

Stand Firm

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] Hey, good morning, church. Thanks for being with us and logging into our live stream service. I believe this is our first ever virtual sermon, so it's exciting. You're here for a historic moment for us as a church. Our building is closed, but our church is not, and so we're continuing to worship with folks around the world and in this city just in a different way. As I mentioned on Friday, our methods have changed, but our mission has not, and so our mission is just as urgent as it's ever been, and so we're excited to be with you all this morning. I'm going to do a couple announcements as we're heading in. Since we didn't have an announcement time this morning, first of all, I want to remind you that we're going to have a live stream again at 7 p.m. on Wednesday evening, March 25th. I've asked a couple of my friends who've been trained in Christian counseling to join me for a live Q&A, and we'll ask them some questions about how we can be wise during this time of isolation as we face things like fear and loneliness and anxiety, so I'm really excited about that time.

These are two men that I trust and whose advice has been helpful to me as I walk with Jesus, and so I hope to be able to see you there. Second, I want to remind you, as I mentioned on Friday at our church town hall, that we are looking for a community that's full of problem solvers rather than problem finders, and so I just want to give a shout out to Greg and Molly Hitt this morning for being problem solvers and hosting their own home worship on Facebook Live. I know many of you joined them for that. We were encouraged this morning at the church. We had that playing while we were getting everything set up for this live stream, so thanks to Greg and Molly. I want to make another note about problem finders versus problem solvers. I mentioned a couple of situations on Friday that this would apply, and there's another one, and it's this situation this morning. We are streaming live, and we are, of course, going to inevitably have hiccups and problems. There are most likely going to be folks in our congregation who have trouble connecting, and so there's two different ways to respond. One would be the problem finder response, and the problem finder response would look something like this. You might text me this afternoon. Hey, Pastor Matthew, just wanted to make sure you know that so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so weren't able to connect to the live stream. Thanks. Have a good afternoon. That would be the problem finder approach. The problem solver approach would be this. Hey, Pastor Matthew, so-and-so and so-and-so had trouble connecting. We've talked to them over the phone, and we've coached them through it, so I think all the problems are resolved at this point. Is there anyone else that you're aware of who needs help? That would be the problem solver solution to this, so I'm encouraging us as a community to continue to be problem solvers rather than problem finders. As we're together as a community, we need as much help as we can, and we need to help one another. We are a team. If you don't have Facebook, you know someone who doesn't have Facebook, this live stream is available on our website, and so there will be a pop-up link. If you go there now, it will direct you straight to the live stream, or you can find it under the COVID-19 item on the menu. It's on the far left. Click on that, go down, and click on live stream, so you don't have to have Facebook. You can help me spread the word about that. I think some folks are under the impression that if they don't have Facebook, they're cut out of the loop this morning, and that's far from the truth, so as much help as you can give me in being problem solvers, I would be very, very grateful. I, as many of you know, was a teacher for some time, and I had a former teacher of mine, a high school teacher, who told me a story.

If you're familiar with teachers, of course, you know that we hate when students talk during class. It's something that we're constantly trying to work against, but she told me a story about one year she had some students who were especially talkative, but she realized that what they were talking about was actually the content that she was teaching, and so it was a helpful tool for them to be

able to process in class, and so that particular school year, she didn't crack down on any talking. She knew that her students were engaged, and that was one way that they showed that they were engaged. I say that to say I invite you this morning to use the comment section on Facebook to participate in a way that engages with the material, so I encourage you, as you have thoughts and ideas, to share them with one another as long as it's something that's centered around us and our community and our study of 1 Peter. It's tempting sometimes for people in the church, especially in the American church, to think of the relationship between the pastor and the congregation on a Sunday morning as one of a performer and an audience. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. It's not that I'm a performer and you're an audience. It's that we're one team, so you could think of it as a coach and players. There's, of course, many people you could have watched this morning. Many of them are better communicators and preachers than I am, but you're here because we are a family, and so I encourage you to show that family unity this morning on Facebook to comment and greet each other as is appropriate. With that, I'll remind you all, as I do every Sunday, that we are following Jesus together as one community. We're following him together, whether we're meeting virtually or in person, and as we follow him together, we're convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it. That's why we come week after week again and again to God and his word because we believe that he speaks to us about his grace. And so we're coming this morning for our last sermon in our 1 Peter series, and so I'm going to tell you these things for the last time. 1 Peter is a letter. It's a letter written by a man named Peter, and he writes it to churches in the first century AD in Asia Minor, what's now modern-day Turkey, and he writes to these churches because they're struggling. These churches are struggling for a couple reasons. They're struggling because they feel out of place in the world as Christians and because they're facing opposition from the world as Christians. And so Peter writes to both encourage and instruct them. He writes to encourage them that Jesus is worth it. Jesus is worth living for, and he's worth loving for.

