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Sermon

Submit Yourselves to God and Resist the Devil

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

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Suffering

As we have gone through this letter of Peter the theme of suffering keeps coming through. As we saw before that is because it was the pressing concern for the church at that time. Roman persecution of the church was building under the Emperor Nero.

Peter tells them, and us, not to be surprised at the trials they are suffering. These painful trials are literally fiery trials. It is a word associated with the purification of metals. The suffering Peter refers to has a refining quality.

It is important that we clarify here what Peter is not talking about!

He is not talking about suffering because you deserve it for wrong doing. He is not talking about suffering with sickness. Our thoughts go there as English speakers because we use the word, suffer, both for abuse and for illness. But in Greek the word for suffer was not used in that way. When they wanted to say someone was unwell, they said, "She is having it badly." Suffering was used of hardship inflicted by other people on you. It relates to persecution.

He says they are sharing in the sufferings of Christ. He does not mean those Jesus endured on the cross. Rather, that the church is the body of Christ and when one suffers all suffer; when we suffer Christ suffers. We hear Jesus referring to the hatred of the world when he said, "If the world hates you, keep in mind it hated me first." Jn 15:18

Again in John 17:14-16,

"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."

Now Peter says something we find hard to understand. He says to rejoice when we suffer with Christ. It is not a unique thought to him, Jesus said it in the Beatitudes, James said something similar. It occurs to me we need a reframing of how we understand the circumstance.

Let me explain with some minor examples. When we were in Africa staying in a local guest house. Although the bedroom was fine, the bathroom suffered from insufficient water pressure. The lavatory flushed, but there was no hot water and the shower would not work. As frustration developed in me I was rescued by

the thought, "It's high-class camping." Suddenly, it was acceptable. Think of it as a hotel and I was ready to grumble. Think of it as camping and it was luxurious – a working lavatory, water in the basin, clean sheets and towels. The situation was reframed and that changed my attitude.

I suspect Peter is offering a reframing of the circumstances to them and us. When you suffer persecution, think of how you are sharing his suffering and it changes the impact on you. Rejoice that the world sees the influence of Christ in your life and wants to attack him in you.

There are two responses that he puts before us: humble yourselves before God and resist the devil. Let's look at those.

Humble yourselves

1 Peter 5:6-11 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.
⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Peter says, "Humble yourselves, **therefore**. Derek Prince used to say, "When you see a 'therefore,' ask 'What's the therefore, there for.'"

The previous verse reads, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Peter is quoting from Proverbs 3:34 from the Septuagint. The Hebrew is even stronger, "He mocks the mockers, but is gracious to the humble."

The word humble is becoming distorted these days. You see an award or an honour given and the person says, "I am so humbled." Nearly always it is obvious they are not humbled but proud. The COD defines humble as "having a low estimate of one's own importance."

Rather we are to be humble because God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Peter says we should clothe ourselves with humility. The word clothe is used of a slave tying on an apron. So we are to tie humility onto ourselves. Sometimes in our relating as Christians troubles arise, tempers flare. Do we need in those circumstances to re-tie humility around ourselves and take the humble path? The alternative is to flare up, to defend ourselves with angry words. Let's be ready to wrap humility around ourselves so we can prefer others.

We are to humble ourselves under God's hand, that is voluntarily to submit to him. And when we do that, the promise is that he will lift us up in due time.

The Kingdom of God works differently from the world. In the Kingdom of God, if you lower yourself, you get lifted up. If you give away, people give back to you. It is about trust and unselfishness.

When does the lifting happen? In due time – when is that? Does that mean after a certain time period? There is a hint here, the word is *kairos* time. It is God's significant time rather than after the ticking of a clock. God appoints the right time and moves then. So in that light we are to cast all our anxiety on God.

That is a choice; but a choice in line with the command Jesus gives us not to worry.¹ And we can do that in the assurance that he cares for us. The revelation of God in Christ shows God cares for us. But when you know that the all powerful one cares for you, then you can trust yourself, your concerns your future into his hands, knowing he works all things together for good for those who love him.²

Discernment

We have talked about humbling ourselves before God and the circumstance of Peter's letter in persecution. Then he goes on to tell us to resist the enemy. That means we have to discern which is which.

