

March 23rd 2014. Final in 1Peter series. 1 Peter 5:1-11.
"The Place I Need To Be".

It was the third day of October 1976 and after 5 years of intensive Theological and Biblical studies and four years of pastoring Baptist Churches, I was about to be ordained as a Minister in the Baptist Churches of WA.

And as I stood that day before a crowded church I recognized that many of the unrealistic ideas about a Pastor's life that I had entered Theological College with back in 1972, had been knocked out of me. And it was with the awareness that the calling I was about to accept was not going to be easy that I accepted the charge that was read out to me. A charge taken word for word from the chapter of 1 Peter in which we find our text today.

Be a shepherd of God's flock that is under your care, serving as an overseer—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being an example to the flock.

As you can no doubt appreciate, these verses are very meaningful to me, but in fact it took me several more years of Pastoring before I began to understand that I had no chance of fulfilling this charge unless I sought to follow the instructions that are found in v6 onwards. And also that these instructions were not just vital for Pastors to follow but for Pastors to preach out and to live out before their people, because no believer can be and do what God wants them to be and do without seeking to obey these simple directions.

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

Before applying these directions to our situation however we need to realize that these verses must principally be understood in the context of the whole letter, and as we have seen over the last several weeks this letter was

written by the Apostle Peter to groups of Christians who were experiencing persecution. They were suffering because they were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Peter had already told them in 3:17 that **PERSECUTION COMES TO FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL.**

And in 4:12 that **IT IS NOT A STRANGE OR SURPRISING THING THAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD SUFFER.**

And in 4:16 **THAT THE ONE WHO SUFFERS AS A CHRISTIAN SHOULD PRAISE GOD THAT THEY ARE WORTHY OF HIS NAME.**

So consequently what he gives them in these verses are instructions for coping with the suffering they are going through because that suffering is not about to go away.

And he begins in v6 by telling them that ***"the duty of the believer is not to resist (either attacking the persecutors or raging against God), but to 'humble [himself] under the mighty hand of God."*** (The New International Commentary on the New Testament by Peter Davids p186)

The word humble means to make oneself low. The expression 'mighty hand of God' is used often in the OT and particularly in the story of the exodus from slavery in Egypt.

For instance in Exodus 5 we read that after Moses had first gone before Pharaoh and told him to let God's people go, Pharaoh's reaction had been to make things exceedingly worse for the Hebrew slaves. So the Hebrews had verbally attacked Moses and he went straight to God and complained that he had done what God asked but it had made the situation of God's people unbearable. And in 6:1 God said to Moses, **"Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country."**

What then followed showed that for the Israelites things had to get worse before they got better—but they had to learn to accept that their situation however hard it seemed, was under the control of God who would in time bring about their ultimate deliverance.

The comparison that Peter was making would have been obvious to these believers. They also knew that when Christ suffered he had not fought back,

complained, or even allowed anxiety to prevent His obedience to His Father's will. As the early Christian hymn about Jesus said (Phil 2:8-9) **"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place."**

So these initial readers would have heard Peter saying that your suffering is a part of life for you at the moment. It is a result of the devil's attack on God's Kingdom. His desire is to destroy your witness to Christ but you must resist Him by standing firm in your faith. And as you suffer you humbly accept it as God's way for you at this time knowing that in due time—when He returns in glory—He will exalt you as He has Exalted the Lord Jesus.

And when you read the stories from those early years of the martyrs of the church you find men and women who went to their deaths humbly before God, testifying that He was the Mighty One even in this, and that one day He would exalt them.

And today in many places in our world there are still believers who daily put their lives on the line for Jesus, and for them these words are just so relevant and comforting.

Recently I heard from this Western Christian who was asked by a group of believers who exist in a land where they too face persecution for their Faith to talk at one of their secret meetings on Acts 16. And in Acts 16 you find stories of Christians being beaten and imprisoned by the authorities because they dare to proclaim the name of Christ. And this Western Christian felt a little embarrassed and overwhelmed by the fact that what they wanted him to speak about was the type of thing they faced every day.

And in a similar sense when I look at these verses and think of how they related to those first readers I hesitate a little about applying them to our Christians lives. We have it so easy compared to what they were enduring.

But the truth of God's Word is that although their circumstances were so different to ours, we are still fighting the same battle against the devil as they were. His aim is still to destroy the witness of Christ living in us. And he still prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

And the sad truth is that he may well be having more success amongst Christian who are not being physically persecuted than he is having amongst

those who are. The Christian church is growing strongest today in countries where it is dangerous to be a Christian and declining most in those countries where it is acceptable.