

Standing Firm in the True Grace of God

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[0 : 0 0] And I think it's good as we start this morning just to pause and just to remember the incredible privilege, the significance this morning and every Sunday, whether in One Pizza or wherever we are, are turning in the Bible, that we are able to listen to the very word of God to us.

As a church, that's what we believe the Bible is, God speaking to his people. That's an incredible thing. And so this morning, let's not take that for granted, although we do this regularly. Let's make sure it doesn't simply become routine.

But as James has just prayed before the reading there, that the significance of hearing God speak to us this morning, pointing us to Jesus, that our minds, our hearts would be open to that.

And it would be a life-changing event as we sit under God's word this morning, both in the big eternal picture sense and also in the day-to-day shape of our lives.

We pray that God would speak and that we would listen. So what is it then that God is particularly saying to us in this part of his word? That's our question, really, week by week. What is it that God is saying to us, or has been saying to us, in this book of One Pizza?

[1 : 1 4] Well, let me draw your attention to verse 12, the close of this letter, where Peter writes, By Silvanus, Silvanus is probably the guy who delivered this letter to the different Christians to whom it went out.

Peter writes, By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, Exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.

Stand firm in it. So under God's direction, through God's inspiration, Peter says he has been laying out for us.

He has been teaching us the true grace of God. It's easy to band around that word grace in the church, isn't it? We want to be a church that is all about grace.

We want grace to be at the center of things, and that's really true. What does that actually look like? What does it actually mean? Well, the content of this letter that we've worked through, Peter says, this is a description of the true grace of God.

[2 : 1 9] It's that new identity that we've been given through Jesus, right back in chapter 1, that we have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that we have forgiveness, that we have an eternal inheritance, an eternal home with him if our trust is in him.

That is part of the true grace of God to us. And yet Peter is saying here that also another part of that true grace of God is us living obediently in response to his call, that it's not a cheap grace.

All the instruction that we've seen of our conduct in different areas of life, that as we're saved in Christ, we live for Christ, to be used by Christ, pointing people to him.

That is part of God's true grace to us. And then thirdly, perhaps most surprisingly of all, Peter has been so upfront about the challenges, the opposition, the suffering that that can bring.

That as we follow Jesus, the path leads through suffering to get to the glory that awaits us. That pattern of suffering and then glory is not a kind of an unfortunate consequence.

[3 : 39] Rather, Peter says that is part of God's grace to us, the true grace of God. That's what this whole letter then has been about, the true grace of God, so that we can know what to expect.

And also, crucially, last part of verse 12 there, that we might stand firm in it. That we wouldn't give up, that we wouldn't look for alternatives, that we wouldn't worry when these things happen, that we're perhaps heading in the wrong direction and turn back, but that we would live in and live out this grace that God has shown us, that we would stand firm in the true grace of God.

And so really good to keep that big picture in mind then as we finish off this letter this morning. And I think really these final verses are Peter's final instructions to help us stand firm in that true grace.

Just tying together so much of what this letter has been about. Three key points, I think, that Peter makes here in how to stand firm in this true grace.

A great way to finish the letter that we don't just kind of finish one Peter and that's back on the shelf and we forget all about it. But these are the steps that we can put in place and continue to put in place so that we can continue to stand firm as Peter would have us.

[4 : 58] And so the first one is this then, be humble knowing God's care. Be humble knowing God's care. If this life that Peter has laid out is the true grace of God, what it truly means to be a Christian, then I hope we've picked up as we've been going through this letter, if you've been with us, that the Christian life is not always one of comfort and convenience.

In fact, very rarely is that the case. It's not always one that gets you respect and privilege. If we take Peter's description here, we see it doesn't always map on to the world's view of success and high achievement.

We saw in chapter 2 and chapter 3 how we're called to submit in various areas of life where the world says we need to strive to be top of the pile. We've seen how we're to be willing to have people think we're different or even speak against us when the world says it is so important to fit in and so important to be liked.

We've seen how we're not to respond negatively to opposition, but we're to bear that where the world would say, no, you need to get even. You need to get your own back.

You need to express your dissatisfaction and let people know about it. And so first, to follow this pattern of life, which ultimately, remember, is Jesus' pattern of life.

