

Series: Clarity in Chaos; First Peter

Awake and Alert

Sermon by Teaching Pastor Paul Joslin

First Peter 5:5-14

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, November 24, 2024

Heavenly Father, God, it feels so fitting in my heart that this is our Thanksgiving service, because I just feel so much gratitude this morning and privilege about the call to this church and to serve and to lead her. God, we just pray an expectation of what you will do through us, and as we partner together to share the good news of Jesus with the world, God, I just pray that this would be a place empowered by your Spirit, a place of unity in the culture of division, and that, God, we would see you do wonders in the world around us, so that people may know you and glorify your name, and it is in Christ's name we pray, amen.

All right, so today we are wrapping up our study in First Peter. For the last two and a half months or so, we have been walking through this beautiful letter that the apostle Peter wrote to the churches in Asia Minor. If you remember, as we have been going through this letter, again and again and again, we come back to this idea that Peter is writing to these churches who are experiencing chaos and persecution, suffering difficulty. He is writing to them, trying to offer clarity in the midst of chaos, and as he closes this letter, he actually comes back to many of the themes that we have talked about throughout the course of this series. He is going to return to ideas like submission, and he is going, which I know there is probably a groan in the audience, like, "Again, we have to talk about submission?" There are so many different things that he comes back to, to root and to remind the churches he is writing to about their call to live faithfully in the midst of a chaotic world, and so as we begin today, I just want to start by reading the passage to you all, and then we will jump into the sermon this morning.

So, it is First Peter Chapter 5, starting in verse 5, if you want to follow along on the screens or in your Bible. It says this: "In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders." I am going to leave a pause for an "amen," there from some of you older people, but no, no, we didn't get there. So that is all right. "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 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, and the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered for a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To Him be the glory forever and ever, amen. With the help of Silas in my regard, as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you to testify that it is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it, and she who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son, Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love, and peace to all of you who are in Christ," the word of the Lord.

So, as Peter closes this letter, he ends, as I said, with some reminders about where the church finds itself at this moment, and as he is closing, he ends this letter in a way that is different from how we end our letters. Typically, we begin our letters with a greeting, so if we are writing to someone, we say, “Hey, this is Paul, and I am writing with this person, and I am saying hello to you.” He ends his letters with a greeting, but more than that, as he is greeting the church at the very end of the letter, he tries to remind them of the place that they find themselves in and the place that he is in, and he says, “Greetings from Babylon.” Now, if you have been following along with this book, you know that Peter is not in Babylon. He is actually in Rome writing this letter, and he is writing to churches that are not in Babylon, but in Asia, in the area of Asia Minor, and so what is he doing? Is he trying to deceive his enemies and throw them off the scent of where he is? No, I mean, he is under house arrest, and what he is doing in this is he is using a Biblical archetype, this idea of Babylon, the city, the place that is built up in opposition to God’s principles, desires, and will, and what he is reminding the people of as he closes the letter is what he began the letter with: Remember, this world is not your home. You are foreigners and exiles in this world, and though this world may at times deceive you into thinking this is where you belong, as followers of Jesus, we need to be constantly aware of the idea and the fact that we are living in Babylon, the place and the culture that is set up in opposition to God, so we should expect suffering and hardship. We should expect cultural values not to align with us, in the things that are going on in the world. We should not be surprised when the world looks like Babylon, because that is where we are living.

I think the problem for many Christians is sometimes we can so easily fall into temptation and so easily be deceived that we are not living in Babylon, and we can think this world is actually luxurious. There are some good things here. I mean, have you ever had a Krispy Kreme doughnut fresh off the oven when it comes out? It is easy to think that way, like this place is pretty good, right? Peter is trying to remind us that no matter how beautiful this world may seem, no matter what ways it might use to deceive you, we need to remember that we are in Babylon. So, with that reminder, he offers them encouragement. Three times, he says stand firm, stand firm, stand firm in the midst of Babylon, and he closes his letter with this idea that if we want to live faithfully in Babylon, then we need to stand firm. So, what I want to do today is walk through the three different places that he calls believers to stand firm in the faith so that they can live faithfully.

