

Stand Firm

1 Peter 5:12-14

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 7, 2018

You can go ahead and turn in your Bibles to the book of First Peter. As you're doing that, I've learned that it may not snow in Chilliwack, but it does ice over a lot. It's good to be back. Darren, you actually picked us up from the airport, and when we were driving from Vancouver to about Abbotsford, I fell asleep. I woke up in Chilliwack, and I thought "Whoa. It's like 'Snow-mageddon' got dropped on us while I was gone." But it's good to be back. I'm glad some of it's melting. We actually have a blow-up snowman in our front yard that is buried under the snow, so it's kind of ironic. We can't get our snowman out until the snow melts, so if you want to see a snowman in January, come over to our house. We'll blow it up for you. You can take pictures. All right.

Well, this morning we were finishing up a series called, "The Suffering Church," where we're talking about how the church should handle pain and suffering. We've been in it since the month of April, and it's taken us most of the year. But we're wrapping it up today. I told you before, the church that suffers together, stays together. The church that sticks through the pain and hard times can make it, and that's what I want to see for our church. I want us to make it. I want us to last through the pain and hard times. So even in these early years and months together, I want us to lay a foundation for what's going to come up the road. Also, we're in this series 'cause I want you to remember God is sufficient for you. He's enough to carry you through the storms like we just sang about here a moment ago. You don't need something else.

I was talking with someone from our church the other day who was suffering. He's going through a hard time. He said, "Everyone keeps telling me to be positive. Everyone keeps saying just believe the best, but they don't tell me what to do when the best doesn't happen. And they don't tell me what to do when life isn't positive." This gentleman was telling me, "But the Bible tells me that. It tells me how to handle life when it's bad." That's why we're in this series: to remind you is that God can carry you through those times. That's what He does. That's the kind of God that He is.

As I was preparing for this sermon, I came across a poem that said this. It said,

Comfort me, Lord, and pay my bills. Comfort me, Lord, and cure my ills. Comfort me, Lord, and remove my fears. Comfort me, Lord, and dry my tears. Comfort me, Lord, and increase my wealth. Comfort me, Lord, and preserve my health. Comfort me, Lord, and plead my case. Comfort me, Lord, and enlarge my place. Comfort me, Lord, and tell me "why?" Comfort me, Lord. Set me on high. Comfort me, Lord, and do what I say. And comfort me, Lord, and do it today.

It went on and said this. (This is pretty good). He said,

The Spirit listened as I uttered my mind. He said not a word as I pleaded and pined. And then He spoke to me in the language of conviction and said to me, "Comfort is not comfort in the absence of affliction."

That's pretty good, wasn't it? He's right. Comfort isn't comfort in the absence of affliction. Hope isn't hope in the absence of pain. Sometimes you have to suffer a little bit to learn how to hope. And sometimes you have to be afflicted to find comfort, but when you are, the good news is God is sufficient for you. When you suffer you can know He's enough to get you through it. And that brings us to the book of First Peter.

First Peter, if you remember, was written to people who are in pain. That's the theme of the book. It was written to people who were being afflicted. I've told you before the word suffering occurs 16 times in the book. That's about three times per chapter because that's what Peter keeps hitting on through the whole book is the topic of suffering.

Just so you can see this, if you look at the first verse of the letter, Peter starts off this way, chapter one, verse one says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ..." The word for alien there is *parepidēmos* in Greek. It means "outsider" or "someone who doesn't belong."

We've said before that several centuries before this letter was written, the Babylonians and Persians captured the ancient world and dispersed the people everywhere, making everybody aliens. They took over Rome and scattered the Romans to Egypt. They took over Egypt and scattered the Egyptians to Rome so nobody would revolt and made them all instant outsiders. But the word *parepidēmos* here could actually refer to more than this. You don't have to turn there, but Acts chapter two says that when Peter gave his sermon at Pentecost, and 3,000 people believed, it says that among those who believed, were residents of "... Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia," - these places mentioned in verse 1 Peter 1:1. The idea is that they heard Peter's sermon. They got saved, went home and became aliens that way. And now Peter's writing a letter back to those people that heard him preach, probably decades ago. They trusted in Christ. They believed in a crucified Messiah, which was a revolting idea at the time. They went back home, told their family and friends about it and were instantly ostracized.