Jesus is also worth suffering for, and he's worth dying for. Not only does he write to encourage them, but he also writes to instruct them. He writes to instruct them how to live in the world as Christians and how to respond when they face opposition from the world as Christians. And we're coming near to the very end of this. I mentioned last week there comes that moment if you're meeting with a good friend or a counselor and they've given you encouragement and advice, maybe in a tough situation, you feel less alone. There still comes that time when you have to walk out the door and go back to the situation that you're in. That's what Peter is doing here. He's giving his final instructions to these churches before his letter ends. They've been given tremendous encouragement from the work that Christ has done for them and the grace that he has for them, and they've been given a lot of practical advice. And now Peter's last word for them is this.

[7 : 18] Don't give up. Stand firm. Stand fast. Take everything that I've given you and I've instructed you and now live it out in the world. In his book *Sea Stories*, Navy Admiral William McRaven tells of his time and when he was in Coronado, California in 1977 and he was going through SEAL training to become a Navy SEAL. And one of their slogans was this. The only easy day was yesterday.

They started out with 155 men and when they were nine weeks in, they were down to 55 men. And during that time, during their training, their instructors would tempt them over and over to ring the bell, which was not a metaphor. There was a literal bell that they would ring. And if someone rang the bell, it was their way of saying that they were done. They were done with SEAL training. They could go home. They would no longer have to suffer what they were going through and they could return to a life of ease and comfort. And so in this section from 1 Peter, Peter's simply saying this.

Don't ring the bell. No matter what you go through in life, don't give up. Remain faithful to God. Remain faithful to his people. It's with that that we're going to turn to God's word. I invite you to turn with me, whether it's in your Bible, on your phone. Maybe you've printed out the worship guide that we provided over email, but we are in the last few verses. We're in 1 Peter chapter 5 and we're starting at verse 12. And as we come to this passage, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read it now starting at verse 12. 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.

[9 : 27] Verse 13. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings. And so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that your word never fails and you promise that it never returns to you empty. It accomplishes your purposes. It accomplishes your purposes, whether we meet in person or we meet through Facebook. We also thank you that our hope is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. We ask that you'd give us that hope and encouragement this morning, that you'd give it to us through each other as we are together, even if it's only in a home or through the internet, and that you'd give us that hope through your word.

We ask that you'd send your spirit to do that now, that you would soften our hearts, you'd open our eyes, and you'd unstop our ears, that we'd be able to see and hear and believe everything that's written about you and your word. And we ask all these things, not because we earn them or deserve them, but because we belong to Jesus. And so we ask them in his mighty name. Amen. Peter starts out here with a reference to a man named Silwanis. This is someone that we see in other parts of the Bible. He appears in the book of Acts as a messenger to carry a letter, and that's most likely what's going on here. Most likely Silwanis is someone who is carrying this letter from Peter and taking it to the churches in Asia Minor. He's a courier. He could potentially have helped Peter write the letter. That's unclear. But if we get pulled down and dragged down into the weeds, we're sort of missing the point. Regardless of whatever role Silwanis plays, he highlights something that's been a theme of this book, which is that we need each other.

Peter walked with Jesus and knew Jesus personally. And that didn't make him a superhero. Much like us, Peter still needed the people of God. He needed their help. He needed practical help. He needed practical help from someone like Silwanis. He's going to mention not just in verse 12, but then we're also going to hear in verse 13 about his companions. In the same story, Admiral McRaven tells about right before they're going to go into the last week of their initial SEAL training known as Hell Week. And they have one man with them who's part of the training, and it's his second round, because the first time around his bicep was torn off of his arm in an accident. So he took time away to heal, and then he returned. So he had experience, and he knew what it was they were about to be up against. And so he took the men together, and he gave them a little pep talk.

