

Stand Firm
I Peter 5:8-9

Willie Annen holds perhaps the most unique job in all of Europe. He is the city watchman for Lausanne, Switzerland. Beginning at 10:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. from the windswept belfry of the city's ancient cathedral he cries out: "This is the watchman; it struck twelve."

At five minutes before the hour an alarm clock wakes him up and when the six ton bronze bell tolls the hour he cups his hands together and calls out the hour. Then he goes back to sleep for 50 minutes before he wakes once more to announce the time.

That seems like a pretty safe job, unlike the job of the watchman in Biblical times. They warned of approaching danger.

In our passage today Peter, in a sense, is calling each one of us to be a watchman. Not someone who gets to sleep before calling out the time, but someone who is attentive to the dangers that lurk around us, to be wary of our surroundings. It is a call to be ready minded in order to swiftly respond when action is required because of danger.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to I Peter 5:8-9 this morning. We are finishing up with some general instructions from Peter given to the churches in Asia Minor. They're not random instruction, but rather serve to summarize his letter. They are clear action steps for the church leaders and believers. Let me highlight some of his instructions from chapter 5.

- v. 1 – Leaders are to shepherd God's flock
- v. 1 – Leaders are to serve as overseers
- v. 2 – Leaders are to be willing to oversee
- v. 2 – Leaders are to be eager to serve
- v. 3 – Leaders are to be examples to the flock
- v. 5 – We are all to be submissive
- v. 5 & 6 – We are all to be humble
- v. 7 – We are all to cast our anxieties on God

He continues in our text this morning with some clear admonitions. It is here that Peter lays out four clear and concise principles for us that will guide us on until the time when Christ returns.

We are to exercise caution

We have an enemy that is cunning

Our engagement is clear

Our encouragement is calming

I. WE ARE TO EXERCISE CAUTION – v. 8a

I'm guessing that if we took a moment to review our life there will be some moments that are unforgettable. There will be highs and lows, some things you never want to forget, but other things you would just as soon not want to remember.

Peter is no exception. As he is jotting down his closing remarks he may be recalling some of those highs and lows in his own life.

Some of his memorable experiences would include

Being called by the Lord to follow Him

Experiencing the Lord's transfiguration

Confirming that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God

Walking on water in a storm

Having a great catch of fish that almost sunk his boat

Preaching on the day of Pentecost and seeing 3,000 people saved

Healing the beggar at the Temple

Boldness before the Sanhedrin

Being rescued from prison by an angel on the eve of his execution

Preaching to and seeing Gentiles saved

Those are the experiences you can sit and reminisce about all day. They are the thoughts that bring a broad smile to your face and joy to your heart.

They are the kind of victories you like to bask in when you're with your buddies – "did I ever tell you about the time..."

We all have our own list of things that stir the heart

and overwhelm us with praise.

But then there are the lows for Peter.

Fear in the storm and sinking beneath the waves just seconds after his faith moved him out of the boat

Being rebuked by the Lord after he said he would never let Christ die.

Cutting off the ear of Malchus with a sword

Falling asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane

Denying Christ three times

Running away and soberly repenting

Being rebuked by Paul for his hypocrisy

Such lows are the unwelcome guests that spoil the party. They are the doubts and fears that invade the mind causing us to question our faith or loyalty.

They are perhaps the personal reflections of Peter that prompted him to record these brief but important exhortations and warnings. It may be a subtle way of saying that there were times he blew it big time, and there will be times when you will blow it too so here's some advice. Or, I don't want you to make the same mistake, so listen up and follow these instructions.

The first thing he says is that we need to be poised.

A. We Need To Be Poised

“Be sober” or “self-controlled.”

It's the same word of exhortation he used back in 1:13 and 4:7.

Keep your head together when trouble comes.
Have your wits about you.

The word originally meant to be free from the influence of intoxicants. It does not in itself speak of watchfulness but is used in connection or association with it. We can't be watchful if we aren't thinking straight or thinking about right things.

I Thessalonians 5:6, 8

In this passage Paul is urging the believers to be

watching and waiting for the Lord's return. We can't be spiritually lethargic. We must be self-disciplined as we wait. He then illustrates the kind of readiness we are to have through the example of a soldier.

Being sober minded refers to being disciplined in our thinking. We are to be clear headed, focused, resolute, determined, disciplined in our mind. Paul puts it a little differently in I Timothy 4:5 “But you, keep your head in all situations in the face of difficulties...” In other words, be cool headed, don't lose your head when trouble comes your way.

