morning that we would be encouraged and strengthened. Lord, I pray for your help that you might help me to speak your words and that together we might sit under your word this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, as Peter's writing this final exhortation, the central idea is this, stand firm. And he says, stand firm because it's a real battle. And stand firm because God has got you in it. So, let's look at those things. Verses 8 through 9, stand firm because it's a battle. Peter says, stand firm, verse 9 says, because there is an enemy, an adversary, the devil who is prowling around seeking to destroy you. Okay? Now, we need to stop for a second because we live in the 21st century and we stopped talking about the devil a long time ago. Or, as C.S. Lewis says, he just shows up as a cartoon with a pointy tail and red tights, right? So, this is what we tend to think. But if you haven't read the Screwtape Letters, you should. It's a wonderful book with an imaginary correspondence between two devils who are seeking to corrupt the world and corrupt the life of a particular man. And C.S. Lewis, one of the things he does is exposes some of the different strategies that the devil has, some of the strategies of the spiritual realities in which we live. And he says, sometimes the spiritual realities the devil will work through obvious displays of power and intimidation in order to frighten and dissuade people from following God because there's this power that's against them that they don't want to have to face, right? Then there are other times when Satan wants to hide. And he goes underground and he says, you don't want to think about Satan because you don't want to think about spiritual things at all. You just think about materialism and the world right in front of you and all these things. And so, the way Satan then works is very subtly and in a very underground way. Not to intimidate and overwhelm, but to sabotage the church. And so, we need to recognize that we may live more in that second category where we tend to be in a society that just dismisses the whole thought of this.

And yet, Peter reminds us what we see throughout Scripture, that in fact, there is a spiritual battle. There are spiritual forces and spiritual beings, and that there is particularly one repeatedly called the devil or Satan who stands against God and his people and is seeking to destroy us. Like a prowling lion. Like, as Wayne Grudem says, a prowling lion is someone who attacks suddenly, viciously, and often when its unsuspecting victim is engaged in routine activities.

We need to recognize, Peter's saying, there is a battle because there's an enemy who is encircling your life, our church life, the church worldwide right now seeking to find ways. How can I bring destruction? How can I bring death? Remember what Jesus said, he comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

[7 : 03] How does he steal the blessing of God? How does he kill the life of the church and the life of faith? How does he destroy the kingdom? That's what he's always seeking to do, right? And his goal, as you see in verse 9, is that you might be devoured. That you might be literally consumed by him and his devices, right? So, what does this look like? It might look like you being consumed by passion.

Passion for things that aren't leading you to God himself, right? A passion for pleasure, a passion for the praise of others. You could think of many other things that your heart gets so captured with that God is lost in the picture. Maybe it might be that you're consumed by distraction, right? That thing in your pocket that's buzzing right now. We live in a world of distraction with screens and those sorts of things. But there are other things too. Our busyness, our achievement, our hobbies, there's even our families. Even good things can become distractions when they lead us not to, but away from God.

Similarly, we can be consumed by despair. This happens when things get hard. And I know enough of you have walked through hard things to know the pull of this. When things get hard, those hard things fill the screen and the hurt and the agony and the pain just seem to push everything, including God, out. And we lose God in the midst of it. And we see actually that this is in fact part of what Peter's connecting.

The enemy is using the persecution of the church in the first century as a means of intimidation to bring the church to despair of the hope of the gospel. And Peter's saying, don't give up to that.

One of the ways that Satan does this with despair is he says, you're alone in it. Whatever your battle is, whatever is hard, whatever pain you're bearing, you are alone in it. That's one of the ways that the enemy speaks to us. And so Peter says, listen, you're not alone. In fact, throughout the church worldwide, they're suffering the same thing. And we can now say, and the church throughout history, the same thing is true. These battles, the battles you are facing, the despair that you're fighting, you're not alone in it. This is a common thing that the enemy has been working to bring this in.

[9 : 30] So Peter is exhorting us to recognize that there is a real battle. What are some of the hallmarks of when I feel like spiritual battle is at play? Well, there are a couple of different things.

One is unbelief. When I deny things are true about God that he has clearly revealed, I recognize that's the enemy drawing me away from God, right? Sometimes it has to do with relational discord.

When suddenly relationships are filled with not trust and grace and kindness, but are filled with suspicion and doubt and accusation, right? Sometimes discord and unity within a group of people, the enemy is sowing these things. And I hope you've been here long enough to know there are times when we have to fight with one another, fight for righteousness, fight for good things, bring ugly stuff to light so that we can deal with it in the gospel framework. But that's not what the enemy does.

The enemy brings those things to light so that it will destroy and divide us, right? So these are some ways that I look and see where there might be fingerprints of the enemy's work in our lives. And Peter says, there is a battle. It's real. And we need to be ready for it.

And he then goes on and he says, there is a command that I have for you. Be sober-minded. Be watchful. Resist and stand firm. Now, these are not new commands that Peter's tacking on to the end of his book.

[11 : 20] And I'm going to spend a little bit of time in the rest of the sermon connecting what's here to the broader themes of the book. So just be ready for that. So in chapter 1, verse 12, Peter's already said to us, prepare your minds for action. Be sober-minded.