Peter writes to them reminding them God can comfort them through it. He's enough for them. You can see this throughout the letter. Just to walk you through it very quickly, chapter one, verse five says that these people had been protected by the power of God. If you think about it, the power of God is the strongest thing in universe. There's nothing greater than the power of God. This is the power that created the world. This is the power that raises the dead. This is the power that upholds everything, and Peter says you are protected by that.

Chapter two says that'll protect you in the government, in the workplace and the home. He starts laying it out in certain areas of life. With the king and your boss and your spouse, God will protect you with that power.

Chapter three, verse 13 says, on account of this, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" Some say that's the highlight of the letter. That's what it's all about. Who's

going to harm you if you're protected by God? Then in chapters four and five, he applies this to our lives. I've told you before that there are five "therefores" in chapters four and five of First Peter. Because this is how Peter closes the book out with a "therefore" or a summary, an application of what he has said.

Chris just read chapter five to you, so I won't read it here. But if you notice, Peter starts off in chapter five, verse one with "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you," which sounds strange because what do elders have to do with all this other stuff? Well, elders are one way God protects you. Your leaders are one way He watches over you and keeps you from harm. If they do their job, if they shepherd you, like the passage says they should, elders can offer you a defense.

Then Peter shifts gears for a minute and mentions in verse five of chapter five, "All of you." In other words, "Now, this is a command for everybody." The rest of this chapter's for all of us. He says, "Clothe yourselves with humility." That's another application. He says cast "... all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." Verse eight, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Resist the devil." And finally, in verse 12, this is the last application of the book, this is how Peter closes it out, "Stand firm in it," he says.

He says, "This is the true grace of God" (meaning everything he just said so far in the book). We'll talk about that in a moment. "... This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!" In other words, don't be wishy-washy. Don't back down. Don't cave into pressure. I don't have to tell you it's easy to cave into pressure. When you feel like an alien already, when you feel like you don't belong, and life starts getting harder and harder, it's very easy just to throw your hands up and say, "I'm done with this Christianity thing."

You guys know what it's like. You go visit your family over the holidays, and they say, "Why won't you drink with us? Why won't you party and get drunk with us?" And you say, "Well, I'm just a good person." Really? Is that what you believe? You believe you're a good person? No. You don't believe that. You're caving into the pressure. You don't want to tell them what you really believe. Or you come back from the holidays, and you go to work, and they say, "Why don't you tell dirty jokes with us? Why don't you cuss and laugh and carry on?" And you say, "Well, I'm just not into that sorta thing." Well, actually, you are into that sorta thing. You are into flesh. You are into sin, but Jesus Christ has changed you. He's made you different, but you don't want to say that either because that'll get you in all sorts of trouble at work. That's the thing Peter's talking about here. You need to stand. You need to speak up about that sorta thing.

We could look at this another way, tying it into the theme of the letter. When you suffer, there's a temptation to say, "Does God still love me? Does He even care? Is He still protecting me?" Peter says you need to stand firm then, too.

I grew up in Tennessee, the home of blues music and sad country songs. The joke is every time I'm in a restaurant I just want to eat and eat and eat 'cause I get depressed listening to the music on the radio. "Could you turn that off? I'm gaining weight?" The joke is that if you rewind a country song, the singer will get his dog back, his truck back, and his trailer back, maybe even his wife. I have more country jokes. The fun thing about living in the south growing up is you

can just change the name of the state and use the same joke. So if you're in Georgia or Tennessee or Kentucky, it's all the same joke. It was a bleak outlook on life.