Paul says in Philippians 4:6-7 that prayers offered with thanksgiving gives us victory over anxieties because our hearts and minds are guarded by the peace of God. When our heart and mind are surrounded by His peace we are able to remain sober minded/self-controlled. Things that worry us can cause distraction to the point of not being self-controlled, sober minded.

What is causing you to be distracted? In this new year can you commit yourself to maintain an attitude of self-control?

We need to be poised.

Peter gives a second exercise for the Christian.

We need to be prudent.

B. We Need To Be Prudent

Peter says to “be vigilant” or “alert”.

It means to be watchful or to keep awake at all times and refers to our being attuned to possible dangers. That doesn't mean we should never go to sleep. It simply means to be spiritually alert. Don't be a Willie Annen, be a sentry who is always looking out for spiritual danger. When we aren't alert that's when things happen. Be on your guard. It also means that we need to take our enemy

seriously. Be watchful.

When my Dad was in the army and stationed in the Korea he owned a dog that went with him everywhere. When he was at his desk, the dog was at his feet. When he slept the dog was at the foot of his bed. That dog was ready to defend my Dad. If someone came to his room and needed him, they knew not to enter the room because the dog was alert. They had to stand outside the door and call him to wake him up. The dog was watchful.

In Biblical times a sentry was posted on the wall in a tower. It was his job to scan the countryside and warn of any approaching danger. He was to sound the alarm. It was his job to be alert and watchful.

In Matthew 24:42-43 (25:13) Jesus taught alertness about when He would return.

In Matthew 26:38-41 He taught about being alert to temptation.

In Luke 22:31-34 we read that Satan wanted to sift or test Peter to bring him to spiritual ruin, but Jesus had prayed for him. Turn there.

Now why did Jesus pray for Peter?
v. 32 – that his faith might not fail. Jesus didn't pray that Peter would overcome the temptation. He didn't even pray that Peter wouldn't be led into temptation. He prayed that his faith wouldn't fail implying that Peter was going to face something.

Jesus went on to say something of importance for us to notice. Notice at the end of the verse that Jesus knew Peter would fail: "when you turn back." Perhaps of more importance it's also a statement indicating that Jesus knew Peter would return. It speaks of his repentance, of his restoration and of his forgiveness.

Folks, when we blow it – and we will – this is reassuring us that we will also experience

forgiveness and restoration after repentance.

Now, Jesus also reveals the means by which Peter was able to return. Look again at v. 32. "I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail."

How significant is it that Jesus prayed Peter's faith wouldn't fail? Do you suppose in His ministry of intercession before the Father He is praying the same for you?

With that in mind, turn to I Peter 1:3-5.

Peter's return was by the power of God to keep us. Paul says in Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Jesus says that nothing can pluck us from the Father's hand.

Dear people, rest secure in the knowledge that God's power keeps you, but even so we must be watchful and alert.

Now if we were to go back and read Luke 22:54 we see that Peter did deny Christ just as predicted. Yet skipping over to John 21 the Lord restored him.

When he is looking over his life, I think Peter understood well what he wrote in verse 6 that God is opposed to the proud, but exalts the humble. His pride resulted in being humbled, but in humility he was raised up.

Here's the thing.

We may temporarily fail the Lord.

We are utterly dependent on the power of God to keep us.

We need to fight the devil with confidence, not in our own power, but in the power from God.

Now when we take into account verse 7 we see that casting our cares on Christ does not mean we give up our watching, our alertness. We are to remain poised and prudent in the Christian faith – self-controlled and alert. Both words speak of spiritual

discipline in the Christian life.

Why exercise caution? It's because we have an enemy that is cunning.

II. WE HAVE AN ENEMY THAT IS CUNNING

– v. 8b

In 1939 Solomon Linda wrote and recorded a song with the Evening Birds for a South African Record Company. It was titled “Mbube”, which means lion. It was composed in Zulu and adapted and covered internationally in the 1950's and 60's by such groups as the Weavers, Jimmy Dorsey and the Kingston Trio. In 1961 a doo-wop group called The Tokens recorded the song that became number one on the charts in the US. You may better know this song by its title “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”.

Ee-e-e-um-um-a-weh
Ee-e-e-um-um-a-weh

Wimoweh, wimoweh, wimoweh, wimoweh
Wimoweh, wimoweh, wimoweh, wimoweh
Wimoweh, wimoweh, wimoweh, wimoweh
Wimoweh, wimoweh, wimoweh, wimoweh

In the jungle, the mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight
In the jungle, the quiet jungle
The lion sleeps tonight

Near the village, the peaceful village
The lion sleeps tonight
Near the village, the quiet village
The lion sleeps tonight

Hush my darling, don't fear my darling
The lion sleeps tonight
Hush my darling, don't fear my darling
The lion sleeps tonight

I have no idea what a wimoweh is, but the jungle isn't quiet and the lion isn't sleeping at night and there is something to fear my darling. I'm not even sure the village is quiet at night with lions roaming around. The lion is a dangerous hunter.

