

“Hope Beyond Life’s Struggles”

1 Peter 5:8-14

Fanny Crosby wrote more than 9,000 hymns, some of which are among the most popular in every Christian denomination. She wrote so many that she was forced to use pen names because she didn’t want the hymnals to be filled with her name more than others. And perhaps the most remarkable thing about her was that she had done so in spite of being blind.

Someone once told her, “I think it is a great pity that the Master did not give you sight when he showered so many other gifts upon you.”

Fanny Crosby responded at once, as she had heard such comments before. “Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one request, it would have been that I was born blind?” said the poet, who had been able to see only for her first six weeks of life. “Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.”

Born in 1820 in Putnam County, New York, Crosby became ill within two months. Unfortunately, the family doctor was away, and another man—pretending to be a certified doctor—treated her by prescribing hot mustard poultices to be applied to her eyes. Her illness eventually relented, but the treatment left her blind. When the doctor was revealed to be a quack, he disappeared. A few months later, Crosby's father died. Her mother was forced to find work as a maid to support the family, and Fanny was mostly raised by her Christian grandmother.

Her love of poetry began early—her first verse, written at age 8, echoed her lifelong refusal to feel sorry for herself:

Oh, what a happy soul I am,

*although I cannot see!
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't,
To weep and sigh because I'm blind
I cannot, and I won't!*

Fanny Crosby went on to write thousands of hymns, such as, “Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine,” and, “To God Be the Glory,” or, “Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross.”

Toward the end of her life, someone asked her, “Do you ever feel any bitterness toward the doctor?” She replied, “No, you see, it may have been a mistake on the doctor’s part, but not on God’s part.” She was a firm believer in a God who controlled the situations and circumstances of our lives and used them for His glory and our good. Hope!

This is the very same God whom Peter reminds his readers of here in the final verses of this letter. Within this closing section, the apostle Peter once more reminds his readers that God’s grace is more than sufficient for life’s struggles. He wants them to be assured of the fact that God’s promises to us through Jesus Christ provide an eternal hope that goes far beyond our struggles.

If we are to live with this hope, then I want to show you a few things that we must keep in mind.

1. Recognize the source of spiritual CONFLICT (5:8-9)

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

In many ways, the dramatic climax of 1 Peter sounds like a general who is rallying his troops before leading them into battle. Peter has addressed the elders of the church. He has called upon those who are younger to live in humility and commit their cares and concerns to the Commander in Chief Himself. Now, he calls upon believers to recognize the source of spiritual conflict—we have an enemy who is in opposition to us. And in order to face the enemy, we need to be alert, we need to be anchored, and we need to be aware.

We must be alert

The real enemy that we face is not suffering itself. Peter wants his readers to know that their enemy is not flesh and blood. The diabolical source behind their spiritual conflict is the adversary, the devil.

We face fierce opposition from this adversary.

The term ‘adversary’ was used as a technical term to refer to a legal opponent, as well as any kind of enemy who was aggressively hostile. The term ‘devil’ is the same word we get ‘diabolical’ from. It takes the opposition to the level of a malicious enemy who slanders and attacks.

Even though God is at work behind the scenes through the trials of life, so also is Satan. Yet while God often uses our struggles to draw us closer to Him, Satan tries to use them like a crow bar to pry us away from Him.

As Christians, every single one of us faces a powerful and cunning enemy. Our victory over this opponent depends on knowing his tactics and schemes and relying upon the presence of God to stand firm against him.

2 Corinthians 2:11 — “...so that we are not outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.”

Success in combat demands that we be familiar with the enemy's tactics. We dare not operate blindly!

Dwight Pentecost — *“No military commander could expect to be victorious in battle unless he understood his enemy. Should he prepare for an attack by land and ignore the possibility that the enemy might approach by air or by sea, he would open the way to defeat. Or should he prepare for a land and sea attack and ignore the possibility of an attack through the air, he would certainly jeopardize the campaign. No individual can be victorious against the adversary of our souls unless he understands that adversary; unless he understands his philosophy, his methods of operation, his methods of temptation.”*

Peter wants his readers to be well aware of Satan's tactics, and he doesn't want them to be caught off guard. They needed to be alert.

