

True Grace to Stand in

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[0 : 00] Tonight's reading is taken from 1 Peter chapter 5, beginning at verse 8. You can find it in the church Bibles on page 1220.

Chapter 5, beginning at verse 8. 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 a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. 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. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings. And so does my son Mark. Great one another with a kiss of love.

[1 : 26] Peace to all of you who are in Christ. Hello. Let me add my welcome to Simon's.

My name's Jamie, and I'm one of the ministry trainees here at St. Silas. It's my pleasure to be taking us through this passage this evening. And it would be helpful if you could keep your Bibles open at 1 Peter chapter 5, on page 1220.

Before we begin, I'm going to pray and ask that God helps us as we look at his word together. Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word is true and speaks of who you are and what it means to follow you.

We ask that you would help us to understand what you are saying to us. Open our eyes and our hearts so that we may know you. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. What are your expectations for the Christian life? If God is gracious, then what do you expect experiencing that grace to look like?

[2 : 46] If he has given generously to his people, even when they don't deserve it, what do we expect? Comfort? Luxury?

Joy? Happiness? Peace? Freedom? Security? Love? Family? Friends? A good job? A nice house? A big fluffy dog?

Surely, these things are how we experience God's grace, right? And yes, some of them are. But what about suffering?

What about longing for home? What about resistance? Are these parts of the Christian life? You see, today we have reached the end of this letter.

And it ends much as it began. Peter introduced his letter stating that he is writing to God's chosen people who are dispersed and scattered.

[3 : 46] That is, he is writing to Christians who are not together and are strangers far from home. This is something not unique to those he was writing to at the time.

We here today may feel isolated. We may also feel not at home. And throughout this letter, we have learned that these exiles are experiencing some suffering.

In fact, they are experiencing persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. We saw in chapter 4 that this can be low level and might be as simple as being insulted for not participating in certain behaviors.

The temptation in this suffering and persecution is to turn away from Jesus. The danger is that the pressure caused by this will lead them to fold, both individually and collectively as a church.

We might ask the question, is this grace? What sort of gift is a new identity which leads to insult or even injury?

[4 : 57] Yet Peter may surprise us with his answer. Verse 12 makes clear the purpose of the letter. Look with me. But what does Peter mean by this is the true grace of God?

What is this? Well, God's grace is his generosity, an unmerited gift from him to his people. Yet when Peter says, this is the true grace of God, this must be the rest of the letter.

Life as an exile, as a stranger in a land that is not home. God's grace is present in the Christian life even in suffering, even in being persecuted for belonging to Jesus.

Peter says that suffering and persecution is normal. It's not a sign that everything has gone wrong, but it's in fact exactly what it means to be God's people.

When you become a Christian, there isn't an endless list of terms and conditions with suffering hidden away on page 47. It's the normal Christian life. And we see this in verse 13 when Peter mentions she who is chosen in Babylon.

[6 : 31] Babylon is almost certainly code for Rome, and he means God's people there. Babylon in the Old Testament and Rome in the first century, when Peter is writing, were both places of worldly power.

Peter, in writing from there, is showing that he too right now is a stranger. So we too can see that for us, as God's people today, we shouldn't be surprised if we have suffering in our lives.

And we shouldn't be surprised if life is harder because we follow Jesus. And this is precisely what Peter said in the previous chapter. Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you.

God's people go through fiery ordeals. Few more literally than Daniel and his friends, who 600 years or so earlier had been in Babylon itself and were thrown into a fiery furnace.

We, like Daniel, and like these scattered Christians, are exiles. We are not home with Jesus, and we feel the consequences of that.

[7 : 40] And yet, in verse 12, Peter says that this is an encouragement. And he writes it in love, intimate love. He asks in verse 14 that they greet each other with a kiss of love.

It's not something I did when I arrived this evening, but nonetheless, I hope that you feel as those who are united in Christ, intimately close to one another.

We are so close to each other that, in fact, we are family in faith. We see that Mark is referred to as his son, and Silas, a wonderful sidekick throughout the New Testament, and a fine man to name a church after, is named a faithful brother.

Peter's message to the exile people of God facing small persecutions is sent as a team effort in love. But even with these encouragements, the point still stands.

Is this true grace really such a good thing? Why should I stand firm in it? Maybe you're a guest here this evening, or you haven't yet made up your mind about who Jesus is and whether you should follow him.

[8 : 54] If so, you might think, I've put you off for good. Why would I want to seek this life of suffering? But Peter here gives us two reasons following Jesus is worth the cost.

The first is this. There is an enemy to resist. Look with me to verse 8. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. You see, Peter is reminding us of the very real danger of giving in when we face suffering.

You see, we have an enemy, the devil. He is real and deadly. This enemy has in mind more than just your suffering.

He wants to use this suffering to make you fall. The danger for the church is that when it suffers, it will buckle under pressure and live in an ungodly way.

[9 : 58] This is what the devil wants. And we see here that Satan is hungry. He's prowling on the lookout for any weakness where he can strike. He wants you and will take any chance to try and take you from God.

And when are we more vulnerable than when we're suffering? If you're suffering for being a Christian, then of course you're tempted to break and give in. But these are precisely the moments when you might start down the slippery slope.

But the consequences of this are deadly. The enemy is a roaring lion, a powerful predator. And don't be fooled.

