December 9/10, 2017

Stand Firm in It

Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

1 Peter 5:6-14

Pastor Bryan Clark

Peter has reminded us that as Christians we have been born again to a living hope, but we also have been reminded that we live out that life in a culture of despair—a world where there is pain and suffering and heartache. So how do we live as hope-filled people in the midst of a culture of despair? That's the question we've been wrestling with, and Peter has taught us a lot about that. But there's one particular point that he has made seven times, and this morning in the final paragraph—the final look at Peter—he reminds us one more time—eight times—he has reminded us of a point that, if we do not get it, we just simply stand no chance of living as hope-filled people. What is that point? Well let's find out. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 5. The last thing that we looked at last week was the quote from the proverb*, GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE (OR FAVOR) TO THE HUMBLE, w*hich brings the *therefore* to the discussion this morning.

> **Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,** (*NASB, 1 Peter 5:6)

Therefore, if God is opposed to the proud, if God gives grace or favor to the humble, **therefore humble yourselves**. Literally it is, "Allow yourself to be humbled." Peter has talked a lot about that, that the reality is living as a Christ follower in a fallen world means that life is not going to be fair. Nobody likes to be treated unfairly. Nobody likes to be slandered. Nobody likes to be verbally abused. Nobody likes to suffer persecution. But the reality is we follow the example of Jesus our Savior, and we are reminded that that was true of His story, and it will be true of our story. Our natural tendency is to fight back; it is to demand our rights. And when we do that we simply contribute to the breakdown of a culture. Rather we are to respond with humility. Literally it means to think of someone else as more important than ourselves—that we choose to do right, to do good, even when we are treated unfairly, to provide a platform for the proclamation of the message of Jesus.

So it's allowing ourselves to be humbled **under the mighty hand of God.** Typically that phrase is a reference to God as the deliverer—this idea that ultimately God sets the record straight; God ultimately rights the wrongs. At the end of the story, God is in charge and He will redeem things back to the way they were supposed to be. Peter talked about this—that the reason we don't seek vengeance is because we trust, at the end of the story, God will right the wrongs.

This **mighty hand of God** phrase was used. for example, in the Old Testament. The nation of Israel, the Hebrew people suffered four hundred humiliating years of slavery under Egypt and the pharaohs. But God was raising up Moses and Aaron, and during this series of plagues that would ultimately lead to the Hebrew people being set free, it refers to *the mighty hand of God*—this idea of God as the rescuer, God as the Savior. So we allow ourselves to be humbled in this life under **the mighty hand of God**, knowing that at the end of the story He rights the wrongs, **that He may exalt you at the proper time.**

Now that's really worth stopping and pondering what he just said there. We're all going to have to wrestle with whether we trust God and He will exalt us—if so, in His way, His timing—or whether we're going to determine that actually this life is what matters most and if God's not going to exalt me, I'll exalt myself. It kind of carries the idea then if I'm going to ultimately believe that this world is what matters most, then if God is not going to exalt me, I'm going to have to take matters into my own hands. I am going to be my own god and I'm going to exalt myself. I'm going to give myself significance. I'm going to be about my own safety and security. I'm going to pursue my own dreams; I'm going to do this my way because I've lost faith that God's ultimately going to do it for me.

So part of the big wrestling match—and this is kind of locked in to this key point that Peter's been making—is you have to decide whether what matters to you most are the things of this world or the things of eternity. If it's the things of eternity, then you follow the script. We allow ourselves to be humbled; we stay on mission. We understand this isn't heaven; it's not supposed to be. God never promised that this life would be heaven on earth. As a matter of fact, what he said is this is a battle and it's going to be hard. Look at what they did to Jesus. You can expect the same. But if we get confused and think this is supposed to be heaven and that this is the place where I chase my dreams and they all come true, and we ride into the sunset, and everything is supposed to work out, and we convince ourselves if I'm a good boy, if I'm a good girl—I have my devotions, I give a little money, I serve—God is supposed to make everything work out fine, and then when God doesn't follow our script, we get angry with Him. We think God has cheated us; God has let us down; God is being unfair. You know, we did our part but God isn't willing to do His part? And that is the moment where we take charge and we decide we will exalt ourselves. Once you start down that path, it's just going to be one disappointment after another.

