

Prayers

To God

Pray for the liberation of your spirit by God the father, who delights to redirect lives by His call and who leads us into all truth. Pray for power of God to come on you with joy and laughter

For myself

Weekly theme: Clothes

Dear God. You have made my body as it is, with all its quirks and all its peculiarities, and You have also called me and made me Your servant. May I so present myself each day that people may know I am a trustworthy person who can be relied upon to listen to problems and do my best to help, whether professionally, as a friend or as a neighbour. AMEN

For others

Pray for those caught up in the fighting in Syria, who now fear that their lives and homes will now never be restored to them. Pray for those who fight on whatever side who see no end to conflict, and work through Your people there to witness to Your love and power, which alone stands above the strife of historic islamic and political divisions.

Meditation

Great God of Wonders and God of Love:

Create for us days of joy,
when we are happy with life and content in faith;

Create for us days of mercy,
when our hearts go out to all who are in need;

Create for us days of faithfulness,
when we will not let other people down;

Create for us days of grace,
when we look with favour on everyone around us;

Create for us days of kindness,
when our actions speak louder than our words;

Create for us days of patience,
when we are prepared to wait alongside others;

Create for us days of blessing,
when we give happiness to others, and they to us;

Create for us days of peace,
when all is well with the world, and we may rest in You;

Great and Mighty God,
create Your Kingdom in our hearts, today.

Bible Passage

1 Peter 5:6-14

⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the strong hand of God, so that He may raise you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your burdens on Him, for He cares for you. ⁸ Be in control of yourself and alert.

Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Stand firm in your faith and resist him, knowing that the same sufferings are being completed by your fellow believers throughout the world. ¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will restore, support, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered for a little while. ¹¹ To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

¹² With the help of Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written briefly to you to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. ¹³ Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.

¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Review

We have now reached the end of Peter's great first letter. He concludes it with a sequence of four powerful pieces of spiritual advice (5:6-9), a final general greeting (5:10,11), and then some personal remarks (5:12,13) before a final blessing (5:14). The end of the letter comes suddenly, but this adds to the sense of urgency within Peter's teaching. Remember that the majority of his letter had been the report of a sermon preached to converts at their baptism (1:3;4:11). Peter wanted to encourage these converts, and his letter reflects this by his subsequent teaching about the meaning of suffering (4:12-5:5). It seems that Peter was a man who did not dwell on matters, but said plainly what he needed to say; this fits the picture of a man who was once a skilled fisherman, and the impression we gain from the end of his letter is that he had learned a great deal from his long journey of faith, and he was keen to pass it on.

The first piece of advice Peter gave was to 'humble yourselves' (5:6), and this was the second time in his letter that Peter had mentioned humility. On the first occasion, (3:8), he suggested that humility was an attitude of heart towards other people. This time, however, Peter told his readers that they should be humble before the 'strong hand of God' which

would help and support them ('raise you up' – 5:6) throughout life. It seems therefore that Peter gives a summary of some of what he believed to be important points from the body of his letter. He went on to urge his readers to 'cast all your burdens on Him ...' (5:7). These words summarised the trust Peter expected of those who had placed themselves at the mercy of God by going through the waters of baptism, and earlier in his letter he had said 'through Him you have come to trust in God, who raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory so that your faith and hope are set on God' (1:21).

Connections with the earlier part of the letter continue. Peter then advised his readers to 'control' themselves (5:7), reminding them of what he had earlier said in his sermon 'be self controlled, and set your hopes completely on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you at His revelation.' (1:13). There, self control was the obedience of faith which would lead to the path of holiness (1:14f.), but here, his words are of caution rather than instruction. This is because Peter had a picture, now famous, of the devil prowling around 'like a roaring lion' (5:8) seeking to 'devour' those who were not protected by the saving love of God in Christ. This is a frightening picture which should alert all God's people to the reality of the spiritual battle within which the work of the Kingdom takes place, but Peter was not being pessimistic, just realistic. He had already spoken extensively about the sufferings of the people of God and the reasons for it (4L12f.), and now at the end of his letter he urged his readers to 'stand firm in your faith and resist him (the devil)' (5:9).

