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1 Peter 5:5-11

Eighteenth Message

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THE GREATEST WEAPON IN AN EVIL AGE: HUMILITY

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

Christians should live as aliens in a hostile world, says the apostle Peter in his first letter. Writing in the first century, Peter foresaw the persecution which Christians would face as the Roman authorities sought to destroy them and their faith. Our country too is experiencing a hostile attitude toward those who profess Christ and the absolute values of Christianity. A recent letter to the editor in a local newspaper illustrates this attitude. In response to William Bennett's statement that he felt the devil was behind the drug culture in our country, this person wrote, "Like federal drug czar William Bennett, I too have seen the face of evil. I saw Satan in one of his numerous disguises, amusing himself as he so often does. In one hand, our flag, in his other, a cross, leading Christian fundamentalists down the road to stupidity."

This statement typifies the popular attitude toward Christ and Christians. But Peter encourages Christians to not merely survive the onslaught, but to conquer and be victorious over evil, just as Jesus did by dying on the cross. Humility, says the apostle, is the Christian's most powerful weapon to confront the forces of evil. Conversely, pride is the devil's most formidable weapon in gaining access to the believer's heart. As Proverbs 26:12 says, "Do you see a man wise in his own eye? There is more hope for a fool than for him." The book of Proverbs explicitly teaches that there is no hope for a fool, thus, the person who thinks he is wise is in great danger. Likewise, Jesus built the kingdom of God on those for whom the world holds no value—prostitutes, tax-collectors and thieves—but who were clothed in humility. When they repented, they never forgot the state from which they came. On the other hand, self-righteous, smug, religious hypocrites have no place in God's kingdom because they fail to recognize their inadequacy.

In 1 Peter 5:5-11, the apostle first describes the expressions of humility Christians are to have toward one another; secondly, how they should cultivate humility; and finally, how to use humility to conquer evil.

I. Expressions of Humility (5:5)

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (NASB)

A. Toward the Leadership (5:5a)

In the first part of chapter 5, Peter declared that humility is the greatest quality an elder can possess. He now tells younger men that they can express humility by submitting to their elders, not because elders are the bosses of the church, but rather because they have humbly sought the mind of the Lord through prayer. When the elders come to agreement, therefore, it is important for the church to submit to their leading as if they were following Jesus Christ himself.

Peninsula Bible Church has always followed the principle of unanimity to discover the mind of Christ. This is based on our understanding of the words of the apostles in Acts 15:25, 28, "It seemed good to us, having become of one mind...for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to." Thus in all matters, if the board of elders is unanimous (each elder seeking the mind of the Lord through prayer, without any

coercion by stronger members), they feel they have found the mind of the Lord for the church. The church ought therefore to submit and not be strident, arrogant or impulsive in their reaction to the decisions of the board.

One of the difficulties faced by every generation of leaders is that God often requires them to lead the flock into places that are uncomfortable and contrary to public opinion. Moses, for example, was commanded by God to lead Israel through a wilderness in order to reach the Promised Land. But the flesh rebels in such situations because it wants what it can see with the eye. In contrast, faith hopes for what it cannot see and, resting in that, postpones its desires for the future. Although Moses was leading them to the good land, the flesh in the nation of Israel murmured and stirred up trouble. Leaders then must often guide their flocks through the wilderness before reaching the land of promise.

In the sixteen years I have been a pastor at this church, I have found it difficult at times to submit to the elders, but I have always found that it has been in my best interest to do so. The hardest time in my life, in fact, occurred five and a half years ago when we opened PBC South. My college ministry at Stanford was flourishing and I had no desire to leave. When each pastor was asked whether he wanted to minister at North or South, for some reason I was not asked, but was assigned to South. It was difficult for me to adjust because I had no time to reflect on the elders' decision. In retrospect, however, I now see that it was the best thing that ever happened to me and my family.

Likewise, you too will get a chance to submit in the weeks ahead, as the elders have decided on some changes for our church. I have been delighted to see the godly process at work. Each elder has prayed about your input, and has sought to weight and prioritize each concern. They have finally come to one mind about the direction for the church, and we will be led on to greener pastures. Therefore, you will have the opportunity to submit and, by faith, enter into a new adventure with them.