It begins in verses 8 and 9, where he says this: “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.” So as Peter is reminding these churches of the suffering, the persecution, the chaos that they are living in, he wants them to know that this is not just random things that are happening to them. He wants to ground this idea of Babylon in the idea that there is a ruler of Babylon. There is someone, there is an enemy against the church that wants to see the church fail and not flourish, and he says it is the devil. The devil is prowling around like a lion, seeking someone to devour. It is set up in opposition to the church.

Now it is often said that when we talk of the devil, there is typically two responses that people have, and the first is that some of us have trouble believing that the devil is actually real, and maybe it is more a figment of our imagination, or it is just something that is rooted in an ancient understanding of the world, but I mean, come on, we have iPhones. We know that the devil can’t be real. The world is too

advanced for that, and so we just dismiss this idea of the devil and think that there is not someone in opposition to the church, but then at other times we can go the other direction, and you are probably familiar with some people who see the devil in everything. It is the person who is trying to find a parking space at Walmart, and they can't find a parking space, and then their first thought is, "Oh, man, the devil is just really after me today. I can't get around him," and then you just see the devil in everything you do, and I think what Peter is doing here is he is trying to bridge the gap between those two postures. He is saying that you need to be aware that you have an enemy who is set up against you, who does not want you to succeed, who does not want you to remain faithful to Jesus, but you do not need to fear that enemy, and he uses this imagery of a of a prowling lion.

Now are there any fans of National Geographic or the Discovery Channel or anything, any of the different documentaries, like Animal Planet? Any? Okay, I've got like two. All right. Thank you. My wife loves those documentaries, and every time she has a down moment, I feel like she is watching something about somewhere in the world and some bizarre animal, but in these videos, you have seen probably a lion on the hunt and trying to prowl around and find prey. Now if you think of those videos, whether it is National Geographic or The Lion King, where Nala is about to eat Puma, any millennials in the room, you get that reference, and you think of those moments. How aware is the gazelle or the warthog that the lion is about to eat it? Not at all, right? They are completely oblivious. They are just going about their day. They are trying to get some water, eat a little grass, and maybe talk to the other gazelle or whatever. They have no idea that there is this monstrous animal, this beast of an animal that is about to come and devour them until the very last second, right when it makes its move. Then suddenly they recognize, "Oh, no, I am in danger, and then does the gazelle stand and fight against the lion? No. They run. Yes. Thank you. They run so fast. They try to get out of there as fast as they can.

Now listen to Peter's words. What does he say? He says there is this devil that is prowling around like a lion ready to devour you. Do you run away from it? No, he says, stand firm. Resist. Fight back. It is as if he is saying yes, there is this ferocious animal that is trying to devour you and is in opposition to the church, but you do not need to run from it. It is more like Scar from the Lion King than Mufasa, right? No one is scared of Scar. He is a coward. I just worked in two Lion King reference in five minutes. I'm on my egg today, all right? We're doing it. So yeah, he says stand firm. Stand your ground. Stand firm in the faith, and when Peter tells us to stand firm and resist the devil and stand firm in the faith, he is reminding us that our ability to resist the devil is not based on our own strength. It is based in our anchor, that our ability to stand against the devil is our faith in Christ. It is rooted in his victory, and He equips us to stand firm, no matter how fierce the attack may be.

As I was thinking of this idea this week, and as I was reading different commentaries, they wonder if Peter is maybe drawing some sort of comparison, because there is another character in scripture who is referred to as a lion. Do you remember who it is? It is Jesus, the lion of Judah, and they wonder if what Peter is drawing up in this comparison is saying, yeah, there is this lion that is out there. He wants to attack you. He wants to defeat you. He wants to be in opposition to you. He wants to see you fail, but he is a false lion. He is not the true lion. We have Jesus, the Lion of Judah, on our side, so why would we be afraid of the devil? What he is trying to say is we need to be aware that we have an enemy, but when we stand firm in the faith, while we are aware, we do not have to be afraid.

