

True Grace for Hard Times

1 Peter 1:1

Series: *True Grace - 1 Peter*

Introduction: Please take your Bible and join me in 1 Peter 5, 1 Peter chapter 5. We have the great privilege this morning of starting a series in the book of 1 Peter, and we are going to do that by looking at one of the last verses in this short letter before we look at the first few verses. 1 Peter is perhaps one of the most neglected NT books in the American Church. That is the case because it has a lot to say about being exiles and strangers on the earth and the suffering that comes with that identity. I read multiple accounts this past week which indicated that 1 Peter was one of the favorites of churches in hard places like China and Indonesia and North Korea. They eat up Peter's words pointing them to their suffering Savior and guiding their way down the most difficult roads of life. But the American church is presumably – or at least by our lack of interest in this crucial book – we seem to be mostly free of hard things in our pursuit of Christ. But if we have indeed taken up our cross and followed our Lord in faith, then life will not be peaches and cream and evening walks on the beach. And this letter from one of the first Christian martyrs will guide our steps as we live out the truths of our salvation on foreign soil.

Peter is a man who is uniquely qualified to talk to us about how the grace we have been shown leads us into suffering and guides us through suffering and advances because of suffering. In fact, that is why he has written this letter to these people of Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey. He wants them to know what true grace is all about. Look at verse 12 of chapter 5.

This is Peter's point in writing. He is seeking to make known to us the true grace of God so that we may continue to stand in it. As he writes about this true grace he is going to obviously be God-focused in teaching us where this grace has come from. So he will use the name "God" some 39 different times which averages out to once in every 43 words. Only 1 John uses God's name more. Peter is drawing his reader's attention away from the trials and troubles of living as exiles in a foreign land and he is pointing us to the great God of mercy whose true grace is sufficient for all these things.

And because he is teaching us about this true grace he is going to be exegeting the cross of Christ at every turn. The suffering of Jesus and His work to save us take center stage in Peter's letter to these Christian sufferers. Not only does he point often to the suffering of Christ, but he raises our eyes to the soon return of Christ as well. So, the past work of salvation and the future hope of salvation join together in this book to give us present realities of our salvation which guide our steps in this foreign land.

This makes the words of 1 Peter universally relevant to all of God's people – whether the people of 1st Century Asia Minor or the people of 21st Century Newton, KS. If we know the true grace of the Gospel then this letter helps us understand why life is so hard, and it points us in the direction of true grace to follow our Lord. Now turn back to chapter 1 with me. Now that we have our bearings about us going into the letter – that this is a letter about true grace – we can begin to meditate upon this true grace made known to us from the very first words. *Read 1:1-2.*

There is so much to say about Peter, but I am going to assume that you know some of his story. I will recount some of the high points to you in a minute, but what you must see in verse 1 is that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. This is an official office of the church – an apostle – and in Ephesians 4 we find out that this is an office given as a gift to the Church. Ephesians 2:20 tells us that the Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets and that Jesus Christ himself is the chief cornerstone. It is an office that is no longer functioning in the church – which is a very important fact these days. There is a whole new set of textual hacks who call themselves preachers who are claiming to be apostles of Jesus Christ. But they are not because according to Scripture that office was a once and done kind of office. These men were hand selected by Jesus and they saw and were trained by the resurrected Lord. This is the only office in the New Testament which is given the subtitle modifier – of Jesus Christ. This is to identify their closeness to Christ – having been hand selected and setup by Him alone. These are unique men for a unique time at the start of the Church.

Well, Peter was the leader of these unique men. He is always listed first in the four places where we are given a list of the 12 apostles – Peter's name is always first and Judas Iscariot's name is always last – except in the list in Acts because Judas was obviously dead by then. But in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts, the first apostle listed is Peter. He was a leader of leaders. And you know that as mostly a bad thing for Peter. He certainly was bold and forceful in his speech, but that is part of being a leader. He had some terribly embarrassing moments, but then he was also used by God to accomplish some amazing things in the building of the Church. And what changed Peter from being the somewhat obnoxious and self-interested disciple to being the humble and confident apostle? Well – it was this true grace that he is writing to tell us all about. He knows what to tell us because he has personally seen it in Jesus' life and he has personally experienced it himself. This makes Peter the right man to speak into our lives about the transforming work of true grace.