“Sober-minded” — *involves ordering and balancing life's important issues, which requires the discipline of mind and body that avoids the intoxicating allurements of the world*

“Watchful” — *an imperative command that means to stay awake and on the alert; speaks of vigilance*

Peter had heard Jesus use this very same word once before. While the disciples were with Him in the garden of Gethsemane, He called them to vigilance. Peter had failed once before, and he doesn't want the same for his readers.

Matthew 26:41 — “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Pay close attention to what else Peter says. The reason we must be alert is that our adversary the devil ‘prowls’ around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

“Prowls Around” — *word is a present tense verb; the idea is that the devil is constantly on the move*

We often relax, and we have to sleep. But the devil never relaxes. He doesn't relent. He never takes a vacation. He comes in by stealth and is constantly working secretly against us. He is constantly on the prowl like a lion.

Have you ever watched one of those special programs on the Animal Planet about the big predators of the African savannah? I remember watching one about lions once.

The way that they would hunt was remarkable. The lions would crouch low in the grass and go undetected. A herd of wildebeests would be nearby. The lioness would wait until one of those wildebeest would become detached from the rest of the herd. She would then slowly make her move until like a flash of lighting she all of the sudden pounced upon it, coming out of nowhere.

That is the idea that Peter is getting at here in verse 8. The devil often waits for our moments of pride and weakness to make his move against our soul. He

‘prowls’ around while stalking our every step, waiting for some strategic and opportune moment to catch us off guard.

What exactly is his end goal? He wants to devour us. He wants nothing more than to reduce us to ashes.

We must be anchored

Peter doesn’t tell his readers to tuck tail and run. Instead, he says that they are to ‘resist’ the devil, something that cannot be done in our own strength.

“Resist” — *means to withstand or set oneself against*

The way to resist him involves being ‘firm’ in our faith. We must be grounded in the faith. This simply means that we stand our ground upon the Word of God and refuse to be shaken. We resist him firm in our faith in God. An example of this would be David taking his stand against Goliath. He didn’t place his confidence in himself or in his weapons. Rather, David stood in the confidence of God.

We can’t resist the devil unless we’re first submitted to God. James said something similar:

James 4:6-8—“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

We must be aware

Peter says that we must be on the alert, and we must be anchored in our faith. He also says that we need to be aware that we are not in this conflict all by ourselves. Notice what else Peter goes on to say in verse 9:

“...knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

In other words, “You all aren't the only followers of Jesus who are suffering for your faith.” They were not the only ones being targeted and attacked by the adversary. There were plenty of other Christians who were in the thick of the conflict right there with them.

Sometimes, we feel like we're all alone when we are in the midst of some struggle. And that's what the devil wants you to believe, but it is not true.

2. Rely upon the God of all GRACE (5:10-11)

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Possessing a hope that looks beyond the struggles of life means that we recognize the source of conflict. It also demands that we rely upon the God of all grace. Peter shows us how the grace of God is sufficient for us no matter what we are facing.

Peter reminds these Christians that their suffering is only for a little while. That's true for life's struggles. Compared to eternity, they only last a little while.

Listen to what Peter says believers are called to—the God of all grace has called us to His eternal glory in Christ! This means that our temporary struggles are nothing when we compare them to what we have to look forward to.

Peter then paints a picture of a well-rounded warrior who has come through life's battles and has emerged with maturity and experience that could not have been developed any other way. God had a goal in mind for their faith, and the goal

was maturity. The only way that their faith could be strengthened was for it to be forged in the fire.

What was God up to in their lives? He was working to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish them.

Each of these words are descriptive of what God is doing by way of sanctification in the believer's life. They are used as synonyms and build to a crescendo:

“Restore” — *to thoroughly complete or to perfect*

Philippians 1:6—“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

“Confirm” — *to set fast; to make stable*

“Strengthen” — *to make sturdy*

1 Thessalonians 3:2-3—“To strengthen and encourage you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions.”

“Establish” — *to lay as a foundation*

Each of these words denote strength and immovability that God wants you as a believer to have in the face of struggle. While the adversary wants to devour and destroy your faith, God's promise to you in Christ is that He is working to build you up and make you stronger.

