

Sojourners and Exiles Living in a Foreign and Hostile Land: An Overview Sermon of 1 Peter

JUAN R. SANCHEZ

Juan R. Sanchez is Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas. He earned his PhD in Systematic Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also serves as Assistant Professor of Christian theology. He is the author of *Seven Dangers Facing Your Church* (Good Book, 2018) and *1 Peter For You* (Good Book, 2016). He is also a council member of The Gospel Coalition and co-founder and president of Coalición. Dr. Sanchez is married to Jeanine, and they live in metro Austin, along with their five daughters, two sons-in-law and two grandchildren.

For ten years now, I've been traveling to Cuba at least once a year. On my second visit, I received an "Official Citation from the Ministry of the Interior" in Santa Clara, regarding "Immigration and Foreigners." Much to my surprise, the office was a military installation abuzz with personnel in military uniform. After initial questioning, my friends and I were escorted to the commanding officer, a lieutenant colonel. He questioned us about the reason for our visit, then instructed us regarding what we were and were not allowed to do and where we were and were not allowed to go. Never once did we feel our safety was in question, much less that our lives were in danger, but that experience helped me understand better what many Christians face throughout the world.

When we think of persecution, we often think of what we read in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* or what we see in the news: imprisonment, torture, beheadings, and shootings. But much of the persecution in the New Testament was

much like what I experienced in Cuba: an oppressive government controlling its citizens, restricting religious freedoms, and discriminating against believers simply because of their allegiance to Jesus. This is the kind of persecution the Christians in Asia Minor faced when Peter wrote his first letter. Ironically, it's not much different than the kind of persecution Christians in the West face today. As citizens of a heavenly kingdom, we live in this world as strangers and aliens. The question Peter answers in his first letter is, "How are we to endure such suffering in this world and remain faithful witnesses to our king and his kingdom?" Peter encourages our faithful endurance in the face of hostility by reminding us to rest in the salvation God has accomplished for us, remain faithful to fulfill the mission God has called us to, trace Jesus' steps on the road marked with suffering, and stand in the Grace that God has given us. Let's consider each of these exhortations in turn.

1:1-2 | REST IN THE SALVATION GOD HAS ACCOMPLISHED FOR YOU

To endure faithfully through trials and persecution, Peter points us first to the great salvation God has accomplished for us. We are "exiles" in this world because God "chose" us out of this world to be a people for his own possession (1:1). And because salvation has been granted to us by the triune God, we are secure in God's hand, no matter what we may face in this world. The Father planned our salvation from eternity past. He chose us "according to [his] foreknowledge" (1:2a). In other words, he foreknew and foreloved us, marking us out for salvation. Jesus Christ accomplished this salvation for us in history, shedding his blood as a payment for the sins of repentant sinners (1:18-19). And the Holy Spirit applied this salvation to us, setting us apart at a particular point in our lives "for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" (1:2). That is, the Holy Spirit set us apart for initial faith in Christ to receive the benefits of his substitutionary sacrifice.

To get his point across, Peter takes us back to the covenant ratification ceremony at the end of Exodus 24, where Moses set Israel apart at Mount Sinai, and sprinkled them with the blood of sacrificial animals, indicating that they were ready to obey all God had revealed to them in that covenant. Israel broke that old covenant, yet God promised to restore them through a new and better covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Unlike the old covenant ratified on Mount Sinai, though, the new covenant promised the power to obey: a

new heart, God's Spirit, and the forgiveness of sin in a once for all sacrifice. By capturing this covenantal imagery, Peter begins his exhortation to perseverance by reminding us that we are the new covenant people of God whom he has delivered out of slavery and is now leading us to the promised land, the new Jerusalem. While we're on this earth, we are sojourners and aliens, strangers in a foreign and hostile land; however, because the triune God has accomplished our salvation, he will bring us all the way home.