Set your hope on Christ. In chapter 4, he says, the end of all things is near. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded. And in chapter 4, verse 12, he says, don't be surprised.

Don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you. But instead, be ready. Like a soldier standing at his post on the watchtower, alert, awake, keeping his eyes on the horizon, looking for where the enemy may be at work, with his weapon at the ready so that he can't be taken unawares.

He hasn't left his post and gone down to the local bar for a drink and a carousing, right? He hasn't carelessly assumed that because it all seems good right now, he's just going to take a nap or pull out his phone and watch a movie while he's on guard.

He's not going to carelessly assume that he doesn't need his weapon and leave it at home. But he's going to be prepared, vigilant, ready at all times.

[12 : 36] This is the picture that Peter is saying, this is how we must be, church. This is what we are called to be in the middle of this battle. And so often we are not that way.

So often we are unprepared. We are unaware and taken by surprise. When suffering comes, rather than trusting God's hand in it and seeing it as an opportunity to walk with him, we deny his goodness and doubt him.

When persecution comes, we feel like God has abandoned us. When things go wrong, we blame God and others. We are unaware of how much the enemy is prowling around, seeking in different ways to affect us.

So how do we live then? How do we actually be prepared? What does that look like? Well, I think Peter has actually given us all sorts of commands throughout the whole book so that we might live this watchful, prepared life.

So in chapter one, if you remember, in the second half particularly, he says, how do you prepare? You live holy lives. That is, seeking to do what God would want above all other things.

[13 : 53] And to love one another deeply from the heart. To recognize that our battle is not against flesh and blood. And so we are called to love one another.

This is what he says in chapter three too when he says, I call you to live with a unity of mind, with a sympathy, with brotherly love, with a tender heart, with humility, not repaying evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, blessing.

Do you see, friends, that the way that we stand guard against the enemy isn't by saying no to the bad things, it's by filling our lives with good things, right things, things that we're supposed to pursue.

And as we fill ourselves with those things, we are ready and we see when the enemy comes in and seeks to divert us and seeks to diverge us away. Chapter two gives us a different equipment where Peter has reminded us that our identity is grounded in being God's people, called by grace, living distinctly and differently.

When we know who we are, then the lies and the temptations that the enemy puts before us to put our identity in other things, they have no power over us and we are able to fight and to resist his schemes.

[15 : 16] In chapter four, Peter reminds us that when we suffer persecution, we walk with Jesus doing so. We walk with him who endured the scorn and the shame of so many while he walked this earth as he headed to the cross for our salvation.

As he did so, he did good and he blessed and served others. And so we're called to follow in that pattern. And when we fix our eyes on Jesus, suddenly the alternatives that the enemy will put before us, you can fix us by doing this or you can do this, suddenly have no power because we're following Jesus.

What else would we need when we have his example? This is a hard but a good road. One of facing the battle, knowing there are enemies, knowing there's hardship ahead, knowing that the desire of the enemy is to destroy our faith.

But Peter says, though the battle is fierce, stand firm. You cannot lose God because God has got you. And that's what we'll talk about in the second one.

But I do want, before we go on, this is a great book, Precious Remedies Against Satan Devices. It's a Puritan. If you haven't read the screw tape letters, that's good too.

[16 : 40] This is free for the first person who comes and asks me after the service. I'm giving it away. We're putting skin in the game today. So, but it's a wonderful book to help just strengthen your faith.

All right? As we move on, you cannot lose God because God has got you. This is what verses 10 and 11 say. Here's the wonderful thing. This battle is not our battle to win, but we are fighting in a battle that God is already winning.

And what we want to do, what Peter does in verses 10 and 11 is he says, look at who God is because this is how you will endure in this battle. This is how you will fight. Look to who God is and remember, it's not because your great faith or because you're going to fight well, but because God has got you that you will make it through and endure and stand firm.

There are five things that we learn about God in these two verses that we're going to look at. Verse one, number one. Actually, let's read these two verses first.

10 and 11. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who has called you into his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you to him be the dominion forever and ever.

[18 : 01] Amen. Five things that Peter says briefly about this. One, God knows there's a battle. After you have suffered for a little while, God is not surprised.

He's not taken off guard. He knows that there is a battle that you are in and he's with you in it. And he says, and by the way, I want to give you some perspective on it. It's only for a little while.

That's not to diminish the reality or the severity of what you're walking through right now, because it might be really hard and really overwhelming. But compared to the span of eternity, your life of suffering, even if it were a whole lifetime, is just a little while.

And God says, look at the bigger picture of a world that I rule in and take heart. Don't be surprised. God has sent this to test you, but the testing, if you remember from chapter 4, verse 12, the testing is not to say, hey, are you going to make it or not?

The testing there is, I'm going to send you through this fire to prove to you the quality of the faith that I have given to you so that you can see and know in a richer and deeper way my faithfulness to you and the sufficiency of my work for you.

[19 : 18] So the first thing that Peter wants us to see is God is not unaware, but He knows that the battle is real and He's with us in it. The second thing is that He is the God of all grace.