Jesus gives us a rule of thumb in John 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." When the characteristic is stealing, killing and destroying it is the thief's work. When you see abundant life – it is Jesus' work.

¹ Cp Mt 6:25-34

² Romans 8:28

To be discerning we need to be self-controlled and alert (v8). Peter may well have remembered the night of Gethsemane. He had been warned by Jesus to watch because Satan wanted to sift him like wheat. But Peter did not stay alert, he fell asleep and was not ready when the crisis came. From experience, he warns us to be alert and self-controlled.

The Devil

It is foolish to imagine that all our troubles are caused by the devil and his minions. It is equally foolish to imagine that none of them are!

I am glad to say I have not had extreme experiences with the demonic but I have been involved in many minor and several more major deliverances. What I have experienced leaves me in no doubt that there are evil spirits about – we were not dealing merely with the human mind.

If you maintain that there are no negative, spiritual forces you go against the testimony of Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, Luke, the other Gospel writers Matthew, Mark and John. The John of the Epistles and Revelation, Jude, and the writer to the Hebrews. That's every New Testament book.

Peter refers to our enemy the devil. The word enemy is *antidikos* which was used of an accuser in a lawsuit. The word behind devil is *diabolos* which is slanderer.

I am struck by the contrast between the accuser and the advocate - both law court terms. The Holy Spirit defends and supports us. He identifies with us and argues in our defence. But the enemy accuses us and slanders us.

On a visit to Sweden, I sat in a conference which was being addressed by a Norwegian theologian in Norwegian. Swedish and Norwegian are very close languages and he was speaking without a translator. Suddenly, all the Swedes roared with laughter which made the speaker looked puzzled. I asked the man next to me what was funny and he told me that the speaker had said in Norwegian, "The devil is like a roaring lion," but in Swedish it meant that the devil is like a roaring leaf!

Well he is no leaf, although there is a truth that much of his attack on us is in words and lies. We are basically protected if we don't invite their attention. However, some activities could be likened to putting your head in its mouth! So we should stay right away from the occult, even in minor forms like tea-leaf readings and horoscopes – they open opportunities for the enemy to get at us.

What is the strategy of this lion? He roars and when the lion roars it inspires fear. He walks around seeking someone to devour, overcome and bring under his control.

Here are some particular methods and some scriptures you might use to counter them. Can you match the defences to the attacks?ⁱ Remember, Jesus used scriptures to counter the temptations of the enemy in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

Attacks:

- A. Occupying minds;
- B. causing confusion;
- C. creating diversions;
- D. sowing doubt;
- E. encouraging error;
- F. accusing and condemning.

Defences:

1. *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.* Ps 32:8
2. *We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.* 2 Cor 10:5
3. *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.* Rom 8:1-2
4. *God is not the author of confusion* 1 Cor 14:33

5. *Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.* Phil 4:8
6. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight* Prv 3:5-6

Peter says we should resist or stand firm in faith against the enemy. Paul uses the same language in Ephesians 6 when teaching on the armour of God.

“Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”³

We are to stand firm, we don't run away from the enemy's attacks, we put on the armour of God, we resist and hold our ground.

We know that when we suffer any attack we are not alone. One might think and pray for the kidnapped school girls in Nigeria on. We should pray for the Christian woman in Sudan sentenced to lashing and death for marrying a Christian. We might think of Pastor Ezekiel where Ruth is going, who has twice been poisoned because of his faith. We owe it to them to pray for them and to resist with them that which is demonic in the attacks on them.

Peter is coming to the end of the letter and turns now to glorify God. But this is a bit different in that we get caught up in the doxology. “The God of all grace who called you into his eternal glory...” He started by saying we are living stones being built into the temple of God of which Christ is the cornerstone. Now as he ends we are called into his eternal glory.

We learn that God is at work forming those stones and laying them as they should be. Those stones are us. He is restoring or perfecting us; making us strong –establishing and fixing us in place; strengthening us and making us steadfast or laying in us a foundation so we are firm and unwavering.

That sounds like a solid construction, with living stones on good foundations, fixed in place, made strong and qualified for their function.

To him be power for ever. Amen.

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ⁱ Attacks and some defences: A2; B4; C1; D6; E5; F3

³ Ephesians 6:13