As we rest in God's salvation, we gain a living hope (1:3). The God who saved us is the God who raised Jesus from the dead. When we responded to the Spirit's gift of a new heart with repentance and faith, we were united with Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. That means, even though we die, we will live again. And because of this living hope, we don't have to fear death. For even if our Christian suffering ends in death, we can rest now in the truth that because God raised Jesus, he will raise us too on the last Day. That is our living hope.

Our living hope frees us to long for our future inheritance. While everything we accumulate on this earth will eventually perish, become defiled, and fade away, the inheritance we will receive is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for [us]" (1:4). And because God is the one who saved us, he is also the one who sustains us, strengthening our faith until our salvation is revealed once and for all on that last Day (1:5). But as difficult as it is to hear, one of the means God uses to strengthen our faith is by permitting trials in our lives. God does not waste any of our suffering. God uses each trial to purify our faith, in the same way that gold is purified by fire (1:6-7). As God strengthens our faith through trials, we rejoice that God is at work in us so that our persevering faith "may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:7-9).

As we rest in God's salvation for us in Christ, we are also humbled by the reality that we live in the privileged time of the promised new covenant (1:10-12). The prophets who predicted Israel's restoration on a new covenant (Isa 54-56; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:22-38) also promised that the restoration would be accomplished by a son of David (Isa 9:1-7), a suffering servant who would take the sins of the people on himself (Isa 53). These prophets longed for the revelation of God's Christ, having predicted his "suffering" but looking forward to his "subsequent glories." But because we live in the privileged time of the new covenant, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and

the Twelve were all serving us, for they provided the content of the gospel message that was preached to us, and that, by the Spirit's gracious work, we heard and received (1:11). This great salvation is something angels look at with astonishment because they will never experience it. When God chose to save, he chose to save humanity, not angels. Though we may wish, even hope to live in better times, this is the privileged time of the new covenant. So, let us humble ourselves, and no matter what we face in this world, rest in the salvation that God has accomplished for you, that is, "preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13).

When we rest in God's salvation, we can face any hardship, any trial because we know there is no difficulty, not test, no pain, no sorrow, no affliction, no disease, no loss that can separate us from the love God has for us in his own Son, Jesus. Not even death can separate us from God's love for us in Christ. So, where is your hope? Who are you trusting in to save you? God offers this salvation to all who turn from their sins and embrace Christ in faith. And all who repent and believe, all who "obey" the Spirit's call to salvation can rest in the salvation God has accomplished for you. The Father has planned it; the Son has accomplished it; and the Spirit has applied it to you. So, keep looking to Christ; keep hoping in Christ. But know that God hasn't saved us just to keep us out of hell and bring us to heaven. He has saved us for mission.

2:9-12 | FULFILL THE MISSION GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO

We often say that God has saved us for his own glory, but what does that mean? Peter clarifies the purpose for which God has saved us in 1 Peter 2:9-12. In salvation, God made us "a people for his own possession" to be "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (2:9). Once again, we need to look back to the Old Testament to understand what Peter proposes. In Isaiah 43, God promised to restore Israel through a second exodus, and he tells them to forget the first (Isa 43:16-19). In verses 20-21, God declared how he would sustain his people on this exodus, giving "drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself." Then, at the end of verse 21, God provides the purpose of this second exodus – "... that they might declare my praise." Peter applies this language to the new covenant people of God. But what Peter does with Isaiah 43:20-21 is informative.

In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter splits Isaiah 43:20, “my chosen people,” and 21, “that they might declare my praise,” then inserts Exodus 19:5-6, between them: “you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” In Exodus 19, God explains that after having saved Israel and guided them to Mount Sinai, though all the peoples of the world belong to him, he chose Israel as his special possession to be a royal priesthood and holy nation that would display his rule on the earth. For this reason, God established them in the central location in their known world, the land of Canaan. They were to be a “city on a hill” to show the surrounding nations who their God was, what he was like, and what it meant to live under his rule. To fulfill this purpose, God gave them laws that would distinguish them from their pagan neighbors in their monotheistic worship, their theocratic government, their sexual ethic, even their clothing and diet (Exodus 20-24). It is this relationship between God and Israel, where they promise to be God’s display nation, which Moses ratifies in the covenant ceremony in Exodus 24:3-8.