Grace to save undeserving sinners, grace to support us in our weakness. Grace has a breadth here where it's not just that we are undeserving and that the forgiveness of sin and the new spiritual life that God has given us that will last for eternity is completely undeserved and only on the merits of Christ.

We know that that's His grace to us, but I think that Peter here also uses grace as He's going to give you grace to get through it. He's going to give you supporting grace and helpful grace.

And here's the wonderful thing. Just like the grace of our salvation, this grace of supporting us isn't because we've earned it, isn't because we've deserved it. It's not because we're fighting hard enough or because we know enough.

And the wonderful thing about it not being deserved is it means we can't lose it. We can't blow it badly enough. And God looks at us and says, forget you.

[20 : 29] You're a lost cause. I'm done with you. But the God of all grace is with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you because He has set His love on His people in Christ and He will never forsake.

So He knows there's a battle. He's the God of all grace. Thirdly, He has called you into His eternal glory in Christ. John reminded us earlier about what it means to be in Christ, that by faith we are joined with Him.

And being joined with Him means we enjoy the fruit of all of His work of redemption, the greatness of the salvation, the restoration of being with God and in His kingdom in a beautiful way.

And Peter has reminded us over and over again and instead of trying to explain it, I'm simply going to remind you what Peter has said about this glory and grace, this glorious position of being in Christ that we have.

So in chapter 1, he writes, according to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.

[21 : 52] And later in chapter 1, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the last time for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory so that your hope and your faith are in God.

Jesus Christ died on the cross, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God. This is what He has done for us.

This is the glory that He's called us into. It is an eternal glory that comes from our position of being in Christ. And Peter says, when the battle is fierce, when you think that you're going to be overwhelmed, when you think that you can't go on in following Christ, He reminds you, this is what's awaiting.

This eternal glory that is yours, that you've already tasted, that you've already stepped into and will become in its greater fullness all of yours.

[23 : 10] So stand firm and don't give up. Peter goes on. The fourth thing He says is at the end of verse 10, He Himself will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Four verbs. God tells us what God will do. He Himself will do it. The emphasis is that God is with you in this. He says He will restore all the honor and privilege and the places that you have lost, the cost that you have borne for following Christ.

He will restore all those things in His kingdom and He will give you a place of honor as His child. He will confirm you. He will say, yes, this one is mine, though the enemy may accuse and whisper all sorts of lies.

He will say, because of the blood of Christ, this one is mine and I confirm that and I will not let Him go. And He will strengthen us. He will strengthen us with the example of Christ who went before us, enduring the cross, despising the shame for the joy set before Him so that we might be His.

Strengthening us with the examples of the church throughout history and throughout the world that are suffering even now that we might hold firm together because we're not alone in it. Strengthening us with the knowledge that He's given us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, the Spirit of God and of glory so that we might not have to rely on ourselves but rely on Him.

[24 : 41] Strengthening us with the hope of this future grace that His promises are sure. So He will restore us, He will confirm us, He will strengthen us and He will establish us. We are, as He said in chapter 2, people, living stones that God is building into a living temple.

This is what it means to be His church in this world. It's to be the place where God Himself dwells and manifests Himself in His glory in this age as He prepares us to be His people forever in the new heavens and the new earth where we will worship Him in fellowship with Him forever without any sin.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of the darkness into His marvelous light.

Once you were not a people but now you are God's people. Once you would not receive mercy but now you have received mercy. And finally, in verse 11, He's a God who's with you in the battle.

He's the God of all grace. He's a God who has called you into this eternal glory. He's a God who Himself has promised that He will do all these things for you. And finally, Peter says, to Him be dominion forever and ever.

[26 : 00] Amen. The persecution of the Romans, God has dominion. the trials you are facing, God has dominion.

The enemy who threatens to destroy you, God has dominion over all these things. Just as He has throughout all of history, He does today and He will forever.

God's dominion as the Creator and as the ruler of the world has never, ever been usurped. And so Peter says at the end of chapter 4, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

So Peter says, stand firm. Stand fast in your faith. God is equipping you and giving you all of these things. Be aware that the battle is fierce, but know that God has got you in it.

And when the battle is fierce and when the enemy sneaks up on you, when you feel unprepared and when you're overwhelmed and when following looks like it's going to be too costly, remember the gospel.

[27 : 21] You won't hold firm because you are strong enough to withstand these things. But look to the cross. Remember Jesus dying for you, rising from the dead.

He has won the ultimate victory over sin, over death, over this enemy that's prowling around. And one day, all of those enemies will be fully defeated if we cling to the cross by faith.

Let's pray. Lord, we... we... we admit that we are weak and there are days when we are ready to give up.

Lord, when the battle seems too hard, Lord, when the enemy seems to have won, when it seems too costly to stand firm, oh, Lord Jesus, we pray for your help.

Lord, help us to stand firm in you that the glory that you have wrought in Christ might be displayed in us to this world. Lord, I pray for hearts today that are discouraged and despairing.

[28 : 30] Lord, that you might encourage us today. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.