His sufficient grace will lead you through the struggle.

3. Remember the presence of other CHRISTIANS (5:12-14)

“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. 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.”

According to Peter, to be in possession of a hope that looks beyond life's struggles involves that we recognize the source of spiritual conflict. It means that we rely upon the God of all grace. And last of all, it demands we remember the presence of other Christians.

Now, it wouldn't be hard to read these last few verses and then close the book. But if all we do is merely glance at these verses and move on, then we will fail to see a very important truth that is being emphasized as Peter concludes his letter —the principle of cooperation. I want you to carefully notice the names that Peter makes mention of in these verses.

- Silas, a faithful brother
- She who is at Babylon, also chosen
- Mark, my son
- One another...all of you

Christians who help one another

“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.”

The name 'Silvanus' is another way of saying Silas. I'm sure you are familiar with Silas. He was one of Paul's travel companions, after having replaced Barnabas on his missionary journeys. It was Silas who was there with Paul in the Philippian jail. Acts 15:22 reveals that Silas was one of the leading men in the

church, even though he isn't on record having said a word. Like an old faithful oak, Silas was there for Paul, and now Peter says that Silas has been there for himself. We need a 'Silas' in our life!

Christians who encourage one another

"She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son."

More than likely, Peter is speaking in cryptic language here due to the increasing hostility toward Christians that had been building in Rome. The word 'Babylon' is another way of referring to Rome, the city where Peter was being held as a prisoner.

Both the church in Rome as well as Mark sends greetings to the persecuted believers that Peter is writing to. It all illustrates how Christians need encouragement from other Christians when we face life's struggles.

Christians who love one another

"Greet one another with the kiss of love."

Our relationship with one another isn't some surface level and superficial relationship. We are one in the bond of love as the people of God. Peter is reminding these Christians to not take their relationship with each other for granted.

At the end of verse 14, notice Peter's last sentence:

"Peace to all of you who are in Christ."

That's the way that he ends his letter. What a statement of hope! To be in Christ is to be at peace—even when the bottom falls out of life, when the adversary levels his attack against you.

I heard a story about a painting contest promoted by an art gallery that sought the perfect picture of peace. The competing artists were told to paint whatever they felt would best portray 'Peace.' Some artists painted serene landscapes with sunsets and fields of beautiful flowers. Another painted a still quiet lake with a reflection clear as glass.

Each was amazing and beautiful, but when the winner was revealed, everyone gasped in disbelief. The title of the winning painting was "Peace in the Midst of the Storm."

At first glance, the painting looks anything but peaceful. Black clouds and lightning bolts fill the sky. Waves crash down a jagged rocky hillside with raging waters below. How could this ever be descriptive of peace?

You have to take a closer look at the painting, because there is more there than simply meets the eye. Just beneath the gushing water falls, you will notice a little bird with her nest of babies tucked underneath the edge of a rock. In the midst of the storm, this bird found a sanctuary, a safe place to rest her wings.

Richard Fuller, a 19th-century minister, told of an old sea captain who said, "In fierce storms, we must put the ship in a certain position and keep her there."

Fuller went on to say:

"This, Christian, is what you must do... You must put your soul in one position and keep it there. You must stay upon the Lord; and, come what may—winds, waves, cross seas, thunder, lightning, frowning rocks, roaring breakers—no

matter what, you must hold fast your confidence in God's faithfulness and His everlasting love in Christ Jesus."

Is Christ your peace? When life's struggles and pressures begin to build, when the adversary roars, and when doubts and fears assail, do you have peace?

Peace is a Person with whom you can have a personal relationship. He gave His life on the cross to save you from your sin. He wants to give you eternal life so that you can share in His glory.

The gospel says that no matter what my experience is in life, my hope is rock solid because I am standing on the Solid Rock.

Do you have such confidence? If you don't, then why not turn to Jesus Christ in faith now while you have opportunity.