By putting these Old Testament texts together in this manner in 2:9, Peter argues that the church is the new covenant people of God, “my chosen people” (cf. Isa 43:20), having been rescued through a second exodus, set apart by the Holy Spirit, and sprinkled with Jesus’ blood to obey Jesus’ commandments in order to display God’s rule on the earth as a royal priesthood and holy nation. As a holy nation, we live under a heavenly government. Our citizenship is in heaven, and our king is Jesus. As a royal priesthood, we are ambassadors of king Jesus and his heavenly kingdom, representing God’s rule on the earth. As God’s special possession, our mission is to display God’s rule on the earth and to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2:9; cf. Isa 43:21). We glorify God as we fulfill this two-fold mission to display and declare.

Except, the new covenant people of God are no longer established in a central geographical location. We are exiles scattered throughout the world, being led by Jesus on a second exodus to our eternal, imperishable inheritance in the new heavens and new earth. So, unlike the people of God formed under the old covenant to display God’s rule to the surrounding nations from Canaan, we are scattered throughout the earth. Each local church is an outpost or embassy of the heavenly kingdom in their locale, called to display God’s rule and declare that he has placed his king, Jesus, on

his throne. While the nations may rage against God's king, we continue to call all peoples everywhere to consider Christ, to bow down to God's king, and to kiss the Son, lest when he returns in wrath to judge the world, they be caught up in his judgment (cf. Ps 2). Peter explains what this two-fold mission might look like in the world today.

We are called to display God's holiness as we reflect his holiness in our own lives (1:14-2:3). As those set apart by the Spirit "for obedience to Jesus Christ," (1:2), we are to reflect the character of our Father in heaven, rather than the character of our earthly father, Adam (1:14-17). The foundation for our holiness is Jesus' substitutionary, sacrificial death (1:18-21). God purchased us from the old ways of ignorance and rebellion by the precious blood of Christ. In other words, God set us free from slavery to the old ways of Adam through the forgiveness of sin in Christ's once for all sacrifice. We are now empowered with a new heart, given to us when the Spirit gave us life when the gospel was preached to us (1:22-25). Therefore, since we have "tasted and seen that the Lord is good" (2:3), we are to put aside all wickedness (2:1), and grow in maturity by longing for the same word by which we were saved (2:2).

We also display God's holiness together as a church, for when the Spirit set us apart for salvation, he incorporated us into the new temple, the church (2:4-8). "As you come to him," declares Peter, "you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (2:5). Again, Peter looks back to Isaiah to remind us that the privilege of being God's temple is only for those who believe in Jesus, the cornerstone of God's spiritual house (2:6-7). Those who reject Christ will experience his judgment (2:8). As God's new temple, we display who our God is, what he is like, and what it means to live under his rule as we follow Jesus on the road to suffering (2:21-25) and live together as a church in unity (3:8-12), serving one another (4:7-11), and following the example of the elders Christ has given us (5:1-5). And as God's priests, we offer "spiritual sacrifices," as we live holy lives before an unbelieving world, that "they may see [our] good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (2:12).

As both individual Christians and as a church, we also display God's rule as we submit to those in authority over us, whether governing authorities (2:13-17) or "masters" (2:18-25). Our sovereign, heavenly king has placed human

authorities over us while we live on this earth: emperors, governors, kings, queens, presidents, prime ministers, law enforcement officials, employers. These divinely appointed authorities are to represent God's good authority as they punish evil and promote good (2:14). To be sure, many world leaders abuse such authority. Nevertheless, it is God's will "that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people" (2:15). As God's display nation, we show the world what it is like to submit to God's rule by submitting to those he has placed over us, even those who do not represent God's authority well. Of course, ultimately, we must obey God rather than man when forced to decide between obedience to Jesus' commands or obedience to man's. Generally, though, we are to obey human authorities as if obeying God himself to show the unbelieving world that, while exiles, we are good citizens on this earth. But also, we serve a greater authority and display to world what it's like to live under God's rule as his loyal subjects. Consequently, we will "honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor" (2:17).