[12 : 24] And he said this, the only way you can complete Hell Week is if we stay together as a team. We must stick together. There is no such thing as a Lone Ranger Christian.

There was no such thing as a Lone Ranger Christian in 2019 before the coronavirus hit, and there's no such thing as a Lone Ranger Christian now. We continue to need each other just as much in 2020 in Colorado Springs as Peter needed Silwanis and his friends in the first century in Rome in the Roman Empire. Our building may be closed, but our church is as open as it's ever been.

And we are working together and loving each other just as much as we did before. Peter's picking up on his final themes here, and this is one we've seen throughout the book.

He's told us twice to love one another from the heart. Peter's picking up on his own. The only way we're going to get through this is if we stay together as a team.

That's not just true of crisis moments, but it's true of all of life. Whether we live now or we live in a different time and place, the only way Christians make it is together.

[13 : 50] Peter needed help. We need help as well. That's not Peter's main point, though, in this verse. His main point comes after. He's giving us a summary here.

He says, I've written briefly to you, and then he's going to summarize what he's told them. Many of you are students. Some of you have been students, and you're familiar with the time in the semester where you're nearing the end and finals are coming up, and you have to have a review. And oftentimes, hopefully, you're reviewing many things that you've learned throughout the semester. At some level, you're going to review everything, everything that matters most. Maybe you won't review every detail, but there will be a summary of the important points of the class. Peter here is giving us his summary of the class that he's been teaching us through this letter, and it's this. Been exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.

Stand firm in it. There's two elements here. First, the true grace of God. He says that this is the true grace. So what is he referring to by the this?

[14 : 55] Well, since it's a summary, it's what he's been exhorting and declaring, he is referring to this entire letter that we've read. He's been telling us in different ways and at different angles what it looks like to belong to Jesus and to receive his grace.

And so we can go through and quickly summarize as well. We saw in chapter one that we are chosen by God, but exiles in the world. That's part of God's grace that we belong to him. We were told in chapter one we belong to him because God chose to cause us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And so that's part of the true grace that we stand in, the fact that we have a living hope.

He also told us in chapter one that because God is our father, we're holy like he's holy. And so that's part of the grace that we stand in. Then we saw in chapter two that God has given us a mission.

We saw in chapter two, verse nine, that we are a priesthood. We represent God to the world and we represent the world to God. And so that's part of the grace of God.

[16:02] We bring tremendous honor and glory to Jesus Christ when we do that. We moved on to chapters two and three where we saw a variety of practical situations where God's grace applies.

We submit to authority even when it leads to suffering because Jesus submitted even when it led to his suffering. And then finally, we had a long section on suffering for the name of Jesus.

And we saw God's grace in that as well, the grace that we can stand firm in. And it was the grace that we suffer for Jesus, for Christ, but we're united with Christ.

And so we have tremendous hope even as we suffer because we're connected with him. Jesus suffered. We will suffer. Jesus experienced glory.

We will experience glory as well. And so that's the true grace of God. That's the grace of God that we stand firm in.

[17:07] And so the question this morning is, what are the situations where we're called to stand firm? Of course, these are situations particularly where we're suffering for the name of Jesus Christ, where we're choosing obedience to Jesus over the approval of the world or our own comfort and pleasure.

Maybe it looks like this. Maybe you're a single person. Maybe you're a single woman and you've met a man. You believe he's a Christian and you've been going on several dates with him and you're excited about the potential that this relationship could have.

And then you show up for the third or fourth date and he says something like this. You know, I've really enjoyed getting to know you. And one thing that's really important to me, I think it doesn't really make sense to move forward in a relationship unless you know really whether you're sexually compatible or not.

What do you think about that? Of course, you're stunned at this moment, right? Because you think, I thought this was a fellow Christian who shared the same values that I did. I thought that they agreed with me that sex was something that was reserved for marriage.

And you're caught in that moment, right? Am I going to be able to stay faithful to Jesus Christ and potentially lose this relationship that I've been excited about? Well, this is the true grace of God, right?

