

Three Words of Comfort. 1 Peter 5:6-14

Through many trials

“It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God” Paul said to the converts from his first missionary journey in Asia [Acts 14:23], and the congregations Peter is writing to were experiencing the truth of that.

They were suffering grief in various trials [1:6] and were experiencing what Peter called the fiery ordeal [4:12], the testing of suffering for keeping on doing God’s good will, suffering for keeping on being faithful to Christ in word and deed, confession and lifestyle in a world where they were resident aliens, people whose home is the new heaven and earth.

[1 Peter 1: 6 You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials

1 Peter 4: 12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. [NIV]]

Peter has been encouraging them to persevere in faithfulness to Jesus, to persevere joyfully

But it is hard to persevere in suffering if you think it is purposeless, or feel you are forgotten in your suffering.

It is hard to face the challenge of suffering for faithfulness if you consider your resources inadequate, fear you will be overwhelmed;

hard to endure on the path of suffering if you think harm done is irreversible, the wounds, however worthily received, will never be healed

Believers today know that for ourselves for we also suffer grief in various trials, have our faith tested by sickness, grief, loss of work, the failure of relationships, by the uncertainties and pressures of a world not as it should be

And sharing the faith of Peter’s first hearers, being like them resident foreigners and sojourners because we have placed our hope in Jesus, we also share in suffering for being faithful to Christ in word and deed, confession and lifestyle, suffering for doing good – whether it is the criticism of our peers or families for not sharing the same values and pleasures as them, the suspicion of a society that thinks Christian morality prevents human flourishing, the pressures of workplaces that seek to promote self realisation through sexual freedom, or worship greed.

We know it is hard to persevere in suffering if you think it is purposeless, or feel you are forgotten in your suffering, if you consider your resources inadequate, fear you will be overwhelmed, if you think harm is irreversible, the wounds, however worthily received, will never be healed

So we need, just as Peter’s first readers needed, to hear these words of comfort God caused Peter to write at the end of His letter

Words that assure us of God’s rule and care – in all the circumstances of our life

Of the adequacy of faith to keep us safe in the struggle

And of the commitment of God to heal all our wounds

These are words for us, if we are believers in the Lord Jesus

He cares for you

1 Peter 5: All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because

***God resists the proud
but gives grace to the humble.***

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

Peter has reminded them from Proverbs 3:34 of what every believer knows to be true “That God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble”

We are convinced of its truth because we have seen it proved true in the events of the gospel, in the life of our Lord Jesus who humbled Himself to death on the cross and was exalted over all rule and power and authority, over all

And we know it to be true because of our experience of believing the gospel. Humbling ourselves to accept the Gospel’s verdict on us – that we are sinners, rebels against God who deserve His just wrath, and turning back to God, repenting – saying it is right that the Lord Jesus, God’s King, rules our life, right that He is the boss of our lives, we have found grace, the grace that forgives and gives us new life

Believers know God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble

So now Peter writes to teach those first believers and us how to live through our experience, our experience of suffering grief in various trials, of suffering for doing good, so that we share in the exaltation grace brings to the humble, share in the Kingdom God gives to the poor in Spirit.

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time,

What is it to humble yourself under the mighty hand of the God who gives grace to the humble?

It is to say God is God, the Creator, and we, creatures, are not

And He knows best

He knows best how to fulfil His promises to His people

He knows best how to bring His good news to the ends of the earth

He knows best how to enact His judgments

He knows best how to glorify His Son

If He wills this time to be a time of persecution – He knows best

If He wills this time to be a time of pandemic – however disruptive to our plans and prosperity – He knows what He is doing

To humble yourself under God’s mighty hand is to say with Job in His suffering, when the LORD revealed Himself to Job but gave him no explanation for the suffering he had undergone

Job 42: Then Job replied to the LORD:

² *"I know that you can do all things;
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.*

³ *You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.*

⁴ *"You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.'*

⁵ *My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.*

⁶ *Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes."*[NIV]

He acknowledged God's greatness, and His smallness

God's knowledge, and his ignorance

To humble ourselves under God's mighty hand is not fatalism or the resignation of Stoicism to the unthinking, uncaring forces that control the universe.