Likewise, as Christians and as a church, we display God's love for his people as we live out the gospel in human marriage (3:1-7). As Christian husbands, we are to "live with [our] wives in an understanding way," or according to knowledge (3:7). As we "study" our wives, we will understand how to love them and care for them as God created them. For their part, rather than promoting a war-like environment in the home, Christian wives are to cultivate an environment of peace by following her husband's leadership (3:1-6). When Christian husbands love their wives, understanding how God has made them and following Christ's example as a husband, our wives will have no reason to fear our authority. Consider what a powerful display this would be to the unbelieving world that devalues marriage and commitment, that takes advantage of women, and promotes the feminization of men. Ultimately, however, we display the gospel story in human marriage—how Jesus, the always-faithful, never-failing bridegroom pursues his continually-faithless, always-failing bride and dies for her to cleanse her and prepare her that she may wear the white dress on her wedding day.

God has saved us to display his rule on the earth as his distinct people: a royal priesthood and holy nation. Sadly, the church today looks little different than the world. Professing Christians engage in vitriolic political rhetoric just like the world, criticizing one political party and idolizing the

other. Professing Christians lie, cheat, and steal from their employers, just like the world. Professing Christians violate the marriage covenant, just like the world. Professing Christians join in immorality and debauchery just like the world. As God's display people, we need to hear Peter's exhortation: "I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds [our spiritual sacrifices] and glorify God on the day of visitation" (2:11-12). The purpose of the display aspect of our mission is to provide the credibility of our declarative mission. Our ultimate purpose in salvation is to exalt Christ by pointing all others to him. So, we are to live lives that show Christ and his rule over us and this world. And having shown his rule, we invite all peoples everywhere to bow down to king Jesus.

God set Israel apart on Mount Sinai to be his display nation. While we retain that aspect of mission, under the new covenant, we are the people of the second exodus called to be God's witnesses (Isa 43:9, 10, 12) and declare his praise (2:9; cf. Isa 43:21). Even in the midst of Christian suffering, we are to be "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (3:15). What are we to declare?—"the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9). We declare Christ, his excellencies, his work (1:18-19), his words (1:22-25). As we proclaim the good news about king Jesus, we call the people in darkness to come into the light through faith in Christ. But notice that we cannot separate the display and declarative aspects of mission. They stand or fall together. If we fail to faithfully display God's rule, it undermines our declaration. If we fail to declare the good news, it does not matter how well we display God's rule. Our mission is two-fold: to display God's sovereign rule and to declare God's gracious gospel. For this we have been saved. And for this, we will also suffer.

2:21-25 | FOLLOW THE ROAD TO SUFFERING JESUS HAS ALREADY TRAVELED FOR YOU

When little children first learn their alphabet, often, their teacher will have them trace an outline of each letter. This is the image Peter paints as he urges us to trace Jesus' steps on the road to suffering. Because Christ suffered for us,

we are called to suffer (2:21). And in his suffering, Jesus left us an example to trace (2:22). “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (2:23-24). As we trace Jesus’ steps on the road to suffering, we are not to repay evil for evil; instead, we are to bless those who persecute us, “for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing” (3:9).