B. Toward All

Secondly, says Peter,

...clothe yourself with humility toward one another.

Peter uses the word "clothe" because he is remembering the time when Jesus girded himself with a towel and took the role of the maid-servant to wash the disciples' feet. Then, Peter responded, saying, "Not me, Lord." Jesus replied, "If I do not wash your feet, you have nothing to do with me." I am sure that incident impressed upon Peter that we must always clothe ourselves in humility. Just as Jesus put aside thoughts of his impending death to take care of his disciples' needs, we too must put our agendas aside in order to serve. We must never come into someone's presence without first putting on the garments of humility.

While studying for this message last week, I heard a noise outside our home that sounded like a bicycle crashing on the pavement. From our upstairs window I saw that a young man had fallen off his bike. He

was bloody and dazed, so I immediately dropped what I was doing. I called 911, cleaned his injuries, and contacted his parents. I felt it was an honor rather than an imposition to help the young man. When I went back to studying this text, however, I felt rebuked in my spirit because I thought, “Do I have that kind of attitude when God asks me to wash somebody’s feet spiritually, or do I see it as an interruption of my schedule?” Peter tells us to wear a towel at all times, taking the lowest place to serve.

C. The Incentive for Humility

God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Peter cites Proverbs 3:34, saying that God is an enemy to the arrogant, but a friend to the humble, extending abundant grace, blessing and life to him. The enemies to humility, however, are the devil and the world. In the battle for our affections, there is no room for neutrality; we must choose sides. The choice is between opposing God and having God oppose us, or fighting with the Lord’s arsenal to oppose the devil. Thus, our incentive for humility is that we know we will have God as our friend and not our enemy.

Humility is to be the characteristic attitude of all believers. From elders to the youngest believer, humility is like precious oil that creates a supernatural harmony in the body of Christ. The Psalmist saw the coming day when God would pour out the vibrant life of his Spirit into our midst like the morning dew, making us supernaturally one. Today, we receive that blessing through a humble spirit.

Psalm 133 becomes fulfilled in our midst when it says,

**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together as ONE!
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Coming down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard,
Coming down upon the edges of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forever.**

II. Cultivating Humility with God (5:6-7)

Since all of us are innately arrogant, how do we cultivate humility? In verses 6-7, Peter says:

**Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God,
that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety
upon Him, because He cares for you.**

A. Submit to His Process and Timing (5:6)

The apostle says we must do two things to cultivate humility. First, we must submit to God’s process and his timing. The “mighty hand of God” refers to the time of Exodus when God delivered Israel through a mighty hand and outstretched arm (see Exod 15:1-18; Deut 7:19). When the ten plagues descended on Egypt because of Pharaoh’s hardened heart, Israel also had to endure them. The eye of faith understood that these plagues were not their judgment, but indeed their actual salvation. God dismantled the pagan nation at the core of its idolatry to give birth to a new nation. The people of Israel thus learned that God in his sovereignty uses the sufferings of this present age to give birth to his new kingdom.

Peter reveals that the same thing will happen for all believers, as all generations suffer persecution at some level. The evil one is behind it. His heart is hard, but believers must not despair. God will dismantle any empire that opposes him and will give birth to a new kingdom, comprised of those who walk by his Spirit. Those who have faith will see it. Therefore, the suffering a Christian experiences will dismantle idolatry and result in a new faith.

...that He will exalt you at the proper time...

The ten plagues produced a child, and Israel was born. When Jesus Christ submitted to the mighty hand of God through his death on the cross, he dismantled evil and was exalted in the resurrection. We too will be exalted in God’s timing. Just as God exalted his servant Israel after the plagues scourged the land, and exalted his servant Jesus after his crucifixion, so indeed he will ultimately exalt us because we are in Christ.

B. Submit to His Provision of Love (5:7)

...casting all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you.

Peter reminds his readers of David’s words from Psalm 55:22: “Cast your burden upon the Lord and he will sustain you. He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.”

Peter utilizes the picture of someone throwing (“casting”) off clothes that are binding. The idea is that we all wear multi-colored coats that are laden with anxieties. Peter says, “Take these off and give them on the Lord, and he will give you a towel of simplicity to wear.” Although many Christians have faith to see the process of God at work, it is unfortunate that so few go into their closets and give their anxieties to him. We do not have to carry around the heavy-weighted garments; we can wear clothes that free us from our burdens.