[18:25] Jesus didn't make promises with his body that he couldn't keep. But instead, he sacrificed his body for us on the cross. And so we sacrifice for his sake.

One of my friends that I'm going to gather with on Wednesday at 7, as I was talking to him earlier this week, he gave me a wonderful reminder. He said, relationships are a wonderful desire, but a terrible hope.

And so our confidence, even when it causes us to lose what we might long for, is that we know the true grace of God, and so we stand firm in it.

Maybe you're tempted to believe that because God is your father, you can ignore the government. You don't have to obey things that the government tells you when it's inconvenient or you think it's stupid.

And yet we've been reminded of the true grace of God in this passage. Jesus submitted to authority even when it was costly for him. And so we do the same. This is the true grace of God.

[19:36] Stand firm in it. Maybe you're ashamed to claim the name of Jesus Christ. Maybe you're embarrassed to be a Christian and you avoid hard conversations about that, afraid of what you might lose.

Peter's reminded us of that as well. Noah was out of step with his society. God was faithful to him. You are out of step with your society.

God will be faithful to you as well. And so we can witness to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, even when it's difficult and painful.

This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. Maybe you're suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. Maybe following Jesus has caused you to lose job opportunities. Maybe it's caused you to lose friendships. And you find yourself asking whether it's really worth it.

[20 : 47] Jesus suffered. You will suffer. Jesus experienced glory. You will experience glory as well. He is worth it.

This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. That is Peter's last word for these people.

Now, I've made a big point during this sermon series about understanding the different types of suffering. That there are three types. There's suffering for our own foolishness and sin in this world. There's suffering in general just because of the presence of sin in this world. And then there's suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. And I have highlighted and underscored over and over again that what we are talking about specifically in this book is the third type.

Suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. And yet we find ourselves right now as a city in a world in a situation two type suffering. We're suffering right now because of the presence of the coronavirus.

[21 : 56] The coronavirus is not a result of the direct sin of the members of Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. So it's not type one suffering. And both Christians and non-Christians are susceptible to it.

So it's not type three suffering. It's not suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. And so this passage does not directly speak to this issue. However, we can also take comfort and courage from this passage indirectly, secondarily.

In other words, as we live in this time and face this crisis, we can also know the true grace of God and stand firm in it.

We can know that the true grace of God means we're not surprised or undone. We know that sin and evil are a real presence in this world. And so while we might be surprised by the fact that it's this specific type of suffering, while we might be surprised that it happened in this way, while we might be caught off guard by how quickly it occurred, we're not surprised by the fact that things like this happen.

Jesus told us in this world you will have many troubles. And so part of how we know the true grace of God is we know that this is not the end of the story. We find ourselves in one scene of God's larger story of redemption.

[23 : 25] And that means we can have hope because we know how the story ends. We know that Jesus is coming back, as we read in chapter one of first Peter, and that he is going to make all things right.

It doesn't make everything easier immediately right now, but it gives us a different perspective in the world around us. We can have a type of hope that is unavailable to them.

God is faithful. And in Jesus Christ, he's presented the full and final solution to every struggle and suffering we face in this world. And so we, as we face problems now, can also look forward to Jesus' return.

When he is going to come back, he's going to make all things right, and he's going to rescue us and take us to be with him forever. That's what Peter means when he refers to the salvation prepared for us.

And so, brothers and sisters, this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. We can also remember what Peter's told us when we're tempted to circle the wagons as we face this together.

[24 : 44] Be tempting for us to batten down the hatches and decide we're going to look out for me, myself, and I. And yet Peter's given us instruction about that as well.

Remember, he's told us in chapter two, verse nine, that we are priests to the nations. He tells us this in chapter two, verse 12. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

What better opportunity could we have for others to see and glorify God because of our good deeds during this time? We have the opportunity to bring Jesus tremendous glory and honor, not out of a sense of duty or moralism, but because he is our father and he's coming back for us.

And so we have a hope and a security that we can offer to others and we can act out of ourselves. This is the true grace of God.

Stand firm in it. Peter ends here with a final command.

[26 : 02] Greet one another with a kiss of love. He mentioned some more of his companions. Of course, he's showing them here his solidarity with them. We could think back to verse nine of chapter five.

We know that the same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And now he's listing part of their brotherhood throughout the world. He's not in Asia Minor with them.