Now it is possible, to some degree, we may experience some level of exaltation in this life. But ultimately, it's referring to the life to come. We've had this reminder again and again that Jesus is coming back—and that will be the moment of celebration! That will be the moment where everything will change. But we can think of stories. For example we went through the David story. It's a great story, but we're reminded that David, after he was anointed to be the next King of Israel, his reward for being so courageously obedient to God was a decade and a half of struggle and suffering in the *Wilderness School of Leadership*. It must have been a decade and a half of hurt, of confusion, of wondering where is God in all this and why does it have to be that way? We can't lose sight of how difficult that must have been, but we are encouraged by the fact that at the end of that struggle, he was made King of Israel and became the greatest king in the history of Israel. We're reminded of the story of Joseph. Joseph spent probably about ten years in a prison, in Egypt, being falsely accused. They must have been such discouraging, confusing years for Joseph. But eventually he is rescued and God allows him to be the second most powerful man in the world.

We love those stories because, at the end they still somehow resolve themselves and these people are kind of exalted yet in this life. But I often ask people, "Would you love the Joseph story as much if he died in prison?" And, "Do you realize lots of people do die in prison?" All of the apostles, except for probably John, ultimately were executed for their faith. They were never exalted in this life. The Apostle Paul went from beating and jails and imprisonment and persecution—from one to another to another—until he was ultimately executed for his proclamation of the gospel. No one could say that Paul was exalted in this life.

We love the first half of Hebrews 11—the Faith Hall of Fame—because they are really great stories that we identify with. But we don't like the second half of Hebrews 11 when it tells us, "Oh, by the

way, some were tortured to death. Some were burned to death. Some were sawn in half; some were burned at the stake." And there is a reminder that a lot of Christians will never experience that level of exaltation until they are ultimately in the presence of Jesus. So part of what you wrestle with is, "What do I think matters most?" Ultimately, do I live for the things of this world, and if so, it's almost guaranteed you're going to be your own god; you're going to take charge of your own life; you're somehow going to try to make it happen, or do you believe that ultimately God will exalt me? It's not that it's not going to happen, but rather than me doing it myself, God's going to do it. And if that's the case, God does it His way in His time—so **we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God** ***and trust He will exalt us at the proper time.***

Now that certainly would have raised anxieties for the first readers. They were in a very difficult time in Asia Minor. It was the beginning of persecution; things were only going to get worse. If I was in their shoes and I was waiting for a letter from Peter, here's what I would have wanted to hear in the letter: "*By the way, if you are a good boy, a good girl, have your quiet time, give your money, serve, everything's going to work out. There will be no persecution; you won't be falsely accused; nobody's going to throw you in jail. God's going to make sure none of that happens. It's going to be heaven on earth."* I think that's what I would have wanted to hear. So now what they are hearing is it's not going to be that way. There is nowhere God promises, "This is your best life now." This is not a playground; it's a battleground. This is not a cruise ship; this is a battleship. This is war, and you have to get that in your head—that everything that my soul longs for is in the world to come. For now we have a mission to accomplish which creates a certain level of anxiety. Some of you are feeling it right now. You want to believe, "Certainly we can work out a deal." If I'm a really good Christian, then God can make everything okay because we don't want to believe that something really bad can happen to me or the people we love—which is then where Peter goes in Verse 7:

> **...casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.**

There are legitimate concerns...legitimate fears...legitimate things that cause anxiety within us. The question is, "What are we going to do with that?" The text tells us that we *cast our anxieties on Him*. That word *cast* is a very specific term. It does not mean we cast *away*; it means we cast *upon*. *Cast away* basically carries the idea that when we have concerns, when we have fears, when we have anxieties, we just *cast them away* and life is lovely. But we would refer to that as *denial*. It's just pretending those things don't exist. It's kind of like sticking your head in the sand, pretending they are not there, and thinking somehow that is going to make them go away. That's what people use drugs for; that's what people use alcohol for; that's what people use pornography for. It's like escaping into this temporary relief from the pain. But that never works, because at some point you have to come back and face the reality. Denial doesn't work. The word is not *cast away*; it's *cast upon*, which carries the idea that we just transfer our cares, our anxieties, our fears onto someone who is fully capable of handling them. This exact word was used in the Gospels when, on Palm Sunday the people were casting their garments on the colt before Jesus entered the city. That's the exact same word. It's the idea that I take my fears, my worries, my anxieties, and I cast them on Jesus.

Now anxiety, worry, and fear, are all interesting emotions. We probably could all agree together, by and large, it's a big waste of time and energy. If anybody can explain to me how worry fixes anything, I'd be open to hear it. But at the end of the day, no matter how much we dwell on it, no matter how much we obsess about it, it doesn't fix it. It doesn't make it go away; it doesn't make it all better—it's just an absolute waste of time and energy. Studies tell us that eighty-five percent of

what we worry about never comes to pass—just a total waste of time and energy—and of the fifteen percent that is left, we cast it on Jesus and trust He can handle it. The fact is, even the fifteen percent that will happen, there is very little I can do to change it or control it. What is my responsibility, I should take seriously but most of it is out of my control. But it's not out of God's control. So I cast it on to the One who is fully capable of carrying the load. That's an acknowledgement that life's going to be hard; it's going to be full of challenges. There are legitimate things to concern us and to be afraid of, but we have to trust God—and the rationale is **because He cares for you.**

Now I'd be the first one to acknowledge, sometimes life is really hurtful, really painful. Sometimes it doesn't make sense; God seems a million miles away. Sometimes we wonder, "Why does it have to be this way?" Sometimes it feels like God is cruel. I understand that; I have walked that path. But we cannot question that God cares for us. This is not religious theory. God so loved you that He gave...God willingly gave up His own Son. Christmas is the reminder that when we were lost in our sins, when we had declared ourselves to be enemies of God, when we were deserving of condemnation, God did not turn His back. God actually gave up His own Son, knowing that He would be mistreated, He would be reviled, He would be abused, He would be persecuted, He would be tortured and ultimately executed. He knew that going in, and the only reason He did that is because He loves you...because He cares! He wanted you to experience His forgiveness. He wanted you to be His child, to be His very own possession. Peter has talked about that. He certainly didn't do that because He doesn't care. He did that because He does care...and He's not going to do that and then abandon you halfway through the journey.

Again, I understand life can be painful; it can be confusing. Sometimes God seems a million miles away, but you can't doubt that God cares. He acted on that love and provided salvation, and when we get our thinking correct, we do remember that there is coming a day when we will get everything that our souls are longing for. He will exalt us—in His way, in His time. There will be a victory party that will make it worth it all! But this isn't heaven now; it isn't supposed to be. God never said it would be. This is a sin-cursed earth full of pain and suffering and struggle.

The other problem, then, is in verse 8. We do have an enemy, and the enemy is determined to make sure we do not believe anything I just said. He says,

> **Be of sober *spirit*,** (that means clear thinking) **be on the alert.** (the opposite of alert would be sleepy, so rather than sleepy, we are alert and ready. Why?) **Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.** (Vs. 8)

I don't know if you know this or not, but you actually do have an enemy. You have an **adversary** whose desire is to take you down as a Christian, to at least render you completely ineffective. The idea of a **roaring lion** is a difficult imagery for us, in that probably most of us, maybe all of us, have never actually heard a lion in the wilderness roar before an attack. It would have been a very common experience for them. There was a constant fear of lions in the ancient Near East when they traveled. Whenever they were outside the protection of the city, most would have heard the sound; it would have been utterly terrifying—a roaring lion is a lion on the attack, seeking someone to devour.