Peter's final greetings are not as extensive as in some New Testament letters (e.g. Rom. 15&16), but they are no less sincere. His final blessing is contained between a pronouncement of God's 'grace' (5:10), and His 'peace' (5:14); words which are often found together, but here surround Peter's best wishes to those who read his letter, and he spoke reassuring words about God's desire to 'restore, support, strengthen and establish' His people (5:10) in the midst of suffering. Peter's personal greetings (5:12-13) speak of a Sylvanus, someone we do not know, and also about a church in Babylon, but his final thought is expressed succinctly; 'stand fast' (5:12). It sounds like the command of a fisherman bringing in his boat to secure the catch! I wonder what Peter thought of the journey he had travelled since Jesus called him from the seashore? His letter is a fascinating insight into this great man's spiritual journey and faith.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V7 'Cast all your burdens on Him'

This is the traditional and well known rendering of this verse, but most translations have 'cast all your anxieties on Him'. The Greek word however is 'merimna' which means 'cares, concerns, worries, or anxieties'. It covers a wide range of general words which point to the problems we all have in life, and for that reason, I think that the word 'burden' is best, and the only reason it is not used is because some feel that they must use words other than those associated with ancient translations!

V8 'Be in control of yourself ...'

Most translations have 'Be sober ...' The Greek word does mean 'be sober', but its wider meaning is to do with the exercise of self control, and being sober is one significant example of this.

V9 *The translation of the whole verse is a little different from most versions you will find. Mostly this is a matter of word order, but one word stands out, and this is the last verb*

which governs the whole sentence; 'epiteleo'. It means 'to accomplish or complete', which means that the sentence should be as I have translated it; 'knowing that the same sufferings are being completed by your fellow believers ...' This sounds odd to our ears, so many translations have changed it just slightly to read 'knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers ...' This is unfortunate because as I explain in the notes, there is powerful theological meaning in Peter's chosen word 'completed' (see notes).

V13 'Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you'

The original Greek reads literally 'she who is in Babylon who is chosen together with you ...' This is a little difficult to understand unless you accept that Peter is sending greetings from one church to another, and this justifies the clarification I have given in the text.

Further Comments

Humble yourselves (5:6)

Each of the verses in this passage are fascinating. We have already seen that Peter's words about humility earlier spoke about a Christian's relationship with others, but here speak about a relationship with God. The words Peter uses make this very clear, because the 'strong hand of God' is a Greek way of saying a phrase which is common in the Old Testament, where it comes across as God's 'mighty hand' (see Exodus 3:19, 6:1, Deut. 9:26 etc). This term was used in the Old Testament for all the great delivering acts of God, the release of the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt through the Red Sea, and their release from Exile in Babylon, to name but a few. This same hand of God was also able to bring judgement, because of God's justice, and is therefore spoken of as bringing discipline (see Job 30:21, Psalm 32:4, Ezek 20:34).

This same hand of God, said Peter, was now available through Christ to 'raise' us up (5:6), at a time of God's choosing. Sometimes we imagine that 'now' is always the time for being 'raised up' by God, but Job had to wait for it, and the world had to wait for Christ to come, and we have to wait for God's right time for us to be 'raised up' from our suffering, illness or persecution. But He will do it!

Cast your burdens (5:7)

The simple phrase 'Cast your burdens on Him, for He cares for you' is one of those deeply moving passages of scripture which are memorable because they express in a powerfully simple way what seems almost inexpressible. The great Christian writer John Bunyan perceived this when he wrote his famous 'Pilgrim's Progress' and its famous climax at which pilgrim leaves his 'burden' at the foot of the Cross, and at that moment knows he is set free. It is an old tale, but one still worth reading by Christians old and young.

This is in fact a quote from Psalm 55:22; 'Cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you.' However between the Old Testament psalm and the New Testament letter there is a subtle difference. The 'sustenance' of the Lord has become 'He cares for You'. In this way, Peter demonstrates the difference between mere religious Christianity and the truth of baptism which is that through obedience to God and baptism into Christ, the Lord God loves us so deeply that He 'cares' for us. Once we know this, no one can take it away.

Be in control (5:8)

I have commented in the notes about the way that most translations begin this verse 'be sober ...', but in reality, Peter's advice is about being 'self-controlled' and alert. Peter adds the word 'alert' to explain further that self control is not a matter of selfishness, but unless we

keep our senses keen and alert, we will miss the way in which the devil undermines our faith. We have an enemy who is ready to attack us at any point of weakness we present, and only by vigilance can we call Christ to the rescue when our weaknesses are exposed. We all know well that our weaknesses show when we least expect it!

Too many Christians do not like to think that the devil exists; and there are some who teach that the devil cannot be near the church or God's people because they are 'saved'. That, of course, is only true if we actively make it true, as Peter suggests by active resistance in Christ. It is no good imagining that evil will not reach us just because we are God's people, for the devil is interested in us precisely because if he can get at us, then he can disrupt the growth of God's Kingdom. If we take Peter's advice, then we will say prayers of protection against evil (such as the Lord's Prayer), we will tell the devil to leave our homes, we will pray for the Lord's protection of our church worship and work, and we will oppose all evil in our midst. This is active resistance.

