

1PETER 5:8-11 CBC 6.9.2020am

A lot of people understand the gospel PAST and the gospel FUTURE but they don't really understand how to live in the light of the work of Christ right here, right now. In today's text, Peter captures for us in a few short lines what it looks like to live in the light of the gospel of Christ in these in-between times.

Read 1Peter 5:8-11 ...

1. A TERRIBLE ENEMY vv.8-9

v.8: *"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*

We live in a world where there's real personal evil prowling around, and we're called by the gospel to take that seriously. If you've never read C. S. Lewis' book *"The Screwtape Letters"*, I commend it to you. It's a marvellously insightful look at Satan's strategies to bring us down. In the preface, Lewis famously warns us neither to be dismissive of Satan, nor to become obsessed with him. Wise words!

But a sober look at the Bible will show us that we have a formidable enemy. He deceives (Genesis 3) and he devours (1Peter 5:8). He prowls about like a lion with a big appetite, and he's looking for you. He really hates you. You may say, *"But I'm only little me! Am I worth hating that much?"* But it's not really about you. It's about Christ. Satan is insanely jealous of our Lord Jesus Christ and will do anything to wound Him. It's because you are precious to Christ that Satan hates you with an undying hatred.

And while Peter doesn't want us to become obsessed with the devil, he does want us to know what we're up against and be prepared. Against such an enemy a sentimental, emotional faith won't help us. Peter knew what he was talking about. On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus warned him: *"Simon, Simon, Satan wants to sift all of you like wheat, but I'm praying especially for you ..."* – *"Oh, don't worry about me Lord, I'll be fine! I'll be with you to death if necessary ..."* (Luke 22:31-33). But Peter crumbled.

And from that painful experience he says to us (v.8): *"Be alert and of sober mind."* Are you watchful? We live in a moral world where there really is such a thing as right and wrong. We'll face temptation every day – even if we're in isolation because of coronavirus! Your enemy is looking for your weakness, watching as you expose yourself to temptation unwisely. Do you live watchfully? Do you take seriously the spiritual battle you're in? Your enemy does.

So we need to be "alert" as if we were walking down a dangerous road – because we are. Be careful – Satan has many disguises. His approach may be very friendly, but he's no less dangerous when he smiles at you. Or he may launch a head-on attack through persecution. He can attack from all angles. The better we know God's word, the more alert we'll be to his approach.

And we need a sober mind. Beware of being intoxicated by our culture and not thinking clearly. That's how Satan wants us: spiritually drowsy, reacting to each situation just like an unbeliever might, leaving God out altogether. Sober-mindedness means thinking about life through the lens of Scripture, so that our theology isn't "out there" somewhere, but applicable at street-level. That's totally counter-cultural in our age. It means living as though the gospel is true!

That's what Peter means by being alert and of sober mind. He's not saying we should never have fun – he's saying think clearly, think gospel, have the mind of Christ.

Then, when Satan approaches, you'll be ready to "*resist him, standing firm in the faith*" (v.9). If you look closely at v.9, you'll see that resistance is put in the context of suffering. Striking! We all know that when we're suffering, our resistance is weak. That's when we're most easily tempted to doubt God, turn for comfort to porn or food, be irritable and unloving, entitled – wanting the world to dance around us. Yet that's when we're called to resist, no matter what.

How do we do that? By taking our stand on the word of God as Jesus did, and refusing to be moved. Remember how Jesus suffered in the wilderness – he was hungry, and surrounded by wild animals, and Satan assaulted Him again and again. Jesus showed us that the only way to stand before Satan is to bow before God and His word.

And remember as you do this that you're not alone! v.9: "*the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*" Why does Peter remind us that other people are suffering too? Is this just a case of wallowing together in our misery? No, this is Peter being a wise pastor. He knows that one of Satan's most seductive lies is that we're alone in our experience – that somehow, everyone else's life is easy but ours isn't. And Satan whispers in your ear, "*I thought God loved you! Why is this happening to you? Where's your God now? What happened to His promises? Why should you be faithful to Him if He isn't faithful to you? You might as well live as you like!*"

This is what Peter is countering. He wants us to know that suffering is normal for God's people in this fallen world in this present age. You haven't been singled out – that's just a nasty lie of the enemy. Peter says, "*We're all there with you.*" If there's something in your life at this moment and Satan is saying to you, No-one has ever gone through this experience, no-one has ever been tempted this way, no-one has ever sinned this way, no-one has ever failed like you have, – he's lying. You're sharing in the experience of all God's people. And you can say with Paul in Romans 8: "*Since God is for me, who can be against me? Since Christ died for me, who can condemn me? Since Christ lives and intercedes for me, who can ever separate me from His love?*"

So Peter says, No matter what you're facing, don't let down your guard, don't fail to resist. BECAUSE:

2. WE HAVE A GREAT GOD vv.10-11

There may be a lion on the prowl, but we have a Good Shepherd. Here's the remedy for all our trials (v.10): "*the God of all grace*". All God is to His children is grace. Peter understood this better than anyone. He'd trampled on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ when he denied him three times, yet he'd received more grace. So he knew that no matter how far we've fallen, how much we've allowed Satan to trip us up, how deep the pit we're in, God can lift us because He is the God of all grace.