What we see in this letter then is Peter's pastoral words as he reflects upon His Lord and gives us the fuller meaning of the work of Christ on our behalf. It is a theologically rich and pastorally sensitive and directive letter. He will speak of election and foreknowledge and sanctification and new birth and personal holiness and joy and spiritual ransom and the work of atonement through the blood of Christ and the meaning of the resurrection for the believer and love for one another and the work of the Word of God to bring us to new life – and that is all just in chapter

! This is all the truth of true grace! This is the apostolic message applied to the difficult life of one who is following after Christ in this Christ-less world. Peter is reflecting upon the life and the words of Christ and he is pastoring our souls through the hard things just like Christ did for him. One commentator says that “Peter’s pastoral letter encourages us by instructing us. Our deepest need drives us to our deepest beliefs.”¹ That is what these original hearers are facing – their deepest needs, and so they are in desperate search for their deepest beliefs. They are looking for what is actually true and how does that shape their lives in this present trouble. And Peter is the man for this job. He was once a man who viewed Christ as his personal ticket to glory and fame. So much so that he at one time rebuked the Lord for talking about the cross. But he was changed by that very cross of Christ from this rebuke and denial out of a longing for self-promotion and glory, to a man who is a humble and courageous witness who is greatly used in the building of Christ’s Church. The lynch pin in Peter’s life was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And in this letter he is saying to you and to me that this is our turning point too. This is what it means to follow Christ. This is what true grace looks like. It is the way of the Cross. The letter as a whole teaches us three truths about true grace which will be the drumbeats that our study marches to over the next several months. Peter will teach us that true grace leads us into suffering and guides us through suffering and advances because of suffering.

I. True Grace Leads Us Into Suffering

- a. Peter will point us to these three truths about true grace all throughout the book. He is concerned with suffering in the Christian life because he knows that the true Christian will face hard things and will suffer because they have been born again. This has been his experience. He has known suffering in life because he has known the true grace of God. The turning point for Peter’s own experience – and for ours – is the Cross of Christ. So, as you look at Peter before the Cross you see a zealous man who is quick to speak and slow to hear. He often appoints himself to be the mouthpiece for the group of disciples and he is the one who is most frequently interacting with Jesus in the Gospels. This brought some amazing experiences his way as he had a front row seat to the most glory-filled moments of Jesus’ earthly ministry. You’ll remember that Peter, James, and John formed kind of an inner circle within the larger group of disciples. And this meant that they got to experience and see things that the others didn’t. Specifically, they were taken by Jesus into the room where Jairus’ daughter lay dead – and they had a front row seat to Him raising her back to life. Then they were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus’ appearance was changed and Moses and Elijah appeared on the mountain to comfort and encourage Jesus. And then, on the night of Jesus’ arrest he takes these three with him into the inner part of the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with Him. Some of Jesus’ most glorious and most difficult moments were experienced by Peter.

¹ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, pg. 15.