Stand firm (5:9)

This advice follows on directly from the previous picture of the devil like a 'roaring lion'. However, in my notes above I have explained that there is something special about the word 'completed' in the sentence; 'knowing that the same sufferings are being completed by your fellow believers throughout the world'. This sounds a little odd, but it is really a summary of what Peter said earlier in his letter (4:12f.) which explains that the sufferings and persecution of God's people are a common feature of the Body of Christ, the Church, and whilst Christ has suffered once and for all for our redemption, the on-going sufferings of His people are used by Him to draw others to Himself. Those who suffer for the sake of Christ can find their true healing through the deep insight that we are united with Christ in suffering and that His suffering brings our redemption. This is a mystery, but for a Christian, there is a sense of unity in suffering, especially that suffering which comes from our witness to Him.

The Benediction and the four suggestions (5:10f.)

Within Peter's benediction of 'grace' (5:10) and 'peace' (5:14), are four words which describe God's work amongst His people, and His purpose for the Kingdom prior to the Lord's coming again in glory. God promises to 'restore, support, strengthen, and establish' His people even through their suffering. These four promises are ones which any church would do well to accept and foster. We are too keen today to set our agendas according to our evangelical zeal and the ministry we feel appropriate for our age. Here, Peter gives God's eternal plan for His church, and all the words used are self explanatory. You may say that there is no mention of evangelism, teaching, or any of the other well known priorities we give to the life of the church today. Perhaps this is because we are best to look at all these things in the light of Peter's words here. Perhaps all our evangelism, teaching, worship and ministry (etc.) should themselves be tested by these scriptural words, Peter's prophetic statement of God's intent and support for His people. It is a different way of thinking about things, but probably very valuable.

This, says Peter, is the 'true grace of God' (5:12). He has finished his letter, and concludes with personal greeting. He says 'greet one another with a kiss of love; peace ...' Here is the mutual affection and Christian love expressed in full, and whilst we think of a 'kiss' as something perhaps not quite right in church, for Peter, an appropriate embrace was the best expression of God's love, shared amongst His people.

Discipleship

Application

The wise counsel of a disciple of Christ

At the end of this letter, we have read a great deal of pertinent advice from the man who was Jesus' friend and a leader of the disciples. Everything Peter says is encouraging and spiritually helpful, and much of what we have read today, let alone what we have read in the rest of the letter, has become very well known; 'cast your burdens on Him, for He cares for you' (5:7), 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood!' (2:9) etc. These are not mere snippets of advice, they are considered counsel passed on by a man who had seen far more than we and who was a witness to the life of Jesus Christ, and also of His death and resurrection; and he was also the great leader who preached at Pentecost and led the early church.

True witnesses of God

It is not fashionable to speak strongly in this way today because most scholars strongly doubt that Peter, the Simon called by Jesus from the seaside in Galilee, actually wrote this letter. They say that it possibly reflects his experience, but that's all. I have often thought that in the first century the church went to great lengths to ensure that what was in the New Testament was indeed written by true witnesses of Christ, and it is unwise of me to think I know better, even with all the evidence of literary scholarship which might suggest otherwise. If we want to play the historical / literary game then there can be only one secular and scholarly conclusion; we do not know. As a Christian, I prefer to take the letter as it is, a testimony to Christ which is part of scripture and which was written by one of those most close to Him. In this, the whole letter stands out as an utterly invaluable piece of writing, to our immeasurable benefit.

Ideas for what to do

- *Consider the ways that the devil uses to get at you and try to draw you away from Christ. It is too easy to say this does not happen, but it does, and the sooner we address the issues, the more quickly we will grow!*
- *In a suitable church gathering, try to introduce some of the ideas within this text, perhaps the four promises of God in verse 10. See what reaction you get!*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Which of the pieces of advice in this passage of Peter's letter means most to you and why?
2. Discuss methods whereby you can 'resist the devil' so that he will flee.
3. What do you imagine to be the 'kiss' of greeting mentioned by Peter? How can we best express Christian love in the way that we greet each other?

Final Prayer

Glorious Lord, Your powerful Word challenges us over and over again. Give us the courage to accept it even where it tells us things that seem difficult to accept in our own culture, and help us to face our duty to put into practice the call of God which Your Word contains. Stay close to us, Lord; for we need Your help: AMEN