

Part 14: Hope in Anxious Times

Tyler Velin | 1 Peter 5:6-14

July 5, 2020

I remember hearing the story of someone who moved to New York City. They described how overwhelmed they felt at first at the amount of homeless people that were in the city. But she went on to describe how overtime she started to become used to their numbers and soon it was almost as if they weren't there.

I think this story is a microcosm of life in our world stained by sin. Because we see the pain of brokenness everywhere, we often become blind to those who are hurting. We live in a world where it is easy to be accustomed to the reality that some people suffer.

Loss of loved ones, loss of jobs, loss of houses, natural disasters, injustice, some of these might grab the ear of a culture for a bit. But eventually culture moves on, and those who suffer sometimes get forgotten.

At a national level we are seeing that cultures and governments are also incapable of rightly understanding the weight of those who feel oppressed, wounded and hurting. This even applies to me as a pastor in this church. I'm not aware of all the suffering that sits in these seats. In a sense, I don't think I'm capable of understanding the intricacies and nuances of all that each of you might be burdened with.

From a public perspective we know how hard it is to make sure that the suffering, the isolation, and the brokenness of each and every individual is spoken to and cared for. From a personal perspective we know how painful it can be to feel alone and without hope in our suffering. Which is why the words of 1 Peter today are of an absolutely astounding hope this morning.

We see that for those who suffer, for those who feel the anxiety of life, there is one who sees you and considers you in the midst of it. God knows exactly what it is that burdens your heart.

He knows the weight you carry and he wants to help you with it. The reason our world is broken is because it has rejected God and is riddled with the consequences of sin. But if it is through the work of Jesus on the cross and faith and repentance which brings us back to God, then we have in the midst of all of our burdens the hope of a creator God and his good for us.

God sees the sufferer, and it is his desire to care for them by calling them to Jesus, and by pulling them through this present suffering with the hope of Jesus. God has good news for those who suffer in this world.

What we are going to see today in the final verses of 1 Peter 5 is this: The goodness of God is greater than the grief of this world.

For those of you in here who are not believers, I hope today you see the ways in which hardships in your life show you that there is someone to turn to who can actually help you and care for you in your pain. For those who are Christians, Peter wants to remind you of the gifts of God given to you in your

salvation so that when you suffer, you are able to wrap yourself in the grace of God's sovereign plan for you in Jesus Christ.

We are going to see three truths today which shape help us understand God's goodness in difficult times: **Humility and its hope, Resistance and its enemy, God and his grace.**

Join me as we begin looking at the conclusion of Peter's first letter: **1 Peter 5:6-7.**

If you were with us last week, Peter was calling the whole church to clothe themselves with humility towards one another. But here the object of humility changes from each other, to God. We are to humbly submit ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

This is our first point today: **Humility and its hope.**

If you've grown up around the church you might have heard verse 7 before. It's a popular verse for mugs and posters. This is because there is an astounding reality inside of this verse.

Here we have the God who created the cosmos, the infinite, endless, matchless God of the Bible wanting to take your anxieties because he cares for you!

So why is it that so many of us are still anxious? Here is this verse, "cast your anxieties on him because he cares for you." But why is it that we still feel frustrated when life is hard. Why is it that despite our prayers we still feel scared, fragile and vulnerable?

Part of this is because we live in a broken world and it has real dangers. There will be things in this life which are fearful and painful. To rightly apply this text we don't try to repeat this verse like magic and hope everything goes away. Instead we want to look at the whole hope this text gives so that we might actually experience all the relief this verse promises to bring.

Even though this verse holds out this wonderful hope, it's harder than we think to live inside of it because it starts with the command to "humble yourselves."

The first thing Peter calls people with burdens to is humility, humbling themselves under God's sovereign hand over all of life's events.

When Peter uses the phrase, "under the mighty hand of God," he is calling those in difficult situations to understand that God is guiding and controlling the very details of those moments.

It's very easy when we encounter hardship in life to attempt to wrestle control of the metaphorical steering wheel back from God. We begin to think that God certainly doesn't know where we want to go. He might need some help with the road map.

But when we zoom out of our own lives and look at the cross of Jesus, we see that we can humbly trust God's hand even when it leads to confusing and difficult moments. Look at how Peter, this same Peter, spoke of the cross in **Acts 2:22-24.**

The cross was God's predetermined, definite and foreknown plan. And if God used the seemingly impromptu, chaotic, painful and unjust murder of his son to bring about the salvation of the lost, the perhaps he might be able to be trusted in your chaos as well.

If you want to know what it looks like to trust God, it means that you might have to live in places where you must exercise humility by only trusting God.

For pilots there are two kinds of certifications you can have when it comes to flying: visual flight rules and instrument flight rules.