In trying to sort out what is meant by this—what is the heartbeat or the nature of spiritual warfare—there are people that get really distracted into thinking it's kind of Halloween-ish, maybe to say it that way. It's ghosts and goblins and witches and all this hocus-pocus. You can read a lot of books about the devil and spiritual warfare but I would recommend you don't do that. I think that's a very bad path. I think the Scripture is clear—that we *fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our*

faith. We don't obsess over the enemy. Spiritual warfare is not about all that Halloween-ish kind of stuff. As a matter of fact, it's just a very clever distraction. It's ultimately about lies, about slander. The name **devil** means slanderer. He wants to lie to you about who you are. He wants to lie about who God is. The word **adversary** is a word that's talking about a legal adversary in a court of law. Essentially what he wants to do is take you to court and lie about you in order to destroy you. So it's about messages that bombard you every day—that God doesn't care, that God isn't loving. This salvation thing isn't going to work; it won't work for you. You're a spiritual loser; you're never going to measure up. You're never going to make it into heaven—that this world is where it's at. This is what you should be living for. Life would be better with you in charge. Every day you are bombarded with these lies.

Jesus, in John chapter 8, describes the devil as a liar and the father of lies. He even goes so far as to say he can't tell the truth because his very nature is the nature of a liar. So this is how the battle is waged. You actually have an enemy who has you in the crosshairs. He's coming after you but he's not going to mug you in the alley. It's not how it works. He's going to suddenly, cleverly, lie to you every day about what matters, about what lasts, about what gives you significance, about what gives you value, about what ultimately you should be living for. And so the text says you need to be **on the alert**. You need to have clear thinking and be awake. This is a battle. It's real and it's powerful.

The sobering reality is every day there are hundreds of Christians that believe the lies and are devoured by the enemy. But here's the other side of that—it doesn't have to be you! You *choose* to know the truth. You *choose* to believe the truth. There's virtually no way to learn all the lies. It's not necessary. Know the truth, and the truth exposes the lies. You are extremely vulnerable if you do not know the truth of God. So he goes to verse 9: In light of this...

> **But resist him,** (the devil) **firm in *your* faith,**

That's a military term, "We take our stand." You notice ***your* faith**. *Your* is in italics, which tells you it isn't in the original language. Sometimes faith is not just belief but it is reflective of a body of doctrine. It's used that way quite a bit in the New Testament—that it is not just belief. It's not like belief in belief; it's not positive thinking. It carries more the idea that there's a body of doctrine, of truth, and that's what you stand on. That's what you believe. Now I would suggest to you that Peter has given you more than enough truth in this letter alone to take your stand. He has told you: *by the grace and mercy of God, you have been born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus, for an inheritance that is already reserved in heaven for you. It is an inheritance that cannot be corrupted; it cannot be diminished; it cannot be lost. And it is awaiting the return of Christ, where your salvation will reach its fulfillment, and it will be everything that you have ever longed for.*

So we come down to this: Do you believe God tells the truth? If so, stand on it! Don't let the enemy lie to you. Or you have to wrestle with: Do you think God is a big liar? If so, then walk away. But if God tells the truth, then stand on it...believe it.!

> **...resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.** (Vs. 9)

So imagine, in the ancient world they didn't have communication like we have today. They may be imagining they are somehow unique—this little anomaly for some reason is not working in Asia

Minor—but everybody else is living the dream on earth. And what Peter is saying is, *"Hey, it's this way for all your brothers and sisters anywhere. Jesus is the model. It will mean suffering; it will mean persecution, struggle. That's true of all your brothers and sisters. We battle together to the finish line."*