In this world, we are likely to suffer at the hands of unbelieving rulers (2:13-17). In such times, we are to trace Jesus’ steps as he suffered at the hands of the Roman officials. He did not revile them, justify himself, or call down his angels. Instead, he entrusted himself to God who judges justly. When we suffer at the hands of unbelieving authorities (2:18-25), we are to trace Jesus’ steps as he submitted to the Jewish leaders who mocked him, abused him, and handed him over to the tyrannical government leaders. In all this, Jesus he did not sin. He answered his oppressors honestly, and he allowed himself to be handed over in order to bear our sins as he received the crucifixion we deserved. We are likely to suffer at the hands of an unbelieving spouse, particularly. In such times, the Christian wife submits to her unbelieving husband, trying to win him over by displaying Christ’s submission to the Father in the home, hoping that her display will point her husband to Christ (3:1-6). Likewise, the believing husband is to love his unbelieving wife, loving her and honoring her as Christ loves his bride, the church (3:7). In these and many other ways, we are to display God’s rule over us and declare the excellencies of God’s king, even as we face suffering.

But the road marked with suffering is also the road to resurrection, exaltation, and glory (3:18-22). So, we trace Jesus’ steps to come home to God. “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (3:18). While 1 Peter 3:18-22 is the most difficult passage to understand in the entire letter, the most important point is clear. Jesus brings us to God by following the road of suffering unto death in the body (flesh). But he did not remain dead (3:18). He was raised on the third day (3:21), and is now exalted to the right hand of our heavenly Father, where he has been enthroned and given rule over all things in heaven and on earth (3:22). Whatever we may say about verses 18-22, that much is clear. For Jesus, the road marked with suffering was also the road to resurrection, exaltation, and glory. As we trace Jesus’ steps on the road to suffering, we are

also tracing Jesus' steps to resurrection, exaltation, and glory.

Verses 18-20 explain Jesus' resurrection victory and vindication. Jesus was "put to death in the flesh," that is, in the body. Since spirits do not die, Jesus' spirit did not die and did not need to be "made alive." "Made alive in the spirit" (3:19), refers to Jesus resurrection in a spiritual body. Arguing for the resurrection, the apostle Paul uses the same language in 1 Corinthians 15:22. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be *made alive*" (emphasis mine). Christ was the firstfruits of our resurrection, but "then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor 15:23). In other words, because Christ was *made alive* (resurrected with a spiritual body) as the firstfruits, promising our resurrection, when he returns those who are his will be *made alive* (resurrected with a spiritual body). When we die "in the flesh" our body is "sown a natural body." When we are "made alive in the spirit," "it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44). This is Peter's point: Jesus suffered in the flesh, being sown a natural body, but on the third day, he was *made alive in the spirit*, raised in a spiritual body (3:18). And the encouragement we receive from such news is that as we trace Jesus' steps into suffering, we are also tracing his steps into resurrection.

After his resurrection, then, Jesus announced his victory to the demonic spirits who rebelled during the time of Noah by transgressing the boundaries God had set for them (Gen 6:1-4; Jude 1:6; 2 Peter 2:4; cf. 1 Enoch 15:3). At that time, God judged the world with a cleansing flood and all but Noah's family was swept away (3:20; cf. Gen 6:5-8). Baptism serves as a picture of God's salvation from the sweeping waters of judgment through Jesus' victorious resurrection (3:21). Baptism does not save us. It reminds us that we are united with Christ by faith, and as we trace his steps into his suffering and death, we also trace his steps into resurrection, glory, and exaltation. We are rescued from God's judgment because Jesus received our judgment when "he died in the flesh." But the fact that he was "made alive in the spirit" shows that God accepted Jesus' substitutionary life and death on behalf of repentant sinners. So, like Noah, we too are rescued from God's judgment. Except, we are rescued from God's judgment because Jesus experienced it in our place.

Therefore, at baptism, we make "an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (3:21). In other words, baptism is a time when we make a "pledge" to God, based on Jesus' resurrection, to

remain faithful to our profession of faith and live in a manner that allows us to maintain a good conscience. While 1 Peter 3:18-22 may be difficult to interpret, baptism is a glorious picture of our union with Christ, our cleansing from sin, and our rescue from God's judgment. We are not rescued from God's judgment because of anything we have done but because we have trusted in Christ and traced his steps on the road to suffering and death. And now we know that the road marked with suffering is also the road to resurrection and glory.