Then he goes on in verses 10 and 11, and he says this, “and the God of all grace,” which is just such a beautiful phrase, and we are going to return to that in just a moment, but he says this, “after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To Him be the power forever and ever, amen.” Peter is writing to these churches that have been hurting, and they have experienced the chaos of this world and the persecution, and they have been ostracized and set aside, and they are experiencing this hostility, so he knows they are hurting, and what he is trying to do here is to acknowledge the pain and the suffering that they have had to endure, but he is reminding them that whatever suffering we experience in this life, whatever we have to endure, will not last.

As believers and followers of Jesus, we believe that the Spirit of God continues to hover over the chaos of the world. He sees the evil and the sin that is shaping our world, but our God is at work, shaping a new creation and new creatures in the midst of the suffering. We do not believe that God is some spectator just watching human history and looking at it wreck itself and thinking, “Oh man, I wish there were something I could do.” We believe in a God who stepped into human history to right wrongs and to make all things new, and He is at work doing that. He is bringing redemption, and so Peter says you might be suffering for a little while, but however long that season of suffering is, you need to be reminded that we have an eternal hope of what Christ says He will do, that He will make us whole. He will restore us and make us steadfast and firm.

This is why whatever season you are going through, whether it is a season of divorce, or cancer, or someone you love who is struggling with a chronic illness, the seasons of grief and doubt that you experience, those moments where you feel like you have been wandering through the wilderness for ages, what Peter is saying is that in every single step of that journey, God is working behind the scenes, that He is weaving our stories of suffering into the fabric of his plan of redemption, that God is not someone who allows suffering to be wasted, that He does not cause suffering. He mourns it. He despises it, but through his gracious power, He is able to use it. There is nothing that we experience in this life that can outpace God’s plan of redemption, and so Peter says, “stand firm in hope.” Stand firm in hope the promises of what God will do to bring about restoration and redemption in your stories of suffering and pain and chaos in this world.

It might be a cliché image of hope, but it is one that I think is appropriate. It is the image of the plant, the flower that is pushing through the soil in the middle of winter, and it has experienced the harshness of snows and gray skies and winters, just cold bitterness, but as spring begins to flower, the plant pushes through all of the hardship, and while it has been enduring the winter, it is staying rooted in the ground, absorbing the nutrients, being changed and transformed, being made ready for spring, which is promised to come. That is the image that we have of what it means to be rooted in hope, that there may be harsh winters and seasons of difficulty or loss or uncertainty, but we stand firm, because we know that spring is coming. We know that God’s promises are true, and our hope is rooted in a resurrected Jesus, and that He will make all things new, because He has conquered death. Our hope is not based on the chaos of our circumstances, but on the assurance of God’s faithfulness, that He will complete his work in us, and so we stand firm, because spring is on its way.

So, Peter says we stand firm in faith, and we stand firm in hope, and then he closes with this idea, one more, “stand firm,” one more, “stand fast.” It is found in verse 12, where he says, “with the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.” When you read this verse, on the face of it, it feels a little incomplete, like, “Stand fast in what?” It is not very descriptive. It is like the least descriptive word we have to explain something, but I think what Peter is doing is he is saying stand fast in this true grace of God, that he has been trying to write in this letter about the true grace of God, and that it is in grace that we stand fast and hold fast in the chaos around us.

As I just mentioned, in the verses preceding this one, he says that the God of all grace, which is just this beautiful, all-encapsulating idea that all grace comes from God, that there is so much packed into this one statement that the God of all grace, it suggests that there are no limits or boundaries to the grace of God, that it is not just for salvation, but it is for every aspect of life. His grace meets us in our weakest moments, in our sin and our suffering and our need, and it is everything that we need in comfort and restoration and forgiveness and strength. There are no boundaries to it, but there it also implies that this grace is for everyone. It emphasizes that grace is for every person. It is not just reserved for some select group, but it is available to all who seek it, no matter what their struggles or sin or doubts. I believe it is also an invitation to receive more. The God of all grace is this idea that He is constantly willing to give us his grace. It is always, always available to us, and it is always an invitation into a deeper relationship with Him.