[6 : 24] Remember, Peter is looking to imprint that pattern of Jesus onto the followers of Jesus. To do that is going to require humility because the Christian life is not all about getting everything here and now.

It's not about getting to the top of the pile or getting all the comfort or the respect or the praise from the world. And so it requires this humility that Peter speaks about.

Be humble. And yet, Peter says, it's about something far, far greater than that as well. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time, he may exalt you.

That's so important we remember that. Sometimes it can be a bit like a pendulum, can't it? It can be easy or tempting to try and sell the Christian life as a way to make everything simple.

You know, just come to Jesus and your problems will disappear. Come to Jesus and you'll be happy. Come to Jesus for health and wealth and prosperity. I hope we really are clear.

[7 : 27] That isn't the Bible's pattern. That isn't the Bible's promise. We've seen that underlined here repeatedly in 1 Peter. And yet it can be easy to go from that and swing to the other extreme.

We see in this letter that Christianity is hard, that it means going against the flow. It's not always popular, that it's costly. These things are true.

We've seen this picture in 1 Peter. And yet we can present that in a way which is such an unattractive invitation or is such an unencouraging thing to want to stand firm in that we start to think, well, why would we ever want this life?

You know, why would anyone ever want to follow Jesus? Why would I bother sticking with him if it's so hard? And when we find ourselves asking those kind of questions, that's because we forget that that key aspect of the gospel, that there is glory to come.

That our focus and the focus of our world is so often on the here and the now. What can I get right now? Rather than on the things of eternity.

[8 : 31] That the Bible calls us to look forward and to live in anticipation of the perfection God has promised. Peter reminds us that he, God, will exalt us.

And it's what God says about us, which is what truly and eternally matters. And we're going to come back to this later on down in verse 13.

And I do want us to see that it's only looking forward, it's only looking to God's reward, him exalting us, that allows us to actually be truly humble here in the present, to live humble lives.

We're quite used to that kind of false humility or that very public humility where we say something like, oh, I could never do that. And now we kind of stand and we wait for the person to respond, oh, of course you could do that, you're brilliant.

And if they don't say that, we think, oh, they think I actually couldn't do that. You know, we kind of use this humility in order to be exalted by other people, in order to get that praise from others. That's not humility, is it?

[9 : 30] That's pride. It's using people to build us up. It's relying on what other people think, not God. That's the opposite of 1 Peter. But it's knowing that it's God who will exalt us at the proper time.

And that might not mean tomorrow, that might not mean next week, Peter is looking ahead here to the return of Jesus. And that's when God's people will receive their reward.

It's knowing that God will lift us up at that time, having our confidence there that makes all the difference in the present. That is what, and it's the only thing that enables us to be humble and yet content in our day-to-day lives.

That is what means we don't need to model or strive after our lives being like the lives of celebrities or YouTubers whose whole existence seems on a different plane or all about demonstrating how much money they've made and how much they're able to spend.

That's what means we don't need to always be keeping up with our neighbors in terms of the stuff that they have and the holidays that they go on. It means we don't need to be taking our standards from advertising about what a normal life is, about what we deserve if we work hard.

[10 : 44] It means we don't need to take our standards from what are people saying about other people? Are they complimenting them? Why are they not complimenting me? Instead, when we look to Jesus and what he has promised, we're free to humbly but contentedly follow that pattern of Jesus, being willing to humble ourselves as he did.

What greater humbling is there than the king of all creation coming down to earth to live for us, to be born in a stable as we'll celebrate in this upcoming Christmas season?

Because that path to glory that he has invited us to runs through suffering and humility. It did for Jesus. It did for us.

And because Jesus has walked that path, he has made that forgiveness possible. And so we know that he will exalt us at the right time. Peter again gives another example, another outworking of this same attitude here, humbling ourselves, knowing God's care.

Verse 7, he says, It's not always a pride thing that makes us kind of seek after what everyone else has got or what the world offers us.

[11 : 59] It's not often a pride thing that makes accepting the cost or living a humble life difficult. Peter points out here it can be an anxiety thing as well. Perhaps we're really worried about speaking up at work because we think it might harm our job prospects.

We really need that job. Or perhaps we duck difficult questions with family or friends because we're anxious of what they'll think about us. And those relationships rightly mean a lot to us.