John Newton, an ex-slave owner in the 1700’s, was a remarkable scholar and pastor who thought humility was the most valuable quality for leadership. He wrote of the renewal he experienced as he cast his anxieties on the Lord:

I well remember when I had freedom of access and found it good to draw near to my God, when I could pour out all my complaints and cares before Him, and leave them with Him. I remember the time when my heart was overwhelmed within me, and my spirit was burdened (Psalm 142:3). I saw myself a wretched, helpless sinner. Innumerable evils took hold of me. I thought I was marked out for destruction. I found Satan at my right hand, waiting for permission to seize my soul and make me his prey forever (Zechariah 3:1). I looked round but saw no way to escape, and gave up all for lost. But O, I remembered when none in heaven or earth could help me, how the Lord drew near to me in the day of my distress and said unto my soul, “Fear not, I am thy salvation” (Lamentations 3:57). He revealed Himself as an almighty and sufficient Saviour. He said, “Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom” (Job 33:24) “He brought me out of the horrible pit, and miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock” (Psalm 40:2). “He brought me into his banqueting-house, and his banner over me was Love.”

This was the beginning, but it was not all. Many a gracious visit He favored me with afterwards. O the sweet hours of secret prayer! O the happy communion in which I walked with Him all the day long! “Then in the multitude of thoughts within me his comfort refreshed my soul” (Psalm 94:19). Then I could smile at Satan’s rage and face a frowning world. Every blessing of common providence was doubly welcome, for I could read his name of love written upon it. And every affliction brought resignation and peace because I saw my father’s hand in it and found at a throne of grace renewed strength always suited to my need.

We do not merely survive these birth pangs, we must seek the Lord through them to know him intimately. As we do this, we will find that our concerns are his also. We must learn to put our complete trust in him, truly believing him when he says, “Do not be anxious...Your Father knows that you need all these things” (Matt 6:25-34).

I recently received some anonymous letters from a man who is struggling with homosexuality. When he first wrote, he simply said,

“Pray for me.” He was struggling, and he wanted deliverance from this lifestyle. The second letter I read was a beautifully penned prayer, filled with grace and humility. As I read it and saw its beauty, I thought, “There is more hope with someone struggling with homosexuality who is humble, than a man who is wise in his own eyes.”

Cultivating humility takes faith to see the things that are not apparent to the eye—a submissive spirit to God, and time alone with him in prayer. Peter will now tell us how essential humility is to fight the cosmic battles of the universe.

III. Using Humility to Conquer Evil (5:8-11)

When I read or hear about anti-Christian attitudes, such as the letter to the editor that I read earlier, I am enraged and want to lash out. Peter, however, reveals that humility in an evil world will disarm and conquer Satan himself. Verses 8-10 say,

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And 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. Amen.

A. The Necessity to Be On the Alert (5:8)

Your adversary the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

As we enter the battle, Peter says we must be on the alert at all times to pray because our adversary is a roaring lion who seeks to devour us. The words “walking,” or “prowling,” are taken from Job 1:7; “roaring” is from Psalm 22:13. The apostle uses these verbs to show the devil’s vicious and evil intentions. The reality is that Satan wants to devour, “drink down” or “swallow whole” the believer. It is a picture of a ferocious beast of prey, like the pre-historic Star Wars monster in *Return of the Jedi* which swallows people whole.

Jesus once told Peter of a vision he had of the devil falling as lightning from heaven. It is indeed true that through the work of Christ the devil has been bound and his power broken. Since his time is short, he is extremely vicious and combative against Christ and the church. Thus, he prowls around, his mouth dripping with blood like the lions of the Roman amphitheater, ready to devour those who falter in their faith.

Peter remembers Jesus’ words that he would be “sifted like wheat by Satan” (Luke 22:31). Jesus also told him, “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Prior to the time of Jesus’ arrest, Peter was not humble enough to keep praying (Matt 26:33,41). Since he was not on the alert, he succumbed to the enemy and in his self-righteousness, cut off the slave’s ear, shedding innocent blood. When he was later given opportunity to claim Christ as Lord, he denied him three times. Matthew 22:60b-61 says, “And immediately, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord...and wept bitter tears.”