- b. And yet, before the cross, we know him to be a man not controlled by grace. His life and his words often humiliated him before all the others. So, you'll remember him stepping out on the water to meet Jesus, only to sink after a few steps and needing to be rescued by our Lord because of his weak faith. Or remember the time he rebuked the Lord to his face for prophesying his soon death on the Cross? Or what about that time when Jesus took them up on the mountain to pray and they fell asleep and then they awoke to a transfigured Jesus and to Moses and Elijah there with Him and Peter rashly spoke up and proposed the idea of building tents so that they could stay longer on the mountain. He didn't even get to finish speaking and God the Father interrupted him and said – This is my Son with whom I am well-pleased. Then, as they approach Jerusalem and our Lord's impending death, Peter declares his undying loyalty to Jesus and says that he will gladly die than fall away in fear or disloyalty. And then at the Garden of Gethsemane he couldn't stay awake and pray for our Lord in his darkest hour of need, but then when the troupe comes to arrest Jesus Peter pulls out his sword and lops off one of the men's ear and is rebuked by Jesus to put his sword away. And then, just hours later, in fulfillment of our Lord's prophecy about Peter, he denies even knowing Jesus three different times because he can't even bear the reproach and the shame of his Lord in that moment. And even after the resurrection of Jesus Peter finds himself returning to his old way of life as a fisherman because everything he once hoped and dreamed for in Jesus as Messiah now seemed to be slipping away. You see, Peter knew the depths of sin in the presence of the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. He knew failure and outright rebellion and denial and self-worship even in the presence of God in the flesh!
- c. But then Peter is radically changed by true grace. And this true grace is brought to him by the amazing work of Christ upon the Cross of Calvary. The Cross work of Jesus brought radical and eternal change to Peter's soul. He was given true grace in conversion and redemption and being born again to a new and a living hope. This powerful work of transforming and saving grace turned Peter from a self-promoting leader of leaders to a powerful and bold witness for Christ. And what we see is a man who went from denying that our Lord needed to die on the Cross, to a man who is now willing to die himself for the preaching of that very Cross. So, in the book of Acts we see Peter repeatedly standing before a less than friendly crowd proclaiming that they were responsible for the death of Jesus who was indeed the Messiah. In these bold proclamations of our resurrected and ascended Lord, Peter calls them to repent of their sin and turn to Jesus of Nazareth as Savior and Lord. So, in Acts 2 he stands before a large crowd of curious investigators and he explains to them from the Old Testament how Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah because he has been raised from the dead. In chapter 3 he and John heal a man in the Temple and seize the opportunity to preach Christ to the Jewish crowd and boldly call them to repent of their unbelief

in Jesus as the Messiah. Then in chapter 4 he stands before the hostile Sanhedrin – the ruling body of the Jews in Jerusalem – and he defends his proclamation of the Gospel knowing that it might cost him his very life. And the very authoritative group of men threaten him to stop preaching Christ in chapter 4 and in chapter 5 and Peter's response is – We must obey God rather than men!

- d. Then in chapter 11 he faces the opposition of the Jewish church to the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles and he defends what God has done in Cornelius' house. This spills over into chapter 15 and the Jerusalem Council and Peter again stands for the ever expanding work of the Gospel among the Gentiles as he resists the Judaizers. In Acts 12 he was arrested by Herod after the martyrdom of James and he is most certainly going to die for his faith, but God intervenes and rescues him and he continues preaching Christ. What changed Peter? Well, the true grace of God changed Peter. But when it changed him, did this true grace give him a soft bed of comfort and ease to carry out the remainder of his days until the Lord Jesus returned for him? No, absolutely not! The true grace of God compelled and emboldened Peter to follow Christ, and this put him in one situation after another where he was asked to suffer for our Lord. And what we find out in this letter is that he was informed in those situations by the pattern our Lord had set for Him. As a stranger who was now completely different from those around him, he looked to Jesus to figure out the way through the suffering because he understood that true grace leads us into suffering. In other words, if we have truly been redeemed by the precious blood of the Son of God, then we have a new identity and a new nature and a new purpose and a new goal and a new hope and a new joy and a new reason to live. And these are all different from all those who don't know this true grace. And this means that we are going to suffer.
- e. So, in this little letter, Peter is going to make that point by speaking an awful lot about suffering. In fact, the suffering of Christ will be his dominant theme as he calls us to follow Christ as recipients of this true grace. In fact, in chapter 4 he will tell us that we should not be surprised when fiery trials come upon us to test us. We shouldn't think this is strange he says in verse 12. But rather we should rejoice in that we are sharing in Christ's sufferings. If we are insulted for the name of Christ then we should know that the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. In other words, when we are suffering for God and for the name of Christ and for this true grace then we are truly being blessed by God. God is truly at work in us and through us for His own glorious purpose. Then he tells us in verse 19 of chapter 4 that this suffering is not by accident, but by God's will. He has designed and allowed it to be this way. If we suffer for the sake of the true grace we know in Christ, then we are truly following God's will.
- f. And we see this to be true in the lives of those he is writing to. We will talk a lot more about them next week, but they are a group of churches in what would be