And yet he sends them greetings from their brothers and sisters who are in solidarity with them, suffering the same things. She who is at Babylon. There's been a lot of ink spilled over what this is a reference to.

I believe most likely she who is at Babylon is a reference to Peter's community. His church community where he's located. Babylon is code in the Bible for Rome. It's the way it's used here and the way it's used in the book of Revelation.

So the church community at Rome sends them greetings. They're part of the same empire, but they're in different parts. They're in the capital city. The recipients of this letter are in modern day Western Turkey in Asia Minor.

[27 : 08] And then he sends greetings from Mark as well. But if we get bogged down into the details of who she at Babylon is, again, we've missed the point. Because the point is this, that God gives us one another to help us stand firm.

He gave Peter to these people. He had to write them a letter, right? He couldn't shake their hands. He couldn't give them a hug. That's the same situation, a similar situation to the one we face. But we can send each other greetings. We can send each other text messages and emails. We can call one another. We can FaceTime. We're not going to give each other literal kisses of love. But we can get at the true heart of the command here, which is that we would have deep and true fellowship. It's also a reminder to us that our community is part of how we stand firm. Peter ends with this, peace to all of you who are in Christ. It's not that their circumstances are going to change.

[28 : 19] As they leave the reading of this letter, they're going to face the very challenges that Peter's told them about. They're going to face people slandering them.

They're going to face the loss of friendships. They may face the loss of jobs. They may have misunderstandings from their family members. They also have peace.

They have peace because they are in Christ. They know the true grace of God and they can stand firm in it. The same is true for us.

We can live in a busy and turbulent and chaotic world. And also have peace in our hearts. Peter reminds us that this peace is for those specifically who are in Christ.

God is our father because he's adopted us. He's adopted us because Jesus has paid the penalty for our sin.

[29 : 27] And so we can call Jesus our brother because he lived the perfect life that we didn't. And he died the death that we deserve. And in that, he gives us peace.

Peace knowing that no matter what happens, we have a treasure in heaven that cannot be touched. Our treasure in heaven, in other words, is immune from the coronavirus, even if we are not. And so we can look forward to that no matter what happens in this world with tremendous hope and confidence and peace. We know, as Romans 8 tells us, that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

And so that's our hope and our confidence. In his story, Admiral McRaven tells about the time that they were in Hell Week and they began to spend time in mudflats that were near San Diego. And after a full day of running around in these mudflats, their instructors thought it would be a great idea to have them continue to shiver in them as the sun set.

[30 : 39] And as the sun set, they're stuck, wet, submerged in mud. And their instructors light a fire on the shore and begin to make coffee and food.

And they yell out to them and tell them, we only need five people to give up and ring the bell. If we can get five, then all of you can come and sit around this fire with us.

You can drink coffee and you can eat the wonderful food that we have. Of course, in the midst of their suffering, it was incredibly tempting for many of them to give up in that moment.

And so they locked arms with one another in the mudflats. But even that wasn't enough. There was one man near the end who broke the arm lock and began to make his way away from the mud and towards the fire.

And at that moment, one of the seals in training began to sing. Soon the entire line sang together one of their songs that they knew as a group.

[31 : 44] And as they sang, the man who had pulled away began to move back and link his arms again with his brothers. Brothers and sisters, how do we stand firm?

We don't stand firm. We don't stand firm by the power of our will. We don't stand firm by gritting our teeth.

But instead, we stand firm as we link arm to arm with one another. And we sing together the true grace of God.

That is the only power. Powerful enough to hold us together no matter what when we face suffering. God has given us everything that we need in his word.

And he's given us our community that we would do just that. We would link arms and sing together so that we would be able to stand no matter what. Brothers and sisters, this is the true grace of God.

[32 : 52] Stand firm in it. Please pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and we thank you that you have not left us alone and you've given us your word.

We thank you for your word in 1 Peter to encourage us and sustain us. We ask in practical ways that you would help us to link arms together as a community. And you'd remind us of our grace.

And because of it, we would stand firm together. We thank you it's not our strength that we rest on, but the strength of our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. And so we pray these things in his name, knowing that he is mighty and worthy.

And all of us together can say yes and amen. Thank you.