Visual flight rules says that you can fly the plane when it's mostly clear out. You are trusted to be able to navigate by what you see. But when it becomes cloudy, stormy or dark, those who have only a visual flight rating are prohibited from flying.

To fly in those circumstances you must have IFR, instrument flight rules. The pilots who are IFR rated know how to navigate their plane safely by trusting only their instruments in their plane. Just by looking at all the gauges on their dash, even when they might be disoriented, they have all the info they need to know how to keep the plane level, on path, and away from potential hazards.

Suffering allows Christians the wonderful privilege of trusting God as our primary navigation instrument. When we cannot see what lay ahead, God is asking us to set our gaze on the cross trusting that while we might be disoriented, he is not.

Humbling ourselves requires us to trust God in places where we cannot trust ourselves or our circumstances. But the fruit of this is that we might stay in the air when we otherwise would be grounded.

But this kind of humility under God's infinite control is not some sort of empty stoicism. We can get the false idea that this kind of humility is walking emotionless into areas of hardship or suffering because we are nothing more than cogs in a system.

It is true that from a biblical perspective we ought to humbly submit to God because he is God and we are not. If a God like the God of the Bible really exists, then we must submit to him. He is the creator-God who has all authority. In the corporate world you naturally understand that you need to listen to the CEO because of the nature of his position.

How much more would we need to listen to the God who rules over all things?

Yet this God is so much better than a CEO. When he calls us to humble ourselves under his control he does so with the nearness of two wonderful hopes.

Look back at **1 Peter 5:6-7**. We humble ourselves before God because the same hand which we sometimes find ourselves under is the same hand that will one day exalt us, and more than that, he will do all of this because he cares for his children.

You see these verses humble the arrogant and comfort the exasperated.

First of all these verses humble us all the more. The word structure of this text is such that the phrase casting your anxieties upon God is the description of the head command, humble yourselves.

To think that your suffering is too small a thing for God to be concerned with is a false humility. When we wrestle with the anxiety of life in a broken world and refuse to go to God with the burdens of our hearts we are not humbling ourselves before him.

We cannot humble ourselves without being willing to take the smallest of our anxieties to him. Why does he want you to do this? Because he cares for you!

This text exposed much in my heart this week because I'm one who internalizes the anxieties of this world. I bind them on my back and I just continue to walk forward attempting to follow Jesus in my own strength. But that is not humility, and that is not trusting Jesus.

Consider what Charles Spurgeon says of this verse: **"Christian! Do not dishonor your religion by always wearing a brow of care; come, cast your burden upon your Lord. You are staggering beneath a weight which your Father would not feel. What seems to you a crushing burden would be to him but as the small dust of the balance."**

Humble Christians are Christians who go to God with their emotions. But what if you're one who understands this? What if it feels like you've been casting and casting and casting but you still feel hopeless.

Perhaps we need to make sure we fully understand the way in which God cares for us. We can only properly cast our anxiety on God when we understand that it is at the proper time that he will exalt us.

What is Peter referring to here? I think he's referring to the hope of heaven.

We can only cast our anxieties on a God whom we trust, and it is in the future hope held out for us that we see God is ultimately trust worthy. Our greatest problem was the sin that stood against us, but if Jesus has born that sin for you, and if you repent and believe in him, then this promise of resurrection life is the hope we need to make it in this life.

Casting your anxieties on God is not a thoughtless pill you take to magically make your circumstances go away. It is the thoughtful act of understanding that if you have faith in Jesus, one day all of the pain of this world will be finally and fully removed.

Casting your anxiety on God is not wishful thinking or blind ignorance which ignores the pains of this world. Instead it recognizes the deep ways in which sin has hurt us and our world and realizes that everything will be finally and ultimately fixed in our resurrection from the dead.

When we suffer, we cast our anxiety on God by sharing with him all of our fears and concerns and trusting that one day God has promised to exalt us and heal us. This is how you understand the extent to which God cares for you. God cares for you so much that he sent his son to die for you. That death, that removal of sin, was not meant just to remove the burden of condemnation. But it was to promise one day the removal of all of sins effects. Look at the hope Jesus gives in **John 16:33**.

That is the hope we have in seasons of hardship, and as Christians when we encounter suffering in this world we need to tell our anxiety where to go: it must go to the cross. Just as the disciples cast their cloaks on the colt which carried Jesus into Jerusalem, we must cast our anxiety on the Christ who carries us to glory.

It is important that when we encounter anxiety on behalf of suffering we tell it where to go because if we don't tell it where to go, someone else will try to offer help. Read with me: **1 Peter 5:8-9**.

Peter makes a unique connection here that shouldn't be lost on us. Here the Devils' tempting and devouring tendencies are tied to the suffering of the church. Which means this: The Devil knows that when suffering and anxiety rise in your soul, you are often prone to solve those emotions with sin.