This week I came across a quote from Preston Sprinkle that describes grace in a way that I feel like is just one of the most beautiful depictions I have heard of the word. It says this: “Grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return. Grace is love coming at you that has nothing to do with you. Grace is being loved when you are unlovable. The cliché description of grace is unconditional love, and it is a true cliché, for it is a good description of a good thing. Grace is irrational, in the sense that it has nothing to do with weights or measures. Grace is terrible math. It has nothing to do with my intrinsic qualities or my so-called gifts, whatever they may be. Grace is one-way love. Grace does not make demands. It just gives, and from our vantage point, it always gives to the wrong person. We see this over and over again in the gospels. Jesus is always giving grace to the wrong people. He is giving grace to the prostitutes and the tax collectors and even the people who are in opposition to Him. The most extravagant sinners of Jesus’ day receive his most compassionate welcome. Grace is a divine vulgarity that stands caution on its head,” and Peter says that is the grace that we stand firm in, in this story of God’s redemption, of how no matter what we have done or no matter what we have been through, no matter what has been done to us, that his grace is always sufficient for us. What I love about Peter, and we have made this point throughout this series, is that when Peter is writing these things, they are not just hypotheticals to him. They are not just things that he is like, “this sounds really good.” These are things that he experienced and lived with Jesus.

You think of the end of Peter’s story, where we find the story that Peter engages with Jesus after his resurrection in John 21. If you remember, at Jesus’ betrayal, the night that he was betrayed and tortured and then eventually murdered, before that all happens, Peter comes to Jesus, and he says, “Jesus, I do not care what happens to you. I will go with you to the very end. I will fight for you. I am on your side. There

is nothing that could turn me away from you,” and then as soon as trouble erupts, as soon as trouble happens, Peter runs as far as he can from the danger, and he does not understand what he is supposed to do, and so he follows Jesus to the trial, where people are like, “Hey, I think you knew that Jesus guy, did you not? We saw you with Him at multiple different places.” He is so fearful that even a little servant girl causes him to lie and deny Jesus, and in one of the gospels we are told that after the third denial that Jesus predicted Peter would do, that after the third denial, Peter actually locks eyes with Jesus, and as he sees Jesus on trial in the courtyard, being mocked and abused, they make eye contact with one another, and Peter realizes what he has done, and he knows that Jesus has seen what he has done, and he just breaks down weeping, and he flees.

We are not really told in any of the gospels except for John, what happens after that moment, but we get this picture in John of a confused and restless and uncertain Peter. Jesus has risen from the dead, and Peter just has no direction for his life, so he tells the other disciples, “I am just going to go back to what I know, and I am just going to become a fisherman again,” and so he goes to the sea with his friends, and they begin fishing, and they go out at dusk, and they push their boats out, and it is a long night where they are fishing and waiting for that familiar tug of fish that are in the net, and nothing happens. Then as dawn begins to approach, and the light begins to come on them, they see someone standing on the shore, and John turns to Peter, and he says, “I think that is Jesus,” and Peter says, “Are you sure you think that is Jesus?” and John is like, “Yeah, I think that’s Jesus,” and Peter, you have got to love him. He just immediately jumps out of the boat, leaves all of them in the boat with the fish, and just swims to shore to get to Jesus as fast as he can, leaving them to do all of the work of bringing the fish that they caught after Jesus told them where to place their nets.

It had to feel like such a familiar story for Peter, because this is exactly the story of where Jesus initially called him to follow Him, but I wonder what those moments would have been like for Peter as he pulls himself onto shore, out of the water, and he approaches Jesus, and he sees that Jesus has a fire ready with some food and some breakfast for them that they are going to enjoy as the sun rises, and he is waiting for all of his friends to get there. You have to imagine there had to be a moment when they lock eyes once again, and Peter knows Jesus that knows what he has done, and just how heavy might the silence have been between them in that moment? So they eat breakfast together, and then Jesus, it is that moment when there is something you have to talk about, but you do not know who is going to break the silence first, and so Jesus invites Peter to go with Him on a walk, and they begin walking down at the beach in the morning light. As they walk, I imagine, again, that heaviness of silence just hung between them, and then Jesus breaks the silence by saying, “Peter, do you love me?” and notice He does not say, “Peter, do you love the things that I have done for you? Do you love this resurrection life that I am showing you? Do you love all of the different things?” It was like, “Do you love me?” because ultimately it just comes back to this relationship with Jesus, “Do you love me?” and he says, “Lord, you know that I love you,” and Jesus says, “Well then, feed my sheep. Take care of my sheep.”