This roar is not just for show. His bark is not bigger than his bite. Not at all. His roar demonstrates his power. See the end of the verse. He's looking for someone to devour, to consume.

Shame. Destruction is what the devil does. This reality is not to be taken lightly. So, what must we do? We must be alert and sober-minded.

[11:08] Don't let your guard down, but hold the line. When experiencing any suffering, the devil is looking for these weak moments to pounce. But that is precisely why you must resist. Stand firm.

This resisting of the enemy is not an abstract thing. Remember the context here is persecution.

Resisting the enemy is sticking with Jesus, even when following him is hard.

When pressure mounts, when the devil strikes and says, You know what? This time, just listen to them and join in. When he says, actually, don't come to roots this week.

And you won't have to explain to your mates why you didn't go out with them. When he says, that next time you're insulted, just go off back at them to shut them up.

That is when to stand firm. When to not turn away from your faith. To know that you're not better off without Jesus. And Peter here in verse 9 gives us a great encouragement.

[12:16] He again states that since this is the normal pattern of the Christian life, all believers are resisting together. Standing firm alone is hard.

But when you're part of a shield wall of resistance, it's much easier. Peter's spiritual family, which we mentioned earlier, is of comfort. And even more so because the family is not just those he knows and dearly loves, Silas and Mark, but the entire global family of God's people.

Look with me to verse 9. You know that the entire family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. In this suffering, we're not to be despairing.

We aren't going to be defeated. We all here today can stand with Jesus together. And we here in Glasgow can be encouraged by those standing firm for Jesus elsewhere.

Some even at gunpoint in Afghanistan, Mexico, North Korea. But our brothers and sisters there in those countries can be and are encouraged by us knowing that we are standing by Jesus if and when we suffer.

[13:33] United with them and never letting the devil get a foothold. The spiritual reality is that there is an enemy who seeks to devour you. The danger is not the suffering but your response to it.

And so God is worth holding on to, worth resisting against sin and the devil for. Stand firm. Resist him together.

And the second reason why being a Christian is not a foolish desire for suffering, but following Jesus is worth it, is this.

We have an eternity to remember. Read verse 10 with me. God is the God of all grace.

He displays this because in the end he will draw all of his people to himself. He has eternal glory.

[14:44] His glory is his weightiness, how much he is, his importance. He is weighty. He literally matters. His worth, his value and honor is eternally above everything and everyone else.

And yet God, in his graciousness, calls his people to that same glory through Christ, who in his love died to bring us to himself.

And in doing so, we can look forward to a better day. Despite darkness now, there is a beautiful dawn coming. One where we shall be restored, made right and strong and firm.

In suffering, is this not what we desire? We hope to one day have security and strength, to be firm so that no insult could bring us down at all.

This is a future where we are steadfast in exactly who we want to be, who we should be. Having been united with Christ, we have a secure peace.

[15:53] So why does this mean that we should follow Jesus now? Because this is a great promise to hold on to. We'd be mad to walk away now and lose what Christ has achieved for us.

And see the comparison here. We have God's eternal glory. God is the God of all grace. Jesus will have dominion and power forever and ever.

Yet in comparison, this present suffering is only for a little while. This is challenging. Our suffering and persecution, our suffering at persecution is real.

It's painful. It hurts. And life is long. The layers of pain and wounds build. And know that God does grieve over this.

But even if you live to, say, 120 years, it would only be a little while compared to the forever and ever and ever of eternity.

[17:04] Comparing the two should only leave us with a great hope as we remember that eternity that is to come. And finally, this section reminds us of why this is the true grace of God.

The pattern of suffering for a little while with eternal glory to follow is the pattern because that is precisely the pattern of Christ himself. Chapter 4 verse 1 says this.

It says this. Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude. You see, us suffering for Christ today pales in comparison to the suffering Christ experienced for us.

We once ran from God, refused to let him be king over our lives. We made ourselves far from him. But Jesus Christ, in his love, went to a Roman cross, dying in our place, suffering greatly.

But this suffering was only for a little while. And he now reigns in glory. He has won the great prize and in his grace shares it with us even though we don't deserve it.

[18:19] Verse 11 says, To him be the power. Jesus has demonstrated his right to rule, his almighty authority and sheer power in his resurrection.

Though he suffered, he now lives and has all power as king of the universe. Earlier we spoke of the dangerous power of the devil, which is true.

We must be alert because of it. But that power is small and weak compared to the almighty power of God. You see, the real power, the infinite, eternal power belongs to Jesus Christ.

My friends, there is suffering and persecution today for a little while. Stand firm in it. Resist the enemy.

Don't give up, but cling to Jesus. We stand firm as a family united in Christ. Remember eternity.

[19:24] It won't be long before he restores us to himself and shares all he has earned through his suffering with us. This is true grace.

Stand fast in it. To Jesus Christ be the power forever and ever. Amen. Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, we do thank you that you suffered for us.

Lord, we thank you that we see the grace of God in that. So Lord, we just pray that you would help us to resist, to stand firm when suffering. Lord, to not turn away from you, but to stay with you in faith.

And Lord, help us to remember that eternity that is to come. Lord, help us to long for it and be filled with joy as we think of the glory we will have as we share with Christ.

We thank you for these things. In Jesus' name. Amen.