Folks, we have an enemy, an unseen enemy and he is dangerous. First of all, notice his name, a name that in itself is menacing. He is known as the devil.

A. The Devil – His Designation

He is known by many names and descriptions in Scripture – Abaddon, Apollyon, angel of light, accuser of the brethren, adversary, Beelzebub, Belial, crooked serpent, Dragon, father of lies, god of this world, Lucifer, Satan among others.

Here Peter chooses to refer to him as the Devil. In the Greek it is *diabolis* and means slanderer, a term that refers to someone who makes false statements about someone else to damage their character or reputation. His intent is to injure you with his accusations. That's why he is accurately called the accuser of the brethren in Revelation 12:10 the “accuser of the brethren who accuses the believer before God both day and night.”

He is relentless with his accusations against you and will continue to accuse you until he is cast down. He is a powerful enemy and we should never take him for granted. Always consider him to be dangerous and cunning. He is an enemy and needs to be treated as one.

Someone once asked an electrician how he could work around all that power without getting hurt. The electrician said the minute you don't respect it, it will get you.

He is our enemy and we must respect the power he has. The word “enemy” means adversary and was originally used to refer to an opponent in a lawsuit.

We can't be spiritually lethargic when it comes to this enemy. We need to remember that he is out there and that he is lurking about. He is the devil, our adversary, that's his designation. He is not only a powerful enemy he is a personal adversary – “your enemy, the devil”. You are in his sights.

His name is designated as the devil. Next we see that he is a devourer bent on destruction.

B. The Devourer – His Destruction

“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for (seeking) someone to devour.”

This isn't just a casual stroll hoping he comes across someone to attack. He is seeking someone, anyone who is not spiritually alert, who is weak in their faith. It's a concerted effort on his part. It's intentional. He's bent on one thing – your destruction.

We have a couple of cats that I have seen from time to time stalking in the field next to us. They are on the prowl looking for their next meal. Everything is keenly attuned to pouncing on their prey.

That's the devil. He is lurking about. John Phillips writes that the devil is not afraid of us. He is out to destroy us. He may not be able to snatch us away from God's hand, but he'll do his best to destroy our testimony, rip apart our faith, cause us to doubt God's love, and steal our joy.

Our verse says he prowls around like a lion seeking someone to devour. This could be a veiled allusion to Nero's use of lions in the colosseum to attack and kill Christians. Like Peter, the devil wants to sift us, tempt us, ruin us and when he finds someone he roars a ferocious roar to instill fear.

We were at the zoo last year and got to hear a lion roar. It's quite intimidating and frightening. They prowl quietly. They watch and wait and when they have found their prey, they roar so loudly their prey becomes frightened. Some will freeze in their tracks. Other prey run often times in the direction of other lions waiting in hiding to grab them as the run by.

He'll use temptation, fear, loneliness, depression and persecution among other things to devour us.

The word “devour” means to gulp or drink down. It's used in Jonah 1:17 when the great fish swallowed Jonah.

How important it is then for us to remain alert and wary, always looking for the lurking devourer.

One author made an important observation. The enemy expects to find prey. He is confident. There are always Christians who will be an easy catch. It's been said that if you can keep at least one hundred yards away from a lion, you can outrun him. They can keep a good speed for about that distance and then they lose steam.

There will always be Christians like Peter on the night he betrayed Jesus. They're weak and vulnerable. Others are filled with pride believing they aren't vulnerable to attack. But this enemy when he has found his prey shows no mercy. He is out to devour and destroy because he is a cunning enemy.

With such a foreboding adversary, is there any hope for us? How can we stand against such subtle and vicious attacks?

Peter tells us that our engagement is clear.

III. OUR ENGAGEMENT IS CLEAR – v. 9a

The military has rules of engagement that describe the circumstances under which various military operations will enter into and continue combat with opposing forces. It defines when, where, how and with whom military force may be used and implies what actions soldiers may take on their own authority and what directives can be issued by a commanding officer. They are part of a general recognition that procedures and standards are essential to the conduct and effectiveness of civilized warfare.

Since the 1983 Beirut barracks bombings, a caveat has been added to American rules of engagement to

state that all personnel have an inherent right to self-defense implying the ability to respond with whatever necessary force is required to neutralize the situation as appropriate to the level of threat.