It's good for us to remember we have brothers and sisters all around the world this morning who are suffering intense persecution for the sake of the gospel. We in America probably have as little as any Christians have ever had in the history of Christianity. Most of our brothers and sisters have experienced a severe level of persecution and, even today, many of them are imprisoned and put to death. We talked about this two weeks ago. If there is going to be an epic battle on the field, ultimately for the victory, and if it's going to be a battle where we're going to be bruised and bloodied and give everything that we have, I don't want to be in the bleachers. I don't want to just wear the uniform and stand on the sideline and watch my teammates battle it out. I want to be in the mix. I want to stand with my brothers and sisters from around the world who endured intense persecution and, at the end of the day and in the victory celebration, I want to stand with them and say, *"I gave it everything I had in the midst of the battle. We're in the mission together, and we celebrate the victory together as the people of God!* That's essentially what Peter just said. Verse 10:

> **After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. To Him *be* dominion forever and ever.** (Vs. 10-11)

Verse ten is a reminder, the suffering is **for a little while.** In light of eternity, it is a short period of time. This isn't a cruise ship; it's a battle ship, and sometimes it gets really, really hard and confusing and painful, but we can't ever lose sight of the fact it is temporary. In light of eternity, it is a short period of time. To live for this world is to live for things that will only matter for a very short period of time, and then to ultimately realize I totally missed the point. So no matter what you are going through, it *is* temporary—it's a short period of time.

So after **a little while, the God of all grace**—the reminder that what we have is not on the basis of my performance, it's not on the basis of my religious activity—it's something that's based on the *grace of God*, so it's equally true of me on my best days and on my worst days. It is eternally secure in the grace of God—the grace of Him **who called you to His eternal glory in Christ**.

This is the eighth time in Peter that he has referred to *the glory of Christ, referring to the return of Christ*. Now stop and think about this. These people are undergoing serious suffering and probably right on the edge of serious persecution. Many of these people will be imprisoned, die; some of them will be burned at a stake. What's ahead for them is going to be very, very difficult. Some people think that the reason Peter used the imagery of a roaring lion is because he was living in Rome and the activity with Christians in the coliseums had already begun; and he would hear the roar of the lion, know what was going on, and was reflecting on that imagery. Whatever is going on, these were very difficult times for these people.

So when Peter writes to them and tells them what they need to know, eight times he reminds them: *Jesus is coming back, and it will be the end of the pain and suffering and struggle*. It will be this awesome victory celebration, and now, at the end of the book, he adds something to that. *By the way, not only will this be an awesome victory celebration together, but did I tell you, the party will last forever!* That's essentially what he just said—**the eternal glory in Christ.** It is the beginning

of everything that your soul has longed for, everything that your soul has wanted. There is so much in our souls that is good and right, and what we long for is what God wants for us. But it's not going to happen in this sin-cursed world; what we're going through is temporary. When Jesus comes back, it will be a victory party *forever* and it will finally be the fulfillment of everything our souls long for.

He will Himself perfect. That word means basically to *mend or restore.* It's a word that was used to describe the mending of nets back to new condition. So it is the reminder, at the end of the story, somehow He rights the wrongs, somehow He restores, He makes new again. It's everything that He ever wanted for you. It is delayed, but one day it will be a reality. That's the idea of **perfect**. **Confirm, strengthen and establish**—there isn't much difference in those. Ultimately God gives you what you need to get to the finish line, get to the celebration. In verse 11, *it's all for His glory*.

Paul, in Ephesians 1 says, *to the praise of the glory of His grace*. It's all about putting God's grace on display in order to take sinful men and women and turn them into His people, His children, the trophies of His grace. Verse 12:

> **Through Silvanus,** (we would know him as Silas) **our faithful brother (for so I regard *him*), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! She who is in Babylon,** (which would be Rome, so the Roman church) **chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and *so does* my son, Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love.**
>
> **Peace be to you all who are in Christ.** (Vs. 12-14)

Right in the middle of that paragraph is, again, military terminology. This is the truth about the grace of God. **Stand firm in it!** So once again we're wrestling with this question: Do you think God tells the truth or do you think God is a big liar? I can explain the truth, but I cannot believe it for you. You have to decide if it's true or not. Every day the enemy is bombarding you with lies, and you have to decide what you believe to be true.

