

Stand Firm!

1 Peter: Hope Away from Home

1 Peter 5:6-14

Pastor Josh Black

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Hanging in There

When someone asks you, “How are you doing?” what do you say? I regularly say, “I’m hanging in there.” I even said to one of my friends yesterday, “Hang in there, buddy.” But if you were to ask Joe Stout (one of our elders) how he’s doing, he wouldn’t say he’s “hanging in there.” No, he’d say, “I’m standing firm!” The answers are quite different, aren’t they?

Now I know “hanging in there,” is just a colloquial way to answer a basic question. But sometimes it really does feel like we’re just hanging in there. Maybe even hanging by a thread. That’s the reality of our lives. Our lives can feel pretty fragile, like the ground beneath us isn’t very firm. But our passage this morning calls us twice to stand firm (5:9, 12). How can we stand firm when it feels like our lives are giving way? To answer that question, I want to spend some extra time summarizing two themes in 1 Peter, before we dive into our main passage.

First Peter is written to elect exiles (1:1). And if we’re believers, we too are elect exiles. These two words describe two different realities of our Christian lives.

As exiles, our first reality is the life we live now, away from our heavenly home. And this reality is a difficult reality. We’re promised persecution and opposition for our faith in Christ. We’ve seen this repeatedly throughout 1 Peter. Verse 1:6 says, “Now, for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.”¹ And these trails test the genuineness of our faith. Verse 2:21 tells us that “Christ suffered for us.” And his followers will also suffer because of our faith in him. Verse 3:14 tells us this suffering includes being slandered and reviled for being a Christian. Verse 4:4 says it involves being maligned for not living like the world. Verse 4:14 says it’s being insulted for the name of Christ.

You get the point. If you’re living for Jesus, you’ll face opposition. We know this is true for believers living in places like Eastern Europe, or North Africa, or in some parts of Asia. But it’s also true for believers in Wichita. It may feel like we’re barely hanging on.

But Peter calls us to stand firm because of another reality that’s equally true. And that has to do with our future glory that’s coming, not now but later. If you belong to Christ. If you’re elect, verses 1:3-4 say that “according to [God’s] great mercy he’s caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . . to an inheritance that’s imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” Verses 1:6-7 say that we can rejoice now even in suffering, because of what’s coming. Verse 4:13 reminds us that there is a glory to be revealed. Verse 5:12 calls this future glory, or eternal inheritance, the true grace of God. And because of that reality—a reality greater than our present suffering—we should stand firm. Which is another way of saying we should trust God. We stand on a solid rock, not shifting sand.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

One of the common phrases in pop culture is “you only live once.” You hear it in marketing and in music. At best, it’s a call to make the most of your life or to seize the day. But it assumes this life is all there is. YOLO is the acronym used for this phrase. There’s actually a bike and surfboard company named YOLO. Mike Bullmore once told his kids he was going to start a different company called YALT—“you actually live twice.”²

This phrase gets at the truth we need if we’re going to stand firm. Our first life *is* full of the reality of suffering, but for believers it’s really short in comparison with our second life. Eternal life is really long. And it will contain no suffering.

That’s what Peter says in verse 5:10. “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.”

There’s so much cause for anxiety and fear in our lives now. But there’s so much more to give us hope for what is coming later. So, we’re not just hanging in there. We can stand firm. But how do we stand firm now, in view of what’s coming later? Let’s look at our text for this morning.

1 Peter 5:6-14

¹Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹²By 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. ¹³She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. ¹⁴Greet one another with the kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage contains three commands. And they give us three ways to stand firm in the future grace of Christ. They teach us how to trust God now as we wait for what’s coming.

HUMBLE YOURSELVES (VV. 6-7)

The first command is found in verse 6. “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God.” What does this command mean?

Well bear in mind, there are many commands in this letter to submit: For all to be subject to governing authorities, even to guys like Nero (2:13). For slaves to be subject to masters, even the unjust (2:18). And for wives to be subject to their husbands, even those who don’t obey the word (3:1). At the end of that section on submission, Peter calls the church to humility (3:8), and tells them to not repay evil for evil (3:9).