I think one of the biggest examples of this for so many Christians is worrying about their children. Last Sunday we were through visiting friends in a housing scheme in Dundee where they planted a church.

One of the hardest things for them has been getting Christians involved in that, Christian families, because Christian parents don't want to bring up their children in this particular area or send their children to these particular schools.

Again, that's a really understandable anxiety, isn't it? And yet why is it that this family have been willing to move their kids there? Ultimately, it's because they recognize the need for the gospel in that area, that these people need Jesus as we all do.

[13 : 12] That's their primary motivation. But on a more personal level, it's because they know that God cares for them, that God cares for their family.

They put their trust in God's care and not the securities that the world offers. And often whether we're willing to take those steps that make us nervous, and where there are genuine consequences, genuine costs or reasons to be anxious as we step outside of our comfort zone, ultimately, whether we're willing to do that or not, it boils down to that question, do I really trust that God cares for me?

Do I really trust that God knows what I need and will provide what I need? Will I depend on his care or do I still think actually I need to kind of back him up?

I need to care for myself. I need the security of the things of the world. Peter says that we can live a humble life. We can bring our anxieties, the things that worry us to God because he does care for you.

And when we're tempted to forget that, well, we are able to look to the cross where Jesus laid down his life for us.

[14 : 33] When we're tempted to think, you know, I'm not sure if God can or if God will help in this situation, this is too difficult or this is too big. Well, then we remember that God gave his own son to rescue us from our deepest and darkest problem, the problem of our sin.

Remember, Jesus suffered the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God. And so whatever is going on in your life right now, whatever is pulling you in different directions, whatever is causing anxiety, maybe keeping you up at night, or the first thing that comes to mind in the morning, the great news that Peter is reminding us of this morning is to be confident that God cares for you, that God knows that situation, that God cares now and will care for all eternity.

He has proved that care in Jesus. And it is knowing and trusting in that care, which allows us to live for him, allows us to accept humble lives, allows us to accept challenging situations, allows us to live not getting all the glory that we might want, but trusting in God who cares for us.

And so be humble, bring your anxieties to God, knowing God's care. Okay, Peter then moves on, verses seven and eight, to what might have first seemed like a bit of an unconnected bit of instruction in this letter.

It's as if Peter's, can almost seem like Peter's getting to the end of the letter, and he just forgot to put this in earlier, so he's suddenly kind of adding a few extra things. That's not the case. I hope we're going to see how that all fits together.

[16 : 07] But we see, be humble knowing God's care. Secondly, be watchful knowing Satan's attacks. Do have a look down there at verses eight and nine of chapter five.

And so suddenly here, Peter is speaking about the devil.

Suddenly Peter is speaking about Satan for the first time in this letter. And we might think, okay, that's a little bit of a jump. That's not something he's spoken about before. One of the things that we have spoken about, one of the things we've seen repeatedly in this letter, is how kind of down to earth, and how practical it is, how that new identity we have in Christ works its way out in the workplace, in our marriage, in how people speak about us, how do we respond to these day-to-day things.

And Peter's point here isn't to say, well, as well as all these practical things we've been looking at, well, now suddenly, here's all these spiritual things that you need to think about as well. No, Peter's point is that these spiritual elements are alive, that Satan, the devil, is at work in and through these very practical and day-to-day areas of life, and especially in these areas of suffering, which is a focus in this final section of 1 Peter.

And I was worth saying here and being upfront about this, this might all sound really strange to you, as soon as we start talking about the devil. I get that. In fact, speaking about this in kind of secular Scotland, in a Western context in 2024, we are a room who are right up there, in terms of people throughout the whole of history, for whom this will sound the most strange, and feel the most alien to.

[18 : 11] Throughout history, and even in other parts of the world today, this would seem like a very normal thing to be aware of. That's not really the case in our context. We speak about evil, perhaps, and people accept that.

We don't often think of Satan, the source of evil. And yet, in some ways, that is Peter's point. He's saying, well, don't be naive, don't be asleep, don't be careless.

Instead, be sober-minded, be watchful, Peter says. Because there is this spiritual battle going on, and it is taking place, not just through those who visit mediums, or it's not just something, you know, in tribes, in far-off lands.