Once you begin to think that this life is where it's at, that this is where I'm supposed to ultimately be happy and fulfilled, that this is my dream and this is where I want to be exalted, that this is about my significance; this is about my value; this is about my safety and security, and because God doesn't seem to be doing the job, I'm going to take charge myself. I'm going to be my own god and I'm going to make it happen in this life. Once you get into that frame of mind, you're going to be disappointed again and again. It's going to confirm to you that God doesn't really care. If He did care, He would come through for you, and so you take charge all the more, which leads to more disappointment. God doesn't care any more; so it's just this death spiral down...down...down.

There might be some of you sitting here this morning and you're thinking, "You know, I'm doing it myself, making it work...seems like it's all working out." You know, that could change with one phone call. We see it all the time. People think they are on top of the world! Then one phone call, and everything changes. Today may be the greatest day of your life; tomorrow might begin your nightmare. This is a sin-cursed world, and to be blunt, you are a fool to think this is where it's at. God has told you that over and over and over again. So we're back to our question: Do you think God tells the truth? Then you realize this isn't heaven. It's not supposed to be. This is going to be filled with heartache and struggle and confusion, but we understand that ultimately, Jesus is coming

back and there will be this victory party together. It will be everything that my soul has longed for, and it will be a party that will last forever.

My hope is not built on my belief that if I'm a good Christian, everything in this life will work out. That's a recipe for disaster. My hope is built on my belief that no matter what happens in this life, Jesus is coming back, He will fulfill His promise, and there will be this grand victory celebration around the glory of God! He will exalt me at *His* time, in *His* way, and it will be glory forevermore. If I really believe that, then it is there I take my stand! That is what is necessary to live as a hope-filled person in the midst of a culture of despair.

Our Father, we celebrate this morning that when there was no hope, You sent Jesus into the world to be the Savior of the world. Lord, in that You never said that this life would become heaven on earth. Actually You said just the opposite. It's going to be really hard. It's going to be a battle, but one day Jesus will return and it will be glory forevermore. Lord, I know there are people in this room this morning, they are really hurting. There is a lot of pain; there is a lot of suffering; there is a lot of confusion. God, remind them again this morning our hope is not in this world, but in the promise of what is to come, made possible through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus our Savior, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2017 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

December 9/10, 2017

Stand Firm In It!

Hope-filled Living in a Culture of Despair

1 Peter 5:6-14

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What are some of the lies of the culture that bombard us every day? How do they affect our perspective on what matters in life?

2. Why do we worry? What does this reveal about whom we trust?

3. What would it mean to you to live each day for the glory to come rather than for this world?

Bible Study

1. Read I Peter 5:6, 7. What does verse 6 look like practically lived out in your life? What does it mean to "allow yourself to be humbled (literal translation)?"

2. To allow yourself to be humbled is going to create anxieties. What does it mean to cast them on God? What is the difference between trying not to worry (just casting them away) and casting our worries on God?

3. Read I Peter 5:8, 9. How does Peter describe the enemy? Compare John 8:44. How does the enemy attack and what then is our weapon against him? What does it mean to "stand firm in (your) faith?

4. Read I Peter 5:10, 11. What is the perspective needed to remain faithful in hard times? Peter has mentioned the return of Christ 8 times to people who are undergoing trials and persecution. Why is this focus on the return of Christ so important when times are tough?

5. Read I Peter 5:12-14. Peter states that "this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!" As a review of I Peter, what have you learned regarding what is true of you as a believer because of the grace of God? What does it mean then to "stand firm in it?"

Application

1. List the 3 most helpful things you've learned from I Peter.

2. How can you keep these truths in mind when you go through hard times?

3. What is Peter's message in one sentence?

Copyright 2016 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.