In fact, I remember as a kid watching a show called "Hee-Haw" with my grandparents. Does anybody remember "Hee-Haw?" They had that in Canada? Are you kidding me? Aw, man. I'm really excited about that. We'll talk. We'll talk afterwards. It was a country show that took place in a corn patch. It had a theme song (or one of the songs) that said, "Gloom, despair and agony on me. Deep, dark depression, excessive misery. If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all. Gloom, despair and agony on me." Peter says you shouldn't think that way as a Christian. You need to stand, and you need to stand firm in the hope that you have.

It's been said you don't want to be saved everywhere, but on your face. You can smile. God's watching out for you. You don't have anything to worry about. It's also been said those who kneel before God can stand before anything. You need to learn how to kneel. That's a major lesson in this book. You need to learn how to bow, so you can stand. There's also a saying of those who don't stand for something will fall for anything. That's right, too. You have two choices in the Christian life: you can stand, or you can fall. Peter says rest on God and you'll stand.

Maybe another way to say this is you need to have a back bone in the Christian life. In his book on holiness, J.C. Ryle says some Christians never grow a back bone. They have what he calls a jellyfish condition of the soul. They're incapable of discerning truth from error. They're carried away by everything. They're boneless, nerveless. He says, "Catholicism or Protestantism, atonement or no atonement, Holy Ghost or no Holy Ghost," he says, "They swallow it all like a jellyfish." The point of this book is you can't do that. You've got to have some convictions. You have to learn how to stand.

I don't know if you ever heard the name Thomas Cranmer before, but Thomas Cranmer was the Archbishop of Canterbury in England. In the 16th century, he was one of the leading figures of the Reformation in that country, until the Catholic Queen Mary took the throne. And she threw Thomas Cranmer in prison. When that didn't change him, she tried another approach. She began to flatter him and give him money and praise and make his life real comfortable and easy. That did it. Thomas Cranmer, as a result of that, signed a document denying everything he stood for in the Reformation. The point of this book is that you need to stand whether life is comfortable or not. You need to stand up to the pressure when life is hard or easy. You can't be wishy-washy. You can't be willy-nilly. You can't go back and forth.

2 Corinthians 4:2 says, "It is required of stewards that they be found faithful." Paul says stewards don't have to have a lot of things. They don't have to be handsome or pretty. They don't have to be smart or rich. They don't have to be popular, but they do have to be faithful. If you want to please God, you have to be trustworthy. Revelation 2:10-11 says, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." In other words, this is how you get the crown. This is how you get into heaven. Be faithful. Persevere until the end. In James 1:12 says, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for he will receive the crown of life." Hebrews 10:23 says, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering." My favorite one of these is Luke 9:62. "Jesus says, 'No one, who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of

God." That's an interesting one because it means you're not fit for service in the kingdom, if you look back to world. Jesus says you're not fit to serve me, if you look at the sin around you and say, "I want to go back to that." If you do, He says your plow will be crooked. Your field won't be straight. You need to look to Christ and stand.

That leads us to our passage for this morning. If you're taking notes, in 1 Peter 5:12-14, to close this letter out, Peter gives us several ways to stand. As he's finishing this up, drawing it to a close and putting a nice neat ribbon on it, he says you need to be faithful. You need to stand, and he gives several ways to do that. Since God is protecting you, since He's watching out for you and keeping you from harm, since He is enough, you can stand. And here's some ways to do that. The first one is this: you need to stand firm in the truth. That's how he starts this off here. You need to stand firm in the truth.

If you think about it, we live in a world that stands on lies. It stands on things that are ridiculous. Just believe the best and it will all work out for you. I don't know what world you live in, but I don't live in that world. There are times when bad things happen whether you believe the best or not, right? I'm not trying to be pessimistic here, but it's just fact. "Just be positive, and it'll all be okay in the end." Well, maybe it will and maybe it won't. "Just take this pill, and it'll solve all your problems." Well, no, it won't. You can take the pill, and you can zonk out, but when you wake up, the problems will still be there. See, that's how the world stands on those things. Peter says you need to stand on something greater as a Christian.