When we are filled with pride, the way is clear for the devil to gain access to our hearts. Oswald Chambers wrote, “It is easier to be a fanatic than a faithful soul, because there is something amazingly humbling, particularly to our religious conceit, in being loyal to God.” It is much harder to have our blood shed in humility than to shed the blood of others in our self-righteousness.

In his grace, God gave Peter the symbol of his arrogance, the cock. Every morning when he awoke to the crowing of the rooster, I am sure Peter was reminded of his failure to remain faithful. The symbol of a cock is also significant. The rooster arrogantly struts around the barnyard during the day, but by night he has lost his head and is served for dinner. It must have been a constant reminder to Peter that he was arrogant to the core and needed a humble spirit to fight spiritual battles.

What is your symbol? Many of us have daily reminders of our arrogance. For some of you, it might be a divorce and the consequences in terms of estrangement and broken families. For others, it might be a financial failure, an indebtedness which is a symbol of a one-time arrogance. We must regard these memories not as God’s judgment on us, but rather symbols of his grace to keep up humble. It would be wise for us to remember a rooster that begins the day by trumpeting our failure so we will not be tempted to forget, and thus fall back into pride. Every time Peter heard the rooster, he must have prayed. He was on the alert because he was reminded that the devil was there, ready to devour him. Thus, we must thank God for those symbols because we need humility to save us from our arrogance.

Christina Rossetti’s beautiful poem helps us enter into Peter’s shoes:

St. Peter once said: ‘Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?’
 Much more I say: Lord, dost Thou stand and know
 At my closed heart more rugged than a rock,
 Bolted and barred, for Thy soft touch unmeet,
 Nor garnished nor in any wise made sweet?
 Owls roost within and dancing satyrs mock.
 Lord, I have heard the crowing of the cock
 And have not wept: ah, Lord, thou knowest it.
 Yet still I hear Thee knocking, still I hear:
 ‘Open to Me, look on Me eye to eye,
 That I may wring thy heart and make it whole;
 And teach thee love because I hold thee dear
 And sup with thee in gladness soul with soul
 And sup with thee in glory by and by.’

B. The Strategy for Defense (5:9a)

Resist him, firm in your faith...

We do not resist the devil by lashing out with a sword, but by being firm in Jesus Christ who strengthens our faith. The word “firm” comes from the Greek version of Isaiah 50:6-7, describing Jesus as the servant. When he went to the cross, he set his face like a solid, firm rock:

**“I gave my back to the scourges,
 And my cheeks to blows;
 And I turned not away my face from the shame of spitting;
 But the Lord God became my helper;
 Therefore I was not ashamed,
 But I set my face as a solid [firm] rock.”**

The name “Peter” comes from the word “rock” used here. Here, the apostle is not referring to apostolic authority or pointing to himself as the rock of the church on which the papacy is founded. Rather he is referring to elders and leadership, and alluding only to his weaknesses. The apostle whom Jesus called “the rock” tells us to be firm in the rock, who is Christ. We cannot trust any authority given to men. We must have faith in Christ alone if we are to resist the devil.

The purpose of testings is not to destroy faith, but to purify it. Testings perfect the believer, and expose and conquer evil simultaneously. Therefore, we must resist the devil, and be firm in our faith.

C. Encouragement Under Trial (5:9b)

...knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

God does not ask anything of us that he does not ask of others around the world who are suffering. They are not being devoured by Satan, but are a testimony to us, standing firm in their faith, and crushing Satan under their feet (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20). This truly encourages us, and unites us in Christ with the saints in bonds of love.

In the 1700's, the Huguenots suffered great persecution. The following excerpt from Edmund Clowney's book, *The Message of 1 Peter*, is an example of one woman's faithful endurance:

In southern France, overlooking the Mediterranean, stands the Tower of Constance. There, in the eighteenth century, Huguenot women were imprisoned for decades because they refused to surrender their Reformed faith. In the tower room where they were held captive, a stone coping surrounds a round opening in the floor. Inscribed in the stone is the word '*Résistez!*' Marie Duran entered that room in 1729, when she was fifteen years old. Three years later her brother Pierre was hanged at Montpellier. In 1745 she was offered her freedom if she would agree to renounce Protestant worship. She refused all such offers and remained captive for thirty-eight years, resisting the temptations to despair, to suicide, to betrayal. From her imprisonment she began a ministry of encouragement by correspondence. Some of her letters are kept today in the 'Museum of the Wilderness' in the mountains of the Cévennes.¹