It is not just saying, that's the way things are and I just have to accept that.

This is under God's mighty hand, humbling yourself under the God who is acting in power to save you.

God's mighty hand is an Old Testament phrase found in accounts of the Exodus. It is associated with God's rescue of His people from Egypt

Exodus 3:¹⁹ "However, I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go, even under force from a strong [mighty] hand.

Deuteronomy 5:¹⁵ Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there with a strong [mighty] hand and an outstretched arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

[Ex. 32:11, Deut. 4:34, 6:21, 7:8, 19, 9:26, 11:2, 26:8]

God's mighty hand speaks of the might by which God works His saving purpose in the world and defeats His enemies.

To humble ourselves under God's mighty hand is personal and relational, an expression of trust in our saving God.

It is to say of our suffering "That is the way my mighty God has ordered things for my good, to prosper His saving purpose in my life."

To humble ourselves under God's mighty hand is to accept that our sufferings have a good purpose, a purpose already spoken of in 1 Peter

1 Peter 1:⁶ You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials ⁷ so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4: ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And,

*"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"*

That they are purifying our faith, equipping us to be a people who honour God with our trust, to be a people who will rejoice and share in praise, glory and honour when our Lord is revealed

Believers in the gospel should be already prepared to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, to acknowledge our God is wiser and more powerful than we can imagine, that even when things look dark and difficult He is doing all things well.

We begin the Christian life saying God has saved us through the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus, that He has defeated all His foes by that shameful humiliation, restored moral order in the universe by that unjust execution, brought eternal life through that cruel death

And we know that vindicating His greatness, showing He is the only God and Saviour, in that way would never have occurred to us.

We would all be with Peter saying to the Lord Jesus when he began speaking of His crucifixion "Oh no Lord! this will never happen to you."

We start the Christian life confessing God is so much wiser, so much mightier, so much better than us

And confessing that the Lord came to His exaltation by humbling Himself, saying to the Father 'Not my will, but yours be done.'

It should be natural for believers in Jesus to humble ourselves under the mighty saving hand of our God

And avoid its opposite

The pride that says, or thinks, God should run the universe to suit me, or at least consult me or explain himself to me if He is going to do anything I may not like, that I might find difficult or hard.

The pride that thinks that if God is to have any place in my life it is to partner with me in achieving the best life for me, of which I will be the judge.

That if I do my bit, fulfill my obligations under the partnership – my religious works, go to church, give to the poor, read my bible – He has to do His bit and keep me safe and happy

And if He doesn't I have a right to be angry with Him, to criticise the way He runs things – especially the way people who are not as good as me seem to have so much better a life, grumble against His ordering of the affairs of my life

We may not put it as crudely, or as clearly, as that

But that pride is deep seated, lurking in the shadows of our hearts, just waiting its opportunity

But hasn't one of the challenges of the pandemic for some of us been to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand as it exposed our pride?

I remember in 2020, the first lockdown, being so angry that I couldn't do what I wanted, go where I wanted, speak face to face with whom I wanted, that people would be making rules that so interfered with what I wanted to do – without even consulting me

And I don't think I have been the only person to have to deal with anger or been tempted to criticize and complain.

And, of course, I could say it wasn't directed against God but against the government, or the epidemiologists, or the vaccinated, the compliant, the unvaccinated – the list goes on

And I could clothe my anger and grumbling in the language of rights, or science, or freedom

But at its heart what was being exposed was my sense of entitlement. That life should be organised the way I thought it should be, and that at its core was lack of trust in God.

Unless my God is some feeble idol I have to confess

God is in charge of governments and their decisions

God is in charge of the movement of the virus

God is in charge of the development of vaccines

And God knows what He is doing, and He won't fail of His promise to work this, even decisions I might disagree with, for the good of His people

And recognising that, humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God should free us from that anger that can destroy relationships, that grumbling that can never encourage, free us to love people struggling with great and new challenges, encourage imperfect people trying to do their best, to pray for those we disagree with.