He says it this way in verse 12. He says, if you read along here, he says, "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother for so I regard him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it." As Peter is drawing this to a close, he says, "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him) I have written you ..." Silvanus is the Greek word *Silouanos*, which is spelled different ways in your English Bible. One of them is Silvanus, what you see here. Another one is the name Silas. If you remember the name Silas from the book of Acts, that's this guy here. He's mentioned 13 times between Acts 15 through Acts chapter 18. He was very important guy in the early church. He had a lot of responsibilities. He is mentioned in Second Corinthians and First and Second Thessalonians. 2 Corinthians 1:19 says he helped plant the church there. So he was a church planter in Corinth, which was no small thing to do.

Acts 15:22 says that this guy carried the letter from the Jerusalem counsel to the churches, which was another huge responsibility. Peter mentions him here to say, "I have written to you through him", meaning he transcribed the letter. Peter said it out loud and Silvanus wrote it down. There's been some discussion as to why he would've done that. Paul had a lot of his letters transcribed this way. Some discussion is that Peter might not have been able to read. A lot of people back then couldn't read and write. He might have said this out loud and Silvanus wrote it down. This could also mean, it probably also does mean, that Silvanus delivered the letter. He was the messenger. Before, we've talked about all those areas in chapter 1:1: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia were providences within the territory of Asia Minor, which is an area of about 300,000 square miles. And you can imagine trying to travel over the scope of British Columbia. It's 300,000 square miles on foot or on horseback. It'd take you months, maybe years. Peter may not have had that kind of time, so he sent Silvanus to deliver the letter.

You can also add to this that letters were very expensive to write back then. It could have costed \$100 or more, a couple hundred dollars maybe to write a letter like this. So this was big deal.

In verse 12 he says Silvanus delivers this letter, "... to exhort and testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it." What's the purpose of the letter: to exhort and testify; to encourage you and to remind you that this is the truth.

Now that phrase "True grace of God" is a reference to all he said in this letter, all he's written about, so things we just talked about. It's a reference to 1 Peter 1:5. You're "protected by the power of God." It's in reference to 1 Peter 1:2, which says you are chosen, "according to the foreknowledge of God...".

If you think about it, that idea of being chosen by God means that's the most stable thing in the universe. Nothing affects God's choice. God never makes mistakes. God doesn't choose you and then in a couple years say, "Boy, this guy is just really annoying. I'm done with him." It doesn't work that way. Peter says you can stand on that. You can rest on the sovereign choice of God. It's a reference to 1 Peter 2:9, which says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's own possession." In other words, you belong to God, and nothing can touch you. You're His property. And He has said, He has put a fragile sticker on you in the sense that nothing can hurt you. 1 Peter 3:12. "For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, His ears are attentive to their plea." 4:19, "God is a faithful Creator." The point is that all of this is true, and you can stand in it. You can build your life on the things mentioned in this letter. The world can't do that.

Unbelievers don't have a source of truth like this. That's why they're all over the place with this. They're back and forth and wishy-washy. I'm a pretty young man now, and I can't tell how many times I've seen the world change its mind. One day they say coffee's bad for you, the next day they say coffee's good for you. One day they say take this drug, and you'll feel better, the next day it's another drug and another drug. One day they say do this diet, and then do this one and then that one. I remember when carbohydrates were bad. Now carbohydrates were good. I'm so confused. I don't know what to eat anymore. Follow this exercise routine. Read this book. Listen to this song. Go to this conference, and it'll fix all your problems, and you'll have a wonderful life. And when it doesn't do that, you got to go find something else. It's like living on a roller coaster.

I was walking through the San Francisco airport the other day, and I saw a bathroom sign that said, "For people of all genders." I thought some people find their identity in that. That's everything. That's who they are. Another 30 or 40 years, it'll change to something else. Saw another sign that said, "Yoga Room." I thought I bet that was the prayer room 50 years ago in the airport. See, that's what the world turns to, to fix their problems. And Peter says you have a better way to live. You have something more solid to stand on. You have the true grace of God and you can stand on it not matter what comes.