"Since therefore Christ also suffered in the flesh [body]," we now can "arm [ourselves] with the same way of thinking" (4:1). If we have the mind of Christ regarding suffering, we will be able to live in this hostile world, not pursuing human passions, but pursuing the will of God (4:2). And even in our suffering, we are to display God's rule over us so that we may point unbelievers to our suffering, conquering king, Jesus. This is "why the gospel was preached even to those who are [spiritually] dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are [in death], they might live in the spirit [realm] the way God does" (4:6).

When we trace Jesus' steps, suffering becomes normal; therefore, we shouldn't be surprised when we encounter it (4:12). But when we suffer as Christians, we can rejoice, not only that God is using that suffering to strengthen our faith (1:6-7), but that we also have the privilege of sharing in Christ's sufferings (4:13-16). To be sure, we are not to look for suffering. We do not delight in or enjoy suffering. Christian suffering and persecution are evil. It is evil when governments seek to eradicate Christian populations. It is evil when Christian minorities are hunted down and killed by other religious extremists. It is evil when governments restrict the religious rights of Christians. But because God chose us out of this world, the world hates us. And because we identify with God and his king, we will be persecuted. 1 Peter is an exhortation to Christians to endure in a foreign and hostile world. How? Peter explains in one verse: "I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it" (5:12). This is the melodic line of 1 Peter, Peter's thesis statement—"Stand firm in God's grace."

5:12 | STAND FIRM IN THE GRACE GOD HAS GIVEN YOU

In one phrase, Peter summarizes his entire message to the Christians in Asia Minor. “Stand firm in it,” that is “the true grace of God” that he has written them about (5:12). We stand firm by resting in the salvation God has accomplished for us; we stand firm fulfilling the mission God has called us to; we stand firm tracing Jesus’ steps on the road to suffering. What does it look like to stand firm in the true grace God has given us?

We stand firm in the grace of God as we love and serve one another (4:7-11). The Christian life is not meant to be lived in isolation. We need each other, and the gift of the church is one of God’s great graces. The church is the community of heaven where we practice loving one another, forgiving one another (4:8) and welcoming one another in our homes (4:9). And God has graciously gifted us to serve one another. Those who speak are to speak the truth of the gospel in love, as if God’s very words, encouraging one another and building one another up (4:10a). And those who are gifted to serve, are to serve the body so that in our ministry to one another, God may be glorified (4:11b). If we are to endure suffering as exiles in this hostile world, we need each other. We need everyone in the church. So, let us stand firm in God’s grace by loving and serving one another.

We stand firm in the grace of God as we entrust ourselves to the just judge and leave room for his wrath (4:19). When we are persecuted, we will be tempted to retaliate and to fight for our rights. We want justice! To the degree that our system of government permits such justice, we should take advantage of it. That is our right as citizens of earthly nations. But we must realize that ultimate justice will never happen at the hands of human authorities. This is especially true for those Christians living under corrupt and tyrannical governments. Regardless, we are to entrust ourselves to God, the creator of all things, who alone judges justly. When we do, we will not have to exact vengeance. We can trust God for ultimate justice. But realize that God’s justice comes in one of two ways: either at final judgment or at the cross of Christ. Entrusting our souls to the faithful creator means that we also must trust him when he saves our enemies and makes them our brothers. This too is standing firm in the grace of God.

We stand firm in the grace of God as we follow the examples of the pastors Christ has given us (5:1-5). Thankfully, Jesus has not abandoned us.

Though he is exalted to the Father's right hand, he has given us his Spirit. And now, as God's temple, his Spirit dwells in us (2:4-8). And he has given us each other, the church (4:7-11). But he has also given us pastors to lead us by their example (5:1-5). Pastors are a gift from the ascended Christ (Eph 4:7-11) to feed us and protect us and lead us by their example. So, Peter urges these pastors to be faithful under-shepherds of Christ, leaving us an example to follow (5:2-3). Thankfully, as we face difficult situations and decisions in this hostile world, Christ has made his shepherds available to us. Follow them. Seek their counsel. They are a grace from God, and we are to stand firm in such grace.