They walk along a little longer, and then Jesus asks him again, and I know you’re familiar with the story, but he says, “Peter, do you love me?” and Peter says, “Yes, Lord. You know that I love you,” and He says again, “Feed my sheep. Take care of my flock,” and then we are told that Jesus asks him a third time, “Peter, do you love me?” What we are told is that Peter is hurt at that moment. Jesus’ third question

pricked something in his soul and his heart, and you know the feeling, when you have hurt someone, and they call it out, and they express the wound, and suddenly you are confronted with what you have done, and he recognizes what Jesus is doing in this moment, and he says, “Lord, you know all things,” and I do not think that is some theoretical theological statement that you are the Lord of the universe, and you know all the things, and you know how many stars there in the sky. I think what Peter is saying in that moment is he says, “Lord, I know you know what I have done. You know everything. You saw me that night, but I know you also know my love for you,” and then Jesus says, “Feed my sheep.” Peter experienced the depth of God’s grace given to a person who never deserved it, so when he writes to the church, I think it is so beautiful on two fronts. One, he is writing from a personal experience of understanding what it is to receive grace and how powerful that can be to stand firm in the chaos of this world, but secondly, the most beautiful thing, I think when he says, “stand firm in grace,” is Peter is living out in this letter what Jesus called him to in that moment. “Feed my sheep. Take care of my flock.” Peter sees a church that is suffering and in pain and enduring hostility, and he is trapped in Rome, imprisoned, and he is still trying to live out the call that Jesus placed on his life, “Care for my church,” and what a beautiful picture.

I love the progression you can see in Peter throughout his life, from this person who continually stuck his foot in his mouth and continually pushed against Jesus at the wrong moment and did not understand what Jesus was doing. At the end of his life, Peter is doing exactly what Jesus has called him to do. He is loving and caring for the church that Jesus entrusted him with. Peter, despite all of his failings and his foot in his mouth, and his denial, Jesus says, “You are the one to take care of my church.” What a responsibility, and we see him doing that. In this conversation on the beach, with the way it began, Jesus uses just two very simple words, but it is the words that He is calling each and every one of us to again and again and again. It is the words we never get past. He says, “Peter, follow me.” You have to imagine in that moment that Peter is just like, it is one of those moments when your life flashes before your eyes, and you see everything, because it has to take him back to the moment when he was fishing, and he could not catch any fish, and Jesus said, “Throw your nets on the other side,” and previously Jesus said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,” and it had to take him back to those moments, “Follow me.” What I think Jesus is calling us to through this letter, First Peter, through the life of Peter, who followed Jesus, is to follow Christ into suffering, follow Christ in exile, follow Christ in the hardest moments of our life, but also follow Him in faith and follow Him in hope and follow Him in grace, because we believe in a God who, despite the chaos in the world, is always at work, writing stories of redemption, and He is writing that same story with your life. Amen? Amen.

Let’s close in prayer. Heavenly Father, God, as we close today, I just lay this church and myself before you, that God as we step into the future, as we step into a world of chaos, as we leave behind this beautiful letter from the apostle Peter, God, I just pray that you would churn in our hearts this desire to stand fast, to stand firm in the midst of the chaos around us, not because of our own strength, but because we have been called to this moment as the church, empowered by your Spirit to stand firm in grace and hope and faith that you are a God who is writing stories of redemption in the middle of chaos. May we believe that, and may we live that out daily, and it is in Christ’s name that we pray, amen.

30:49 minutes