I was reading a story this week about a family in Texas who survived a tornado by tying themselves to a tree. They were caught outside, and they couldn't find shelter in the storm. The

wind was blowing. It was howling, and stuff was flying everywhere. They did the best thing they could do. They tied themselves to the most stable thing; to a tree. This was actually in a devotional. The devotional book said as a Christian, you have something even more stable than that to get you through the storms of life. You have the word of God. And it survived millions of storms, and it'll survive a million more. It's been here for a thousand years. It'll be here for a thousand more.

I remember when Voltaire, the atheist, said Christianity will be gone within a generation of his lifetime. The ironic thing about it is, within a generation of his lifetime, a Bible company bought his old house and sold Bibles out of it. You can stand on that.

Let me say this another way. There's a certain stability that comes with the Christian life. There's a certain consistency. I don't know if you've been around people who buy into all this stuff I just mentioned, but they're not very stable. They're up and down like a roller coaster. One day they found the greatest thing, and they're on cloud nine. The next day, it doesn't work, and they're down in the pits. One day they're on top of the world 'cause they're on the newest diet, or whatever. The next day, they're just at rock bottom. Christians, we don't have to live that way. We can tie ourselves to something stable, "the true grace of God." Amy Carmichael said, "Blessed are the single minded for they shall enjoy much peace." She said, "If you refuse to be hurried and pressed, if you stay your soul on God, nothing can keep you from joy in Him." Warren Wiersbe said, "Real contentment must come from within. You and I can't change the world around us, but we can change the world within us." And we do it by standing on the Bible. We do it by standing firm on the truth."

That leads us to the next way to stand firm in your suffering. You need to stand firm in love. You need to stand firm in the truth and be stable and consistent with that. You need to be faithful. The person you are today, people should see you be that way tomorrow and the next day and the next day. You should be the same person at home that you are at work that you are here in church. One more thought on that. The word integrity ... You guys know the word integrity. It comes from the word integer. It's a mathematical term. It means "whole number". You should be a whole person, because you live by the truth. But in doing so, you also need to stand firm in love. That's the second way to stand firm here. Stand firm in the love in others. It's a major theme in this letter.

Over and over again, Peter reminds us we're not alone in our suffering. There are people who love us, that care about us, which is important because suffering can feel very lonely. If you've suffered lately, you know it can feel like nobody cares, but they do, Peter says. He says in verse 12, he says,

Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love.

If you notice, Peter mentions several people who love you here. The first one is "She who is in Babylon," which is another way of saying the church in Rome. That's what we think anyway.

The church was often referred to as a "she" in the New Testament and Babylon was a code name for any city that persecuted the church. The city of Rome was the largest at the time, so a lot of people think this is what he's referring to here. Peter was in Rome as he wrote this letter. You can add to this both Eusebius and Jerome, ancient church historians, say Peter lived in Rome for the final 25 years of his life. And since the church there was under persecution, he wanted to hide his location. He didn't want people to know where he was, so he called it Babylon. If you look in the book of Revelation, you'll see the name Babylon mentioned a lot there as well for a city that persecutes the church. It's a code name.

Then he mentions Mark, or my son, Mark. This "son in the faith" is the idea here. This is in reference to the man who wrote the Gospel of Mark. History tells us he was a companion of Peter in his later years. In fact, he wrote the Gospel of Mark with Peter's help. The two of them sat down together and wrote out the story of Jesus.

Then he says, "Greet one another with a kiss of love." Or we might say a hug of love, a handshake of love. I don't want you guys to get the wrong idea walking out of here. The Eastern people in Peter's day were very affectionate, and they would often kiss instead of hugging. Peter tells them to do that here. Show your affection to one another, he says. That tradition died out some time in the second and third century, which I'm actually glad for. I like you guys, but I like my space, too. You know a little space; a handshake's good – a good distance. That way if you spit when you talk, there's an opportunity for it not to hit someone.

One commentary I read said that there was an ancient pastor who complained that some people just filled the air with kissing in church, so it bothered him. And, for obvious reasons, that faded off over time. But the point is, you need to love one another. You need to show each other you're not alone. You've got Silvanus. You've got Mark. You've got the church in Rome. You've got your own church, so stand firm in that. Lean on one another for support. Tie yourself to each other, and you'll get through it.