It is taking place in the day-to-day lives we lead. This is not a new thing. This is the very same thing, that Peter has been speaking all about. Now, when is the time that we're most vulnerable, to that spiritual attack, to the devil getting his claws in, as it were?

Well, certainly one of those times, is when things are at their hardest. And the devil's temptation not to stand firm, not to bother, not to keep going, can ring in our ears the loudest.

[19 : 23] When we feel, most acutely, our life, of being one of exile, rather than one of comfort, and fitting in, and getting all that we can, here and now.

When there are costs, and struggles in life, and we hear, that voice within our head, that says, you know, what's the point? What is the point, in following Jesus, and in living for him?

It's not making things easier. In fact, as we've seen, it's so often the case, it's making it harder. Why would I bother? It's at times, just like that, that the devil would love, to devour us, and drag us off that path, as it leads, through suffering, so that we never reach, that destination of glory, that awaits us.

And so this isn't a new thing, but it's the same thing, that Peter has been saying, in this letter, but looking through, perhaps a more spiritual lens, which we're less used to using.

But what Peter says, is no less real, and no less practical, and no less important, in our Christian lives. It's really easy for us to say, this is a great book, because it's practical, and then we're not quite sure, what to call the kind of spiritual things, because by definition, we're saying, well, if this is practical, this isn't.

[20 : 38] But that's not the case, all of these things, are part of a whole. This is no less real, no less practical. Be watchful, knowing Satan's attack. So let me put a real, kind of practical application, on that, as we consider, this spiritual element, which is that we need prayer, to be central to our lives, and to our church.

Now what does it mean, to be watchful? What does it mean, to be alert? It means to be prayerful, and to be prepared, for this spiritual element of life. I think probably, it's fair to say for all of us, I include myself in this, that prayer needs to be, a bigger part of our lives, and as our church.

If we want to be able, to live a life of humility, if we want to trust in God's care, if we want to stand firm, as his people, in the true grace of God, then we need to be, constantly bringing, every aspect of our life, every aspect that this letter, has touched on, the most practical, the most mundane, the most day-to-day, all of these things, to God in prayer.

Because in a very real way, the devil spiritually, opposes our satisfaction in God, and our trust in God, in all of these different places. And corporately as well, as a church, if we want our church, to keep on going, if we want to be a church, that remains united, remains able to be a witness, to Jesus in our community.

Peter again, in this letter, has spoken, about the practical ways, of showing love to one another, of hospitality, of serving one another. Those are absolutely right. And again, over and above those, encompassing those, we need to pray for our church.

[22 : 18] Because again, the devil would love to, to push us off the rails. To drag our focus, away from Jesus, and our witness to the gospel, and instead to, you know, our personal preferences, or desires.

And we need to be aware, of that, that spiritual reality, we need to pray. And the great news here, is that despite, the devil's power, the reality of that danger, that we need to be alert to, the Bible makes it abundantly clear, that he is a defeated power.

That we have a far, greater spiritual resources, available to us, in Jesus, who, in his victory, over Satan, went to the cross, and yet rose again, who has won that battle.

And yet, we need to be making use, of those spiritual resources, that victory we have in him. We claim those, by coming to God in prayer. So be watchful, knowing the devil's attacks. Don't be surprised, or naive, but trusting in God's care again, coming to him, in prayer.

So be humble, knowing God's care. Be watchful, knowing the devil's attacks. Finally, be encouraged, knowing God's glory. And it is great, to be able to finish, this letter, as Peter finishes his letter, with this incredible note, of encouragement, and looking forward, that looking forward, that has been such a huge part, of this letter, as we've looked through it.

[23 : 48] Reading verses 10 and 11, again, do have a look. Peter writes, and after you have suffered, a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you, to his eternal glory, in Christ, will himself, restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

To him, be the dominion, forever, and ever. Amen. And really, these verses here, at the end of 1 Peter, bookend, how the letter began.

There's a whole load of links, we don't have time, to look at all of those. But really, the big kind of theme, that is bookending it, is that, that truth, that God will do, what he has promised to do. And that those he has called, and so have, have trusted in Jesus, who have been born again, into that living hope, through the death, and resurrection of Christ, that God, in his grace, will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us, in the eternal home, the perfect home, the eternal inheritance, he is keeping for us, and keeping us for.