If you are still struggling with anger

If you find yourself prone to grumbling

That is your opportunity to work out whether you really trust the sovereign God, have humbled yourself under His mighty hand

An opportunity to repent not just of anger and grumbling, but of the pride that drives them

But Peter focuses on one particular expression of our humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

Casting is a word that could be used for tossing your clothes onto a bed.

We are to toss all our cares, our anxieties, onto God

They are off us, and onto Him – and it is all our cares

Those in Peter's day who professed in a pagan society faith in Christ had many cares, many things to be concerned about

Loss of status and respect, loss of family, loss of friends, loss of livelihood, even loss of life.

And we have many cares from this pandemic

For our children – the development and education

For our economy and work

For the future of our society, its freedoms and peace

Whether we will have enough strength to keep adapting, or energy to re-engage

Whether people's faith will withstand the trial

Whether we will regain momentum in our ministries

Many cares

And all are to be cast on our God.

That is saying we depend on our God

A God who is almighty

A God for whom nothing is too hard

A God who orders the events of our lives

A God who cares

To not do that, to not cast our cares on God, to keep on nursing our anxieties and feeding our fears, can be, again, a form of pride

The pride that thinks everything depends on us,

And thinking that is destructive

It shifts the focus from being God's child by trusting Him with our cares and obeying His word

To 'how can I find a solution to my problem myself' and opens the door to what Scripture calls being wise in our own eyes, setting aside God's commands to do what we think best.

Someone is in a loveless marriage, are struggling within it with their desires – and the way of trusting God, casting their cares on Him, seems too long or too hard – so they find release for their desires in watching porn, and justify it to themselves as necessary – there was no other way – despite all the harm it does to those involved in making it, to their relationship, to themselves in its secrecy and addictive nature

Someone has an obligation they cannot meet – so they lie about it – little lies "Sorry, I never received the email', or big lies like 'No one will ever miss this money'

Or they are worried about the direction of society – so they justify disobedience to government when Scripture commands it

But we are trust God and cast all our cares on Him, not think it all depends on us, not be tempted to be wise in our own eyes

Because He cares for you.

To know the truth of this statement for yourself, to be convinced of it – that is worth everything.

Believer in Jesus – should not leave here this morning without being convinced of it

Not yet a believer – you might be unsettled by the baldness of that statement – that the living almighty God cares for the believers you know

Perhaps even offended by the audacity of people saying God knows them individually and cared for them

Because it is an extraordinary thing to say, to believe

It seems so implausible

You and I are one amongst billions. We are insignificant. The world didn't stop to celebrate when we were born, and it won't notice our passing

You and I are sinners, rebels against God, people who, until we repented and believed, were doing our best to ignore God, keep Him out of our lives. As some of you sadly know, it is hard to keep caring about someone who makes it clear to you that they wish you were dead.

How could we think God could care for us?

And sometimes the experiences of our lives makes us wonder if God does care for us

Peter writes his letter to address the grief and suffering believers were experiencing.

So how could we think God cares for us?

Not because of our achievements, our goodness, our wisdom, our family

There is only one answer – because the gospel tells us so, and the Spirit assures us so.

In the gospel we learn that God so loved us He gave His Son for us, gave His Son for us while we were still sinners – a demonstration of His love that is beyond comparison

Through the gospel the Lord Jesus calls us individually, by name John 10:1-6

Believing the gospel the Lord Jesus gives us His Spirit, the Spirit through whom God pours His love into our hearts [Romans 5:5-8]

And the gospel gives us an unsurpassed hope that puts our sufferings in context and makes them purposeful

To believe the gospel is to know what you could never dare to believe or claim – the living almighty creator God, because He is gracious, loving in Himself – cares for you

That is gospel 101

But brothers and sisters, aren't there times when we struggle to believe it

When we let remembrance of old sins make us doubt God could love us

When the weakness of our flesh tells us this is all too hard

When our pride demands we be treated differently

And we rob ourselves of joy and thankfulness and confident hope

But we say this letter is the word of God

He says He cares for you – that you can face life, with all its trials, knowing He cares for you