I was doing some research on suffering this week, and I came across an article that said one of the best ways to get through suffering is with the help of others. Now don't do it alone. You can be alone for a while, but don't stay that way, because it'll hurt you in the end. You see this with the elderly. One reason nursing homes are so popular is because they keep people from being alone. I'm listening to this discussion with my parents and grandparents about putting them in assisted living centers, nursing homes. One benefit of that is it keeps people from being alone. You see the same thing with hospitals and rehab centers. You see it in support groups. People suffer best in groups. They do it best together. Peter says you need to remember that.

Tying this into chapter five, if you look in 1 Peter 5:8, Peter describes Satan as "a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." And if you know anything about lions, they eat you when you're all alone. Lions don't attack a herd. They pick an animal off the herd and then they get it by itself and kill it. I've heard it said that Satan is a coward. He likes to attack you when you're vulnerable, so don't let him do that. Don't stay alone.

You tie this to another passage, 1 Peter 5:6. He says, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God..." ... "Say that you need some help" is the idea. You can't do it alone. I

can't tell you how many times I've gone through the week feeling sorry for myself, indulging in self-pity, feeling like I had a bad day until I come in here and talk to you. And I say, "Well, I don't have it that bad." You guys humble me that way. You make me repent of my pride. Or I have a tough week, and I'm wrestling with some sin or something, and I come in here, and I remember I don't want to let you guys down. I don't want to drag Christ's name through mud and drag your name through the mud, and it humbles me that way. That's what Peter's talking about here.

I mentioned Thomas Cranmer to you a moment ago and how he compromised and denied everything in the Reformation. But what you may not know about his story, is it's actually a good ending to the story. It is a good ending. I say it's a good ending, but I'm going to tell you this part. It's sad. After he denied the Reformation, the Catholic Church decided to burn him anyway, because he was a heretic. They said he wasn't fit to live. They put him on trial. And at his trial, he said, "As my right hand wrongly signed that document, which I do not believe, so my right hand will be the first thing I put in the fire." They took him to Oxford Street. The story about a lot of the English Reformers is that they were educated at Cambridge, and they were burned at Oxford. They took him to Oxford Street to burn him. And as the flames went higher and higher, Thomas Cranmer stuck his right hand into the fire. And he said over and over again, "This unworthy right hand. This unworthy right hand. This unworthy right hand." It was said that that event made more of an impression on the church in England than anything Thomas Cranmer did before. People everywhere said, "If he could stand up like that, I can stand up, too." They said, "If he could suffer like that after he failed, after he messed up, I can suffer like that, too." They stood firm in his love. That's what Peter is saying. You need each other. You need other believers watching out for you. You need other believers caring for you. You need to have the accountability of not wanting to let someone else down. You need people to correct you when you're out of line.

It was said when the ancient Africans converted to Christianity, they would often find a spot in the field to pray. And over time the spot got so worn down with use that they could tell when someone stopped praying. They could look at your path and just see, "Hey, he hasn't prayed in a while." They would go up to one another very gently, and they would say, "Brother, the grass grows on your path." Friends, we all need someone to tell us from time to time, "Brother, the grass grows on your path." We need someone to say, "You haven't been in church for a while. You haven't been in prayer. You haven't been reading your Scriptures. Is everything okay? Is everything all right?" We need to stand firm in the love of others. We don't have to kiss each other like the early church did. That was a cultural thing, but we do have to love each other.

You guys do a great job of this by the way. You're a very loving church. I think it's 'cause you stand on the truth. I think the two go together, and you do a wonderful job. Just excel still more.