You know, things can be hard, in this world. Peter has made that, abundantly clear, in this letter. And all of us here, in this room, we'll know that, through our own experience. The reality of living, in a fallen world, the reality of our own sin, the reality for Christians, of being exiles, not truly home, in this world, the reality of the devil's attacks, we've spoken about, all of those things.

And yet God promises, that he will bring us home, to the glory, that awaits us. And that we follow, in the footsteps, of Jesus, we are molded, into that pattern of Jesus, of suffering, and then glory.

[25 : 36] And God promises, that if we suffer with Christ, but stand firm, holding on, to those promises, that we will, reach his glory. And that he will, bring us home.

Now when Peter, says there, when you have suffered, a little while, again that's not a promise, that if you're suffering this week, it will be gone, by next week. Nor is it to downplay, our suffering, as if it was insignificant.

Peter's made it clear, in this letter, the difficulty, of suffering. And yet it is suffered, a little while, in comparison, to the eternity, and to the magnitude, of the glory, that awaits us.

That whatever cost, we face as a Christian, and living for Christ, that whatever it means, for us to follow, in Jesus's footsteps, through suffering, on that path to glory, that whatever the discomfort, of living the whole of our lives, here on earth, as exiles, and all those things, are very real, but all of those things, will fade into nothing, into less than a speck, when we reach, that glory that God, has promised us.

A glory that we reach, through Jesus, and what he has done for us, in the gospel. A glory that we don't deserve, but are invited into, because of the forgiveness, that Jesus won, at the cross, for all, who trust in him.

[27 : 07] Be humble, knowing God's care, be alert, knowing Satan's attacks, but be encouraged, knowing God's glory. And I think, if there's a takeaway for us, from one Peter, and I hope there's, there's lots of things, that we can remember, and take away, but if there's a big, kind of headline, I think it's this, to keep looking ahead, to that glory, and be encouraged, by the eternal promises, that God has made, and he will keep.

Remember, the eternal home, the internal inheritance, you have been called to, and let that work itself back, into our lives, here and now. Let that shape, every aspect, of our day to day lives.

Be willing in the present, to live as an exile, distinctively putting up with, and expecting suffering, incredibly being used, by God in that, to point people to Jesus.

Be willing to live that out now, because through Christ, we have an eternal home, and we have a place, with him, who has dominion, forever, and ever. That is the good news, of the gospel, that is only possible, through Jesus.

If you're here, this morning, and you don't know Jesus, there cannot be, any greater invitation, to what is, the most glorious, the most eternal, the most secure, kept for us, if we put our trust in Jesus.

[28 : 27] If you're here, this morning, and you are a Christian, and times are hard, and you know the truth, that Peter's been saying, that Christianity, doesn't just remove, all the difficulties. Be encouraged, to stand firm, in the true grace of God, to keep going, on that journey, living for Christ, as his people, in anticipation, of that glorious home, that he has for us.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you, that you have made, incredible promises to us, as your people, and that you have kept, those promises, through Jesus, who through the cross, has made our, forgiveness possible, and through his, glorious resurrection, has brought us, into a new, and eternal, living hope.

Lord, we thank you, that you, have kept your promise, to us as your people, and that you will continue, to keep that promise, until we are brought home, into our eternal inheritance, to share with you, in your matchless glory, for all time.

Lord, we ask that you would help us, to live the whole of our lives, here on earth, in light of that eternal glory, and that perfect home. We pray that we would be able, to faithfully live our lives, as exiles, living according to your word, and pointing to your grace.

Lord, please help us, to recognize, where the pressure points, in our lives are, and we pray that, at those times, we would prayerfully, be able, and strengthened, to accept the cost, of being your people, living here on earth.

[30 : 06] Lord, we do pray, that you would help us, as we do that, to be aware of, and alert to the reality, of the spiritual opposition, that we face, but that as we, prayerfully, work our way, through our lives, we would be remembering, all the time, that you are greater.

Lord, please help us, to do that, confident in your care, bringing our anxieties, to you. Please help us, as a people, to remember the identity, that you have graciously, given us in Jesus, and to live our lives, for your praise.

Lord, we pray that you would, strengthen us, through your Holy Spirit, for this work. We pray that you would help us, to be encouraging one another, as we continue, together as your people. And we pray all of this, in the precious name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.