² Mike Bullmore, “[After A Little While ...](#),” *Suffering and Glory: Hope in a Hostile World*

One reason we need to be humble is because there's a temptation to retaliate against unbelieving authority. But Peter tells us to humble ourselves, and suffer under opposition to our faith. And what's his reason?

It's because God is mighty. He's sovereign. This is something Peter wants to emphasize in this passage. That's why he begins the passage by telling us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. And then he ends the passage in verse 11 saying, "To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen." The root word for "mighty" and "dominion" are the same in Greek. What's the point?

This world may seem to be spinning out of control. It may feel like we're barely hanging on. Like we're sinking in the sand. It may seem like the enemy and the unjust of this world are mighty and have dominion. But God's mighty hand has been seen throughout redemptive history. We read about God's mighty hand throughout Exodus.³ How God's mighty hand delivered his people from harsh subjection to Pharaoh and brought his people into the Promised Land.

The same will be true for the elect exiles. It will be *exponentially* true. God's mighty hand will exalt us at the proper time. He will bring us from suffering to eternal glory. So, we can humble ourselves under his mighty hand.

But how do we humble ourselves under God's hand? Verse 7 says by "casting your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." This should be a distinctive mark of a believer. There's so much in our lives to cause anxiety. This pandemic has certainly caused some level of anxiety. But there are unique anxieties we face just because we're Christians. And that's what Peter's addressing. We're slandered and reviled and maligned for our faith. Our faith may result in the loss of relationship or even a job. It could even result, in extreme cases, in the loss of our lives.

Peter's not downplaying these realities. And he's not saying it's wrong to have anxieties or worries (please hear me on that)! He's simply telling us what to do with them. How should we handle the anxiety in our lives? There are many ways a Christian can rightly deal with anxiety in their lives. And those ways may include counseling or medication. But the one fundamental thing, the thing we can't miss, is the fact that we're called to cast our anxieties upon God.

God's not only able and mighty. He also cares for us. His mighty *hand* speaks of his caring presence with us. He loves us. And so, he says scoop up all your anxieties and throw them on me.

But how do we do this? How do we cast our anxieties on God? One way is through prayer. In Philippians 4:6-7 Paul says, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

When you get to be my age, one of the questions you ask your spouse in the morning is, "How did you sleep last night?" Sometimes Maggie will say to me, "I was up all night praying." I know her well enough to know that means she couldn't sleep because she had a lot on her mind. So sometimes, when I'm not being very sensitive, I'll say, "You mean you were up all night worrying." But both are true. She *was* up all night, anxious about the troubles in her life, but mainly other people's lives. *And* she was also up all night praying. And that's exactly what you should do when you're anxious. You should be praying.

³ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

God knows what's causing us anxiety. We don't need to tell him. But even though he knows, he still wants us to throw our anxieties on him. He wants us to unload them on him. And we can do that safely and with confidence, because he cares for us!

We're called to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. And we do that by casting our anxieties on him. So, when we don't cast our anxieties on God, we show our pride. When we don't cast our anxieties on God, we show that we're trying to deal with our problems in our own strength. Or we don't believe God's able and willing to handle our problems in his timing or in his way. That's pride.⁴

If we want to stand firm, then we need to trust God. We need to demonstrate our humble dependence upon him through casting our anxieties on him.

SOBER WATCHFULNESS (V. 8)

Second, if we want to stand firm, we need a sober watchfulness. This is found in verse 8. "Be sober-minded; be watchful."

If we know God will deliver us by his mighty hand. If we know we have a future reality that's greater than our present reality. And if we know that long-term perspective is needed to stand firm, then the one thing we can't do is take our eye off the ball.

We can't have our perspective dulled by spiritual drunkenness (cf. 1 Thess. 5:7-8). The call to sober-mindedness is repeated in 1 Peter. In chapter 1, we see that it's a way to set our hope fully on the grace that's coming (v. 13). It's a way to stay awake and watch for Christ's return.

There's a reason driving drunk is so dangerous. It affects one's ability to respond to the unexpected hazards of the road. It hinders your ability to focus on what's in front of you, what's behind you, what's beside you. And it impairs your vision and alters your decision-making abilities. Driving while intoxicated is dangerous, even deadly.