Our enemy doesn't operate by any rules of engagement. He's out to destroy by whatever means necessary.

Peter gives us the green light to respond. The first thing he says to us is to stand in resistance against the enemy.

A. Stand In Resistance Against The Enemy

He begins verse 9 by saying "resist him" referring to the devil. The picture here is of an army standing against an enemy.

James says something similar when he writes "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7)

While the devil is a powerful enemy, he can be opposed and resisted. James gives us the tool we need to oppose the devil – "submit to God". Live under His authority. Allow Him to rule your life. Humble yourselves before Him.

John Phillips writes that "the devil is not afraid of us, but he is terrified of the Holy Spirit. As we submit to God, Satan finds himself up against the One who is in us, One who is greater than he is." (I John 4:4)

The ability to stand in resistance to the devil happens when we submit to God. Because the devil actively seeks to destroy us we should actively seek to resist him. James says that when we resist the devil, he will flee from us. But remember that he is always seeking someone to devour, so just because he left you, doesn't mean he left you alone for good. He'll be back. When Jesus resisted the temptation of the devil in the wilderness through the power of

the Word of God, Matthew 4:11 says he left him for a more opportune time. He continued throughout Jesus's ministry to oppose him.

We can be victorious in standing against the devil. Resist him. Submit to God.

Ephesians 6:11 "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power."

Some time ago I saw a short video of a bear cub being chased by a mountain lion. The lion was relentless in pursuit, hungry for what seemed to be an easy meal. The cub became cornered, unable to go anywhere so he turned to face his opponent standing up on his hind legs, paws outstretched ready to fight to the end. About that time you see the lion turn and run away. As the camera pans around you see why the lion left, standing behind the cub was its mother.

We are to stand in opposition against to the enemy. We are to stand firm against the enemy.

B. Stand Firm Against The Enemy

The Roman army did something that provided an advantage against their enemies. They put small nails in the soles of their footwear. It gave them an extra foothold so they wouldn't give up ground against the enemy. They could dig in and stand firm.

Peter is telling us to stand firm in the faith. It's a military term that speaks of soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder with shields locked together.

One author reminds us that we can only stand firm in the faith so long as we stand wholly in Christ. Colossians 2:5 "I...delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is." Paul provides us with the means by which we can stand firm. He illustrates it with the Roman military

attire. In Ephesians 6:11-18 he tells us to put on the armor of God which is able to help us stand against the schemes of the devil, without which we will be defeated.

Warren Wiersbe suggests that “unless we stand, we cannot withstand.”

We stand or fall in the strength or to the degree of our faith.

We stand or fall in the strength or to the degree of our knowledge and application of the Word of God. We stand or fall in the strength or to the degree of our time in prayer.

Ephesians 6:18 “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Howard Marshall writes “What Peter is talking about is not putting strength into believing, but drawing strength from what we already believe.” In essence Peter is saying be strengthened by what you already know to be true.

Are you standing firm in a faith that has saved you and a faith that is continuing to develop your Christ like character? Are you learning to trust God more?

We have an enemy that we are to stand up against and resist. Peter has given us clear rules of engagement.

He gives one final thought.

IV. OUR ENCOURAGEMENT IS CALMING – v. 9b

“Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

A. Suffering Is Unilateral

This was persecution specifically targeted against Christians believers just like us..

There are other Christians going through suffering just like you.

B. Suffering is Universal

Peter wanted to encourage them because Christians in other parts of the Roman Empire were also undergoing persecution, so hang in there, believers in Asia Minor weren't alone in suffering. Knowing that others are persecuted can strengthen our resolve to stand firm.

This is a call for empathy for other believers around the world who are suffering persecution, to pray that their faith would stand strong in times of persecution, to pray for their persecutors to be won by the faith of those persecuted. We draw strength from the faith of others who stand firm.

A Newsweek article appeared on the internet this past week that was about the persecution and genocide of Christians. The journalist writing the this article indicated that the suffering of Christians is worse today than at any other time in history. The study by the Aid of the Church in Need reported that “not only are Christians more persecuted than any other faith group, but ever-increasing numbers are experiencing the very worst forms of persecution. The report showed that Christians suffered crimes against humanity. They were hanged, crucified, and beheaded. The report stated that the defeat of a certain Islamic militant group offers the last hope of recovery for Christian groups threatened with extinction.

I encourage you to be praying for the persecuted church. Although the enemy is strong, let the faith of suffering Christians serve to encourage you. It can be calming. Be self-controlled and alert; resist the enemy as you stand firm in your faith.