And He's planned for us eternal glory (v.10). ETERNAL glory. If you're a Christian, there's a guaranteed place for you in a glorious eternity where there is no more sin / suffering / roaring lion / doubting God's care for you – forever and ever. *Our various trials / suffering are only for "a little while" but the glory that results is eternal.*

And God has "*called you to his eternal glory in Christ*" (v.10). Sometimes when a Christian dies we say "*He's been called home*" - and it's a lovely way of putting it. But listen: God called you home long before you die! Peter puts it in the past tense – this is what God has been calling you to all along.

And that's important! Think of this: the guarantee of FUTURE GLORY is what tells me beyond any doubt that I can rely on PRESENT GRACE. Because the only way I'll ever reach eternal glory is if God gives me all the grace I need along the way. I don't have to worry about what's round the corner / what I'm going to face tomorrow / what's going to happen in my relationships / to my job / with my health etc. I don't have to worry about how I'll cope if I get coronavirus. Because whatever I'm facing, God is going to supply all I need so that I reach the destiny He has called me to in Christ. That promise of glory guarantees me that He will give me every grace I need, right here, right now. Because if eternal glory has been promised me, then there'll be sufficient grace along the way.

And that's why Peter says so confidently that (v.10) "*after you have suffered a little while, (God) will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*" After you've suffered a little while: Peter's referring mainly to persecution – how, if you live in obedience to Christ, you'll be misunderstood and mocked, because you'll be like an alien in this world. But our sufferings may be wider than just persecution. He's made it clear in 1:6 that we suffer all kinds of trials. And of course we think, "*Couldn't we just skip them and go straight to the eternal glory?*"

But listen: your struggles are not in the way of God's plan – they're part of God's plan. He's chosen for us to live in this broken place for His glory and our good. God knows how self-reliant we are, how dependent on our own wisdom we are. And God has to take us beyond ourselves – take us where we never intended to go – so that we come to the end of ourselves and learn to cling to Him with both hands. That's not a mistake, that's the plan. Because God means for our lives to become like a shop-window in this world, so that other people who are as broken as we are can learn about a God of glorious grace who saves needy people – who can rescue them.

Because here's what they'll see (v.10): God "*will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*" Again, Peter is speaking out of experience. These are the very things our Lord Jesus did for Peter when they met on the shore at Galilee (John 21). Peter who had denied His Lord was restored. Peter who was weak was made strong to feed the flock. Peter who had crumbled was made firm and steadfast. He knew what he was speaking about. This is God's plan. He wants us to know more than propositional truth – He wants us to know that the gospel really works in frail people like us.

It's even more impressive because of something we perhaps forget about Peter: we recall his denial – restoration – but Jesus also spoke of Peter's crucifixion. We marvel that Jesus went through His ministry with the shadow of the cross hanging over Him, but Peter had to do the same. So it's all the more impressive that he writes about the grace of God holding us steady.

Is there something on the horizon that you're dreading? Trust God's grace. Suffering won't get in the ways of His transforming work. Circumstances won't stop Him redeeming you. He will restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast, because He has called you to His eternal glory in Christ. And He will never give up till He has finished that work.

No wonder Peter sings the doxology (v.11): "*To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen!*" That's where Peter leaves us: with our eyes fixed firmly, not on our problems, but on the greatness of God. It's a timely reminder that in a world with so much evil, the power of God still reigns supreme. And He rules for your sake, because He's your loving heavenly Father. And in that reality there is hope. We can get up in the morning and face the day, because our God rules over everything in wisdom and love.

CONCLUSION

That's how to live the Christian life in these in-between times – between salvation past and salvation future. Even though there's a roaring lion, you can resist and stand firm. And you can know that every promise God has made to you will be fulfilled. You can rest in His grace. And if you live in the light of these things, you'll be a person who is growing in Christ and shining His light in the world.

PRAYER: Father, our hearts are glad because you have revealed yourself in Christ as the God of all grace. Grant that by your Spirit we may do as Jesus did, standing firm against Satan and living in the joy of the eternal glory to which you have called us in Christ. Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

- When are you at your weakest in the spiritual battle?
- How do you typically respond to temptation in those moments?
- How can Peter's words help you fight temptation this week?