We stand firm in the grace of God as we humble ourselves and trust God's care for us (5:6-7). We give thanks to God for our pastors, but they are not our priests. There is only one priest: Jesus. He has gained access for us to God's presence. Therefore, we can draw near to God. So, as we face hardships, trials, temptations, and persecutions, we can humble ourselves under God's strong, powerful hand and cast all our anxieties upon him "because he cares for you" (4:7). God is not weak. He is not deaf or blind. He can carry all our burdens, so when life get hard, even too difficult to bear, don't be proud! Humble yourself, cry out to God, and cast all your cares on him. Stand firm in his grace.

We stand firm in the grace of God when we realize that we are not alone in our suffering (5:9). Ever since Jesus defeated the demonic realm (3:19-20), Satan has sought to destroy God's people (Rev 12:13-17). But we have been warned about the devil and his schemes; therefore, we are to be sober and watchful, resisting him, "firm in our faith" (5:9). Peter also informs us that Satan's activity is not limited to us. He seeks to destroy all God's people through corrupt rulers (Rev 13:1-10), false religions (Rev 13:11-18), and immoral cities (Rev 14:8). Therefore, our suffering is not unique. It's not unique to our time in history, and it's not unique to our geographical location. But as we stand firm in God's grace resting in God's salvation, we don't have to fear Satan because we have a living hope. We can press on fulfilling our mission because not even death will prevail against Christ's church. And we can trace Jesus' steps on the road to suffering because just as Jesus defeated Satan by his resurrection, so will we. So, Christian, stand firm in the true grace of God, knowing that "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" (5:10).

CONCLUSION

Some Christians forget that the apostle John wrote Revelation to seven churches in the same region that Peter wrote his letter to. Both Peter and John sought to equip the churches in Asia Minor for the persecution that was to come, the persecution that some of them were already experiencing. In A.D. 155, Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, one of the cities in Asia Minor, was brought before the governing officials and told to recant his faith in Christ. He replied, "For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" The proconsul then threatened him with wild beasts and fire. Again, Polycarp responded, "You threaten me with a fire that burns only briefly and after just a little while is extinguished, for you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, which is reserved for the ungodly." Then he added, "But why do you delay? Come, do what you wish?"¹

What empowers an octogenarian Christian to say to his persecutors, "Bring it on!?" Polycarp knew what it was to stand firm in the grace God has given him. He knew to rest in the salvation God has accomplished for him. If God, in his salvation, has shown us that he is for us, then who can be against us? No thing and no person can separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus, so we can stand firm in the grace of our salvation! Polycarp also fulfilled the mission God gave him to his dying breath. He not only displayed what it meant to live under a greater king than the proconsul and his superiors, he continued to declare that Jesus alone is his king and that unless the proconsul repented, he would taste the fire of God's judgment. Polycarp could stand firm in God's grace, knowing that king Jesus will build his church. And Polycarp willingly traced the steps of Jesus on the road to suffering because he knew that this "fire that burns only briefly" was nothing compared to the eternal weight of glory that awaited him in his king's presence.

The life that we live, we live by the grace of God. So, as long as we have breath, or until Jesus returns, let us encourage one another to rest in the salvation God has accomplished for us in Jesus; and let us bear one another's burdens as, together, we trace Jesus' steps on the road marked with suffering, knowing we are not alone; and finally, let us continue to fulfill our mission, displaying who our God is, what he is like, and what it means to live under

his rule, so that those who presently rage against king Jesus may bow down and kiss the Son on that final day. And after we have suffered a little while, God himself will establish us. “To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (5:11).

¹ Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek texts and English translations* (Updated ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 235.