Not what you might become, but you as you are

And when you are struggling with that – go back to the gospel

Read of Jesus – who never turned any away, who welcomed the needy and the insignificant, who would have time for you

Read of His death – and that He said He was giving His life as a ransom for many, to free us from the penalty our sin deserved

Read of how He convinced His followers He was alive

Read of their witness to Him, their sharing of the promise of new life

And if you are a believer come and remember Him in the way He commanded – taking the symbol of His death, the bread and the cup, as you hear Him say this was for you

And

Repent of doubting His forgiveness

Repent of doubting His love and good purpose for you, He who has given Himself for you

Repent of your pride, that could never have approved the cross

And let your soul rejoice and know the comfort of what God says to each believer in Jesus

He cares for you

Then show it

Humbling yourself

Casting your cares on Him

Believer, if you don't hear anything else this morning, hear this – He cares for you

And if that is where you want to stop listening just to let that sink in, process what that means for the way you think about and respond to what you are going through at the moment – that is fine, but there is more comfort to come

And if you are not yet a believer – you need to work out if the gospel is true

If Jesus really is God's Son, who died to save sinners, and who has been raised to life and rule

Who came in love to give life and light to people like you and I in the darkness and death of sin

For it is a much better story than the secular worlds

Where you are just a piece of highly evolved primordial slime, brought into being without thought or purpose, living out your brief life in an uncaring, unseeing universe, with all you are able to look forward to is your elements being recycled

Come and talk, or read a gospel, or read through a gospel with Chris in Christianity explored

But there is more, as Peter goes on to assure us that our faith in the Lord Jesus is enough for safety in our struggle

Faith is enough.

1 Peter 5: ⁸ Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

Our thinking can be clouded by suffering, distorted by our fears

And sometimes the pleasures and successes we have can make us complacent

But we are to be sober minded – clear thinking, and alert – for we have an active and malicious enemy who seeks to exploit confusion and complacency – the devil.

Often we only consider our lives in terms of the material, what we can know with our senses, the here and now. Here is a reminder that our believing in the Lord Jesus is part of a much bigger struggle that involves the whole creation and the whole of human history.

And Scripture teaches that behind the malice of individuals the devil can be at work, as we see with Judas' betrayal of Jesus; that behind calamities the devil can be at work, as we see in Job, that behind the actions of idolatrous governments the devil can be at work, as we see in Revelation 13

At work to destroy God's people.

Here he is pictured as a lion prowling around the flock, roaring to terrify and scatter the flock so that he can pick them off, devour them, more easily

But while alert to the threat, to the fear and confusion he tries to create by the threat of suffering, Peter reminds us that we don't need to be terrified

That we have the resources to resist His malice and be kept safe,

Our faith in the Lord Jesus

Resist Him, firm in the faith – confident that Christ has died for you and brought you peace with God, confident that the Lord Jesus has risen and has now all authority, that even the devil is subject to Him, confident that the Lord Jesus will return

Confident that suffering for the faith is not unusual – that *the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.*

The devil wants to use suffering to con us, for he is a liar.

He wants us to believe that suffering says God doesn't care for us, or God's not in charge, or that maybe you are still under God's wrath, and that you alone are suffering

But Peter has been clear that suffering for doing good is not unusual

That it is following the example of our Lord Jesus and the means by which our faith is refined so that we come to share in Christ's glory

It is part of the deal as a follower of the crucified Messiah in a world that still rejects its King

And a sign we are God's loved children

Faith, faith in the gospel, is enough to keep us safe from the devil's malice, which means we should not be complacent, sleepy – but do everything we can to sustain and nurture our faith.

Words of comfort in our trials

God is in control and He cares for you

Faith is enough

And thirdly God is committed, committed to fully restoring you, healing your wounds

He will restore you

1 Peter 5: ¹⁰The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while. ¹¹To him be dominion forever. Amen.

He is the God of all grace, the possessor and giver of grace, always gracious because He is gracious in Himself

And your confidence in victory in your trials, in coming to share His glory, depends on Him

Not your works, which are always imperfect

Not your insight, which is always partial

Not your courage, which is always frail

But His kindness, His initiative, His determination to complete what He has begun

At the beginning He called you in Christ– and called you not just to believe in Christ, but to His eternal glory

From the outset God has a goal for you believer – to share in the glory of His Son

This is what our Lord asked for

John 17: ²⁴“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the world's foundation.

