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Sermon

Humility, Resistance, Strength

1 Peter 5:5B-11

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We have been working our way through the first Epistle of Peter in these weeks between Easter and Pentecost. Pentecost is next week, so we need to draw it to a close today. With chapters 4 and 5 still to go, I have made the call to jump to this section of chapter 5 we heard read today.

Humility vs Pride

Peter tells his readers including us to clothe ourselves with humility. The word to clothe here was used of a slave putting on work garments. So you might think of putting on the overalls of humility or the apron of humility. And that is addressed to “all of you.” Every Christian is included.

He bases this on Proverbs 3:34: “God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.” Pride is a major problem. It is the sin of the devil who as Ezekiel tells us was one of the highest of archangels but wanted to be worshipped himself. Consequently, he was cast down and out of the presence of God.¹

If we adopt a proud attitude, we set ourselves against God and the Bible says God will oppose us. Rather we need to humble ourselves. To the humble, God shows favour.

When I was in my twenties, I was in a church where I strongly disagreed with the Vicar’s theology, yet God repeatedly told me to stay there. I did but I grumbled a lot. Then I was in a prayer meeting elsewhere and someone brought a prophecy, “Some of you obey me because you think you have to and some of you obey me because you love me. I want you to do it because you love me.” I broke down in tears because my attitude had been grudging, teeth-gritted obedience. I was able to repent and continue to worship in that parish out of love for the Lord and the resistance I had felt was gone.

Just last week, a Christian from another church told me of being in a similar situation. She was there to serve but wanted to grumble. Then she understood from the Lord that while she was serving in that role out of love for him, her grumbling would rob her of any benefit she might receive. That was a salutary idea and she changed her attitude. When we humble ourselves before God and clothe ourselves with humility towards each other, it changes our attitudes for the better.

Peter continues in verse 6, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

There is this promise that God will raise up the humble. When? In the *kairos* time – the significant time of God’s plan. Remember *chronos* time is the just time ticking away, but *kairos* is the eventful, significant time.

¹ Ezekiel 28:12-17; Isaiah 14:12-13

Now it is not always easy to be humble. It is not easy to submit to each other let alone to authorities if we don't respect them. Peter knows that full well. He continues, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

The idea that God the creator of the universe cares for us is a treasure of the Judeo-Christian faith. Other religions may demand service or obedience to their gods, but they do not suggest that God cares for humans. That he cares for us, means he is not indifferent to our sufferings. In Matthew 10:29-31, Jesus taught us not to worry because God is intimately aware of our situation and needs.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

You can take this instruction of Peter and use it practically. Cast all your anxieties on God, for he cares for you. Make the decision. Speak it out loud. I cast my anxiety about whatever it is onto you, God, because you care for me. Do you see the logic? If he cares for you, you can trust him through the situation that worries you. So give him the care and worry. He is big enough to handle it!

Resist the devil – verse 8 & 9

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

In verse 8, Peter warns us about demonic attack. You may think the devil is not real, but Jesus, Paul, Peter, James all refer to him as an intelligent, malevolent, spiritual being.

The word Peter uses here is *diabolos*, which means adversary in a court case or accuser. In Revelation 12:10 Satan is called "the accuser of our brothers [and sisters] who accuses them day and night."

Peter warns us to be careful but emphasises that we can resist him – we are not subject to the devil.

Firstly, be alert and of sober mind. While we are protected by the Lord, we still must be sober and watchful. We can put ourselves into danger by going outside his protection. To be sober is to be calm, collected in spirit, temperate, circumspect. Difficulties may come but we need to face them calmly because we can trust in God, who knows every hair on our heads and cares for us.

We are told to be watchful. This is the behaviour of a soldier. When you don't know where your enemy is, you are watchful. When you are on sentry duty, you are cautious and attentive. The Greek dictionary also offers a meaning: "take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one."

Peter goes on to describe spiritual attacks as being like a roaring lion walking about seeking its prey. However, when we remain in obedience to God's ways, the enemy is restrained. He is like a dog on a rope. He can bark or roar but not get to us if we stay out of range.

At one time I used to walk to work each day past a house where a dog lay on the front porch. Every time, it would leap up and bark and growl fiercely at me and run hard to attack me. At first, my adrenaline would surge as I met this attack only to find the dog was on a rope and would be brought up short of the pavement. Day after day, it would try to attack me like this. I learnt not to fear it because it could not reach me. That is how it is oftentimes for us.

One day, as I approached, I saw the dog looking at me from around a tree and I realised that it was beyond the length of the rope. Sure enough, as I got closer, it came for me along the pavement, snarling fiercely.

Instinctively, I sternly ordered the dog, "Down, sir!" And it crouched to the ground. Then I said, "Go home!", and rather to my surprise it slunk away back to the house.

Every after that day, the dog no longer barked at me. It would raise its head as I came into view and lie down again without a bark.

This corresponds to Peter's instruction to us. "Resist him, standing firm in the faith ..." As Christians, because we are in Christ, we have authority over demons. We do not ask, we command. So if we come under attack and realise it is from the realm of demons, we stand firm and resist. If we have strayed from God's ways allowing the enemy to accuse us, we simply repent and ask God's forgiveness. That deals with the basis of the accusation. I remember Dr Derek Prince teaching that the sole basis the enemy has to attack us is accusation for our sins. The blood of Jesus gives us protection, not because these are magic words but because the Jesus' death and shedding of his blood is the basis for the forgiveness of our sins. When our sins are forgiven, God can look at us and see the righteousness of Christ² and say, "I see no sin." Thus the accusation of the enemy fails.

Established by God

Peter wrote to persecuted Christians to encourage them. He finishes with this statement of God's purpose and enabling:

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Our God is all grace. Grace is undeserved favour. We earn nothing from God, everything we receive is through his grace. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. And the wonderful encouragement is that our Lord is the God of all grace. Not a little bit grudgingly given but all grace. Enough for you, enough for me, as we come to him in humility trusting his provision of salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

He has called us to his eternal glory in Christ. That is the hope to which we look forward. Whatever the sufferings of this life – he has promised eternal glory in Christ. Wonders beyond our imagining!

Then Peter uses four verbs to describe what God will do for his people: restore and make strong, make firm and make steadfast.

Restore

This word has the sense of putting in order, bringing to perfection, completing, repairing. As we go through life and when we are finally transformed in the resurrection, we will be made what he intended us to be.

Make strong

The range of meanings includes being placed firmly, established, strengthened. We are made strong in the sense of being given a firm and fixed position. You will remember that Peter denied Christ. Jesus told him that he would do that but also said, "When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."³ Dr Edmund Clowney writes, "Peter who had fallen away, in denial was made an apostle, a rock of foundation, fixed and solid. The promises to Christ's church the establishing grace he had received."⁴

Make firm

The Greek word is only used here in the New Testament. It occurs once in the Greek version of the Old Testament when it refers to the strength of a lion. God will make us strong particularly in spiritual knowledge and power.

Make Steadfast

This one is about foundations, about being grounded and stable. It is appropriate when we think back to chapter one and the metaphor that we are living stones being built into a temple of God. The foundation is Christ himself. So as we trust in him and follow him, we are stabilised on him as the foundation for our faith and our life.

With Peter, we can say, "To God, be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

² 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

³ Like 22:31

⁴ BST: The Message of 1 Peter, IVP, p219

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