This is the second thing Peter wants you to be mindful of: **Resistance and its enemy**.

If we lose sight of the care and hope for us under God's mighty hand, then Satan will surely offer his.

Note the continued emphasis on humility and resistance James provides: **James 4:7-10**.

In Lord of the Rings, Gollum offers to help Frodo in his quest to carry the ring, but Gollum's ultimate goal is to kill Frodo and take the ring for himself.

If we fail to humble ourselves and trust God in the midst of hardships, the Devil will swoop in like a seedy debt consolidator and promise us relief at the price of our souls.

Satan understands that we sometimes are prone to doubt what God designs for good, so he sets up shop at the gates of suffering. Like a lion he seeks to frighten us with his mighty roar into turning away from hope in God and trusting instead in the comfort of sin. He tries to shake our gaze from the instruments of grace.

In 2 Kings we read of the Assyrian army coming to attack the city of Jerusalem. And the officials of God's people went out to meet with the officials of the army of Assyria. One of the officials of Assyria told the Israelite officials that they were no match for Assyria. The king of Assyria had conquered every other nation and their gods, why would Jerusalem be any different.

Hearing how powerful the threats were, the Judean envoy asked for the Assyrians to speak in Aramaic so that the people of Judah who were inside the walls wouldn't be able to hear the conversations.

The Assyrians realized that this was because the officials didn't want the people to have their faith in the King of Judah shaken. So the official turned to the wall and saw his opportunity and said this to those hiding behind the wall: **2 Kings 18:28b-35**.

But remarkably the people did not cave. Why? Because look at what the King of Judah said to the people prior to this: **2 Chronicles 32:6-8**.

You see the roar of the devil will always cause us to fall if we do not stand firm in the comfort of the King.

When you suffer, when the armies of the world seem to be at your door, you might become anxious. And in those moments the lion will roar. His roar can be at the same time both fearful and seductive.

It might tell you that everything you wanted inside the walls of God can also be found outside. It might draw you to think that he can solve what this world aches with. But he cannot. He seeks only to destroy you.

If you are not a believer in here today, and you feel the weight of a broken world, you will encounter the voice of this lion. He will try to promise relief in the comfort of success, or sex, or career, or entertainment, but at the end you will find only teeth that kill.

That's because it is only the true lion of Judah, Jesus Christ who has promised relief from this world. Humble yourself and turn to this king. The king who doesn't devour you, but who laid down his life for you.

If you are a Christian, consider this text as a warning to be vigilant when your heart is troubled. Suffering provides an ingress for sin, and we ought to continue to trust Jesus and obey. One practical way we can do this is to look at the global church. See how those who are persecuted and suffer in different places in the globe continue to obey Jesus.

Resist the devil, firm in the faith, knowing that Jesus always stands with you even when the world stands against you.

We cannot afford to be thoughtless of our hope, for to lose hope is perhaps to trust another hand. I love how Martin Luther captured this in his song, "A Mighty Fortress": Though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God has willed, his truth to triumph through us.

And though we may face pain in the moment, this life, for the Christian is a life of triumph in the end.

Look at Peter's hope in **1 Peter 5:10-11**.

Here we see our last point today: **God and his grace**.

Why do we not need to worry about the roar of the Devil? Why can we hopefully endure when things are hard? Because we know that the same hand which may at times force itself down upon us to cleanse us, is the same hand which will one day restore those who are in Christ.

The emphasis of this text is that even though we will suffer, even though we will be opposed, one day, in the perfect time, the God of all grace, the God who called you to eternal glory in Jesus Christ, he himself and all of his splendor will restore you, confirm you, strengthen you, and establish you because he is the one who has ultimate dominion forever and ever, Amen.

You see after a little while of suffering is a forever of glory.

To be called by grace to Jesus Christ is to be saved by grace through faith. The same hand which guides the world, calls hearts to repentance in Jesus. The same hand which sometimes blinds us with suffering is the same hand which peels our eyes open to see the wonder of his son who came to die for our sins.

The same hand who created all the good in this world is creating for us a hope in glory better than before.

And this God, and his hand will one day take the broken saint, weary from life in this world and he will restore you. Another way to put it is that God himself will mend you.

To you who are suffering in this world, the calling of Christ promises us the mending of God himself. Torn and tattered we come to the cross, but under the gentle hand of the master tailor we are made whole.

With gentleness he takes us, and with all of his grace he remakes us whole. But only if we stand firm in the faith. Look at how Peter closes this: **1 Peter 5:12-14**.

Why did Peter write this letter? To remind sufferers that this is the true grace of God. This Jesus who ransomed us with his blood, who has been raised in glory and who has promised to see us through, this is the grace we need.

Stand firm in it.

Humble yourselves in faith. Look to the eternal reward made manifest for you in Jesus and entrust yourself to him.