Living the Christian life while intoxicated by the world is spiritually dangerous. If our vision of our future life in Christ is dim and our sensitivity to that future is dulled, it will affect our ability to respond to the hazards of the Christian life. So, instead of being drunk, we need to be sober and alert to our future glory. That's the thing that will keep us on the road and keep us standing firm.

The other reason we need to be sober and watchful is because our adversary, the devil is on the prowl. Like a lion, he wants to devour us. How does he do this? He wants us to think suffering is our only reality. He wants to take our eyes off our eternal glory, so we'll live in fear. He wants to take our eye off the road so we'll crash and burn. That's what he wants. So, we need to be alert. We need to keep our eye on our eternal glory. And we need to watch out for the devil.

RESIST THE DEVIL (VV. 9-10)

But that's not all. We can't remain passive against the devil. We can't simply watch and play defense. We also have to play offense. As verse 9 says, we also need to resist him. How do we do that?

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary

By standing firm in our faith. When Satan tempts us to despair, what do we do? To quote one of the hymns on the Spotify playlist for today, we must stand on every promise of God's Word.

When Martin Luther felt the devil assaulting him, and even thought the devil was crouching under his bed at night, he'd take his Bible, open it up to the early chapters in Romans, and then hold those pages down below his bed and say, "Read that, Satan! I'm in Christ. I belong to him."⁵

Maybe you're not as dramatic as Martin Luther. But his action is instructive. That's how we stand firm in our faith when Satan tries to discourage us or take our eye off the prize. We remind him that we are secure in Christ. And that reality is stronger than any reality of suffering or sin in our lives!

Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 6. He says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to *stand* against the schemes of the devil" (vv. 10-11). Have you ever noticed what the armor of God contains? It contains the promises of God's Word. In Milton Vincent's book, *A Gospel Primer: For Christians* (which everyone at First Free should read and digest), he says, "the pieces of armor ... are all merely synonyms for the gospel."⁶ The belt of truth is God's Word (v. 14a). The breastplate of righteousness is the justification we have in Christ (v. 14b). The shoes are for the gospel (v. 15). The shield of faith is our faith in the gospel (v. 16). The helmet of salvation is what the gospel has accomplished (v. 17a). The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (v. 17b).

The armor of God has to do with faith in God's promises in God's Word. Promises that ultimately lead to eternal life. Faith in those promises and prayer (v. 18) are how we resist the devil. That's how we stand firm.

We have to know the truth to stand firm. Part of the truth is the reality that *all* Christians suffer now for their faith in the gospel. That's why Peter says in verse 9, we resist the devil, "knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."

But the other part of the truth is the reality that what we're dealing with now is small in comparison with what awaits us in Christ.

And that's what Peter says in verse 10. "And after you have suffered *a little while*, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

The one who called us in Christ is the one who also justified us. And he's the one who will one day glorify us as well (Rom. 8:30). The grace we've received in the past will give way to future grace. And that's what gives us a foundation to stand on in the here and now. Right now, things are not the way they're supposed to be. But God will make all things right. In the future, he'll restore us. Right now, things feel unsure and unstable. In the future, he'll confirm us. Right now, we're weak. In the future, he'll strengthen us. Right now, we're exiles. But in the future, he'll establish us.

This is building language. It speaks of the foundation of a house. And the people of God are now being built into a house (2:4). And that house is being established on the rock.⁷

⁵ Bullmore

⁶ Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer: For Christians*, p. 15

⁷ Jobes

I came across Psalm 68 in my Bible reading on Monday and I've been meditating on it all week. I think it illustrates all we've seen in this passage. I'd like to share it with you in closing.

Psalm 68 describes the mighty hand of God bringing Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, to worship God in the temple. In the middle of that Psalm, David pauses to describe the heart of our delivering God. This is what he says, "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation (*his house*). He settles the solitary (*exiles*) in homes. He leads the prisoners to prosperity" (vv. 5-6)!

God cares for us. He's not only *able* to deliver us. He wants an eternal *relationship* with us. So, he establishes us in his house, as his children. He puts the isolated in homes, his eternal home. And he brings the prisoner to prosperity, our eternal glory.

He will restore us, confirm us, strengthen us, and establish us. This is the true grace of God. Our future glory is a reality! Stand firm in it. And come to know his peace.