And it is what the Father has committed Himself to

We can scarcely imagine what that will be like, to come to what Peter has called our imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance [1:4]

Though we can meditate on what it would be like to be in the glorified Jesus' presence, or on the vision of Revelation 21 and 22.

But here Peter wants to assure us of the wholeness and security of our future, of the complete reversal of our present wounding and weakness. He uses four verbs with overlapping meaning to make His point

will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while

Notice Will Himself – God is personally committed to this

He will restore – the verb is used of mending nets in Mark. God will put all things to right, he will make whole what is rent, heal what is wounded

He will establish and strengthen – give us a life that is firm, secure, strong

And support – it will be settled and immovable, the end of our sojournings.

Our life then won't be able to be threatened, and will not know weakness again

And when will God do this?

After we have suffered a little while.

While this could be speaking of recovery from a time of trial in this life, and that does happen,

Just as the 'right time' v. 6 could speak of times of vindication in this life

Both here and in verse 6 Peter is primarily speaking of the end, the revelation of the Lord Jesus in glory and the resurrection of His people to life

Our sufferings are 'a little while' from the perspective of eternity, just as Paul could describe them as slight and momentary when we look to what is unseen and eternal [2 Cor. 4:16-18]

God is committed to completing the work He has begun in us

And if now His work in us to conform us to His Son involves suffering like the Son, it is because our Father is determined we will share in the Son's glory

And we will, because eternal dominion, which Rome claimed, doesn't belong to any human power or creature, but to the Lord

¹¹ *To him be [is] dominion forever. Amen.*

Know the comfort your God gives

Believer in Jesus

In this life we will meet various trials in a world still subject to futility

And we should expect to suffer for doing good, for faithfulness to Jesus as we confess Him as Lord and follow His example of trusting obedience to the Father's will

Whatever befalls us

Knowing God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble

Let us humble ourselves under God's mighty hand

Knowing He cares for us

Faith is enough to be kept safe

And God Himself, the God of all grace, is personally committed to restore, establish, strengthen and support us,

To exalt us in Christ,

And let us live out that humble trust in our good God by casting all our cares on Him, staying sober minded and alert, firm in faith

As we set our hope fully on the grace coming to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ [1:13]

This is the word of our God, who has eternal rule and authority, who is almighty and all wise, to us.

Concluding with characteristic notes

1 Peter 5: ¹²Through Silvanus, a faithful brother (as I consider him), I have written to you briefly in order to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! ¹³She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, as does Mark, my son. ¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Peter is signing off now, but as he does so we hear again themes that have run through his letter, themes to let become theological ear worms

v. 13 Grace – stand in it, always rely on God's grace that comes to us in the gospel of Jesus

v. 14 Babylon – she who is in Babylon describes the church in Rome, but the use of Babylon for Rome, the reigning pagan power, is a reminder that believers are now experiencing, like the Jews in Babylon, a temporary exile and are resident aliens on earth, and it is also a reminder that Rome's power will pass. We have no lasting city here, but Babylon's time is limited and will come to an end when the Holy city, the new Jerusalem is revealed from heaven and we come to our eternal home.

v. 14 The kiss of love. What did the kiss of love mean for them? It was the family greeting, the chaste peck on the cheek exchanged among family members. It is a reminder that whatever their differences in background – of ethnicity, social class, wealth, gender, education – believers are one family, a family to be characterised by love [1 Peter 1:22, 4:8]

In a world where believers are under pressure for following Jesus – criticised, scrutinised, suspected, suffering – in the Christian community believers must meet love, the welcome, the inclusion of love.

Like me you may not be a huggy person, let alone kisses – but we all have to find a way to show to fellow believers, whatever their background, that love, to say you are welcome and belong here