That leads to a final way to stand firm. I think this is my favorite one. Peter says stand firm in the truth. He goes on to say, stand firm in love. Love one another; don't do it all alone. And finally, he finishes the First Peter this way. He says stand firm in peace. Stand firm in peace. I think this is a great way to finish a letter on suffering, because as you know suffering is not a very peaceful thing. It can be very unsettling. It reeks havoc on your nerves. You're wondering when's it going to end. How bad is it going to be? What's it going to cost me? All those questions. I've talked

with people that got sick, and they couldn't go to work. And they're wondering "How's this going to impact our finances? How's this going to impact the future?" Peter says, in verse 14, after talking this whole letter about suffering, he says this. He says, "Peace be to you all who are in Christ."

It's interesting. He actually started the letter off this way in chapter 1:2 by saying, "May grace in peace be yours in the fullest measure." And now he ends with, "Peace be to you all who are in Christ." He begins and ends with peace; fullest peace in the beginning, peace to everyone at the end. He says "Remember, God is in control. Remember, He is powerful. Remember, He's looking out for you, and be at peace." As the song says, "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me." Or Thomas Watson says, "Where there is storm without, God can make peace within. When the world creates trouble, He can create rest."

That brings us back to where we started all this, friends. God is sufficient for you. He's enough to give you peace. You don't need positive thinking. You don't need pills. You don't need a new diet. You don't need yoga or another book or another conference or another song, whatever it is. You just need Him. He will give you rest.

A major snowstorm is hitting the US right now, and they say that in the middle of every storm is an eye where all is at rest. God is the eye of the storm. When the world is going crazy all around you, you can rest in Him and be at peace.

Next week, we're going to have our first Vision Sunday as a church. This is something new for us. We've never done this before, but when I was at the Grace Advanced Academy this summer, they asked us to put together a vision statement for Grace Fellowship Church; a projection of what we would like the church to be down the road. What I want to do next week is walk through that together, and talk about it. We won't get to all of it, but as we begin the new year, I want to talk to you some about where we're heading and where we want to go as a church.

I've told you before that the church is like a bus. Half the bus always says it's too hot. Half the bus always says it's too cold, but we stay on the bus 'cause we're all going there together. Next week, I want to talk to you about where we're going together as a church. I don't mean that this side's the hot side of the church, and this side's the cold side of the church. It's just a big mixture.

I also want to talk to you about some the things we did last year. Our church office is putting together a PowerPoint of things we did in 2017, so I think you'll like to see that. We really had a good year of ministry in the Lord.

And the week after that, we're going to start the new series on the book of Romans. But for now, let's just wrap this up by saying God can give you peace. He's enough for you.

The great department store owner, J.C. Penny, was once asked about the secret to his success. He said, "My success comes from two things: adversity and Jesus." He says, "Jesus is the one who got me through the adversity." Can you say that this morning? Do you believe that Jesus can get you through the adversity? Do you believe He can get you through the storm? If you're a believer

in Christ, He went to the cross for you. He suffered and died for you, and He can get you through whatever you're going through today. He is enough.

Just before His death, another famous person in history, John Newton said, "I'm an old man now and although my memory is failing, I remember two things very clearly: That I'm a great sinner and Christ is a great savior." Can you say that? Do you see Him as a great savior? He certainly is, and you can trust Him today. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank You so much for the peace that You give us in our hearts; the peace that transcends all understanding; the peace that is greater than anything this world could ever produce; the peace that's not built on circumstances. That peace that doesn't change when life is up or down or sideways. Father, thank You for a peace like that.

I pray for my friends here who are in Christ that they would rejoice in that. That they would see it as a supernatural evidence of Your work in their lives; that they can have peace in the hard times. For those here this morning, who do not know Christ and their life is not peaceful, and their life is topsy-turvy and sideways and all of that, Lord, I pray that you would draw them to the Savior. Draw them to the eye of the storm. Let them know You are merciful, and You are gracious, and You love to save sinners. I pray, Lord, that you would save some here this morning.

Father, thank You for this time. May You be honored as we've gone through Your word. Thank You for the book of First Peter. Thank You for the Scriptures that were written thousands of years ago, but for all intents and purposes, they could've been written yesterday. For the word of God it sharper than any two-edged sword. Lord, we rejoice in that. We thank You for it. May it not return void this morning and may You be glorified. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.