

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 1 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair Wk. 5

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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. And in the final paragraph, 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 was the quote from the Proverb, GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE (OR FAVOR) TO THE HUMBLE, which brings the therefore to the discussion.

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. Its 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.

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 throwing their garments on the colt before Jesus entered Jerusalem. 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.

Cara: All right, Bryan, you mentioned the ultimate act of humility is where God gave up his own son to die for us. So, if we follow that example, we can be sure to experience heartache and pain as well.

Bryan: Yeah, I would at least say that's very likely.

Cara: I thought that's what I heard. I just wish it was different.

Bryan: Yup. Well I think we probably all do, but it's important to realize in a fallen world, whether you're a Christ follower or not, you're likely to experience heartache and pain. So, it's not like you can opt out of it. The difference is as Christ followers, God uses it to grow us, to change us, to use us to be part of something that will last forever. So, there's eternal gain and not just waste that comes out of it. And that helps us process it differently.

Arnie: You know, our research shows that worry is the number one spiritual struggle and it really holds people back from living out their faith lives. Worry robs us of so much joy.

Bryan: Yeah. So, I worry about that question. That was my attempt to be funny there. I'm not really a very funny guy [No, I'm laughing; remember, just not on video.]. It is a huge problem. And it shows up in your research. I would say as a local pastor; it shows up in people's lives in many ways all the time. It's a battle.

Cara: Right. So, you mentioned the difference between trying not to worry and casting our worries on God. Could you talk a little more about that? Because it's a very important principle, I think.

Bryan: Yeah. So, I just actually had a conversation with a friend of mine about this, this morning, because when people, let's say you're lying in bed and you're worrying, so you can't get to sleep. The tendency is to, I need to stop worrying. I need to stop worrying. But that doesn't work. You can't just stop thinking about it. And so, the difference is, when people think just casting our cares away is kind of like denial. I'm just going to pretend it's not true. I'm going to pretend I'm not worried about this. And that's really like sticking your head in the sand and just pretending there's nothing to worry about and it'll just never work. So, what Peter's talking about is actually the realization that God cares about me and he cares about the things that I'm concerned about. So, I'm not pretending they're not there, I'm just realizing there's not much I can do about it, but I'm going to trust Him with these cares. So, I cast my cares on Him because He's well equipped to do whatever needs to be done and then I'm not going to worry about it.

Cara: So, we could pray to Him about those. [Yeah]. That'd be the casting.

Bryan: Pray. And I think the critical part is if I don't know the truth, and if I don't know Him, it's never going to work. So, to trust Him, I have to know Him and when I know Him, then I know He cares for me and I know I can trust Him with my burdens.

Arnie: So really the people that Peter's writing about, they're undergoing huge persecution, great trials and tribulations, and Peter keeps reminding them about the return of Christ. Is that the key? Is that kind of like, we win in the end?

Bryan: That is the huge key and it's especially an emphasis with Peter. We think about this life because this is all we know. This is all we have. So, it tends to be front and center and that's what's going to get us discouraged and frustrated and worried. It's with eyes of faith, that we believe God tells the truth and Jesus is coming back and there's a better day coming. And you go back and read Hebrews 11 and the great Heroes of Faith, that's what the writer of Hebrews tells us, is they believed, that there was a better city and there was a better day coming and they would die in faith, believing that was true. And so, it's a big emphasis in Peter: Jesus is coming back. The future is glorious, and I have to choose to believe that by faith.

You know, one of the things with that is, we're all familiar with the fact that there's a lot of debate, and even argument, on end times theology, eschatology. And sadly, that's often a distraction from the New Testament message. It's much simpler. Jesus is coming back, and we can all agree. How it exactly plays out isn't nearly as important as the faith to believe He's coming back, and the future is glorious. Can't we agree together on that?

Arnie: Amen.

Cara: Yeah. Amen.