One reason I love to minister in Romania is that I am always encouraged by the believers there who suffer for their faith. They shared an English phrase with us that expresses their attitude under suffering. Regardless of the situation, they say, "*No problem!*" These words points to the reality that either they or their brethren have been in a similar circumstances and the Lord was faithful to carry them through it, and he will do it again. "No problem" is a great testimony and encouragement to God's sovereign power in our lives.

D. The Result of Resistance: Aslan Conquers the Lion (5:10-11)

And 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 the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

While suffering is only for a little while, God's strength and glory is forever. Peter uses a wonderful set of verbs to tell us what God is going to do to us and in us. As we look at the glory of Christ in the midst of our suffering he *perfects* us; he will complete us where we are lacking. Then he will *strengthen* us. Then, *confirm* means to establish us, to make us steady. Strengthen is only used in the New Testament, and twice in the Greek version of the book of Job. Job uses the word *strength* to describe the power of a lion (Job 4:10) and the voice of thunder (Job 26:14). Edmund Clowney sees in this the figure C. S. Lewis uses to describe Jesus in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. He is Aslan, the Lion of Judah, who is endowed with great strength and has the voice of thunder. Thus, we defeat the prowling, roaring lion by strengthening ourselves in Aslan, the real lion. The risen Christ (Aslan) is the one who removes our fear of Satan, the roaring lion. Finally, we will be *established*. That is an architectural term to describe the completion of the new Jerusalem. At that time, every stone united and fitted in the great Cornerstone will then descend from heaven in the wonderful glory of the eternal city.

Thus, we have yet another reason to be humble. The world and its ruler are evil, powerful, and bent on our destruction. If we are arrogant and think we are adequate, Satan will devour us. But if we are humble and watch, depending on our mighty God to keep us standing firm, he will use the very instruments of Satan to further his righteous kingdom and crush evil under our feet.

Conclusion

The submissive, humble spirit expected of the believer has been stressed many times in this letter, and in this final section Peter again exhorts his readers to consider this aspect of their lives. It is obvious that the picture of Jesus as the Suffering Servant is to be our model forever before us (Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). How else can one who is called as an overseer and teacher of others possibly further the Lord's ministry unless he, like Jesus, becomes a servant to those he teaches and guides? Therefore, the example of the elders, and also of Peter, is to be cultivated by all believers in relationship to each other, as well as with those outside the church.

Finally, we must cultivate humility in the midst of suffering before a hostile world. In the fires of persecution we need to submit to God and trust his plan for our lives, never forgetting the wickedness and deceitfulness of the devil. Remaining under pressure in Christ's strength will create new beauty in our spirit. It will give us a radiant countenance that will glorify him. It is glory we are destined for, and it is the path of humility that leads us there. So let us clothe ourselves in a humble spirit.

Peter's Farewell (5:12-14)

Through Silvanus, 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 Babylon, 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.

Silvanus is most likely Silas of the book of Acts, one of the leaders in Jerusalem, a Jew and a Roman citizen, who had a prophetic gift. The person carrying a letter was no mere messenger, but was a trusted and honored ambassador. Peter was essentially saying, "This person reflects in his character everything that is written in this letter." It may be that Silas actually helped compose the letter. When it was delivered, he was the one who interpreted it and applied it in the setting of these Christians. Imagine the joy they had when they received a personal word from Peter through a faithful servant like Silas, who then became their teacher.

Peter ends his epistle with greetings from his son, Mark. This is possibly his spiritual son, John Mark, the author of the gospel of Mark. The church in Rome, which he refers to as "she who is in Babylon" sent its greetings also. The epistle ends where it began, "aliens in the world, but beloved by God." This points to the fact that Christians live in a symbolic Babylon. Just as the Babylon of old was judged and dismantled to give birth to a spiritual kingdom, the same is true for all time. Pagan Rome will not survive, but we who are beloved of God will live in the new city of Jerusalem, which will outlast history. Amen.

1. Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 215-216.