modern day Turkey. Peter is writing to them from Rome near the end of his life. In fact, it will be within a few years and he will be martyred under the wicked hand of the insane Emperor Nero. There is a transition that is happening in the Roman Empire. The Christians have never really been respected, but they have been tolerated and pretty much left alone. But that is slowly changing, and with Nero, the flames of persecution will literally be blown into an inferno and many Christians will die because of their loyalty to Christ. But, I don't believe that is happening yet when Peter writes this letter to these churches. The regions listed in verse 2 are fairly remote places and they probably had a lot of small congregations that were pretty spread out. Turkey will turn into a hotbed of Church growth and maturity near the end of the 1st Century and into the 2nd and 3rd Centuries, but when Peter writes he was writing to some lesser known and pretty common folks. It is not clear why he is writing to them. Perhaps he had been in that region on his way from Jerusalem to Rome. Maybe he had been one of the first to preach the Gospel there. Maybe some of the men who were from this region and heard him on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 had asked him to come and proclaim Christ there. We really don't know because Peter doesn't say. What we do know is that he longs for them to understand true grace rightly so that they are ready when the hard things come.

- g. They were already facing some hard things for their identity in Christ. But this suffering wasn't martyrdom or imprisonment or confiscation of property or even demands for emperor worship. There is no hint of any of those things in this letter. But there is statements of pretty normal things that serious Christians face. So, in 2:13-17 there is an insinuation in the commands that they were being accused of a lack of loyalty to State because they were serving another Lord other than the Emperor. This by the way is what drives so much of state-led persecution of Christians. They are afraid of Christians supreme loyalty to another Lord and another Empire and they seek to squelch that commitment through persecution. This seems to be in the beginning stages for these believers in Asia Minor. By the way – that sounds somewhat familiar doesn't it? We also seem to be at the beginning stages of being called unpatriotic and disloyal because we won't accept the demands of recognizing and celebrating the immoral choices of our society.
- h. They were also facing ridicule and scoffing because they will no longer join into the sinful expressions that they once used to be a part of. So in 4:4 Peter recounts that the unbelievers are surprised when you will not join them in their sinful activities. This too sounds pretty normal to the experience of a true Christian even in our age. There is intense hatred in the heart of an unbeliever for those who are different in lifestyle because they have a new moral code set by their Savior. You've known this haven't you? You've been called a goody two shoes or a holier than thou person before because you wouldn't do what the world wanted

you to do. This is suffering which we are led into by true grace. This is the result of true grace changing and transforming us. We are not in conflict with the world because we are at peace with God through Christ.

- i. Their suffering was pretty normal really. And that is what true grace does. This is not a bad thing. This is not a thing to be despised. Actually this is a thing to be rejoiced over because it is evidence of true grace – of the true work of God to redeem and transform us. True grace leads us into suffering.

II. True Grace Guides Us Through Suffering

- a. But true grace also guides us through suffering. That is what Peter knew, and that is what Peter saw in Christ, and that is what Peter longs to teach us. And he teaches us in an amazingly pastoral way. Do you remember the incident in John 21 where Peter is being restored to service by our Lord? He has returned to fishing after the resurrection of Jesus and Jesus goes after Peter and has that interchange with him where he asks him three different times – Peter, do you love me? Peter responds with “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” And Jesus answer to Peter is – Feed my sheep! He is calling Peter to a pastoral role as the chief apostle. And that is what we are reading in 1 Peter. It is his obedience to Christ’s command in John 21. He wants to shepherd our soul through the prickly path of suffering in this world.
- b. And so, throughout the book he quotes or references the Old Testament at every turn. He does this to show us that this experience of suffering for faith-filled obedience to the God of Heaven is nothing new. This has been the experience of the people of God ever since sin entered into the world. In fact, he frames the letter with Old Testament language. So at the beginning of the letter he calls his intended audience exiles of the Dispersion and then at the end of the book he lets them know that he is writing from Babylon. Well, this is a reference to the Old Testament people of God who found themselves in exile in a foreign land. They were strangers and pilgrims, but they were hopeful of a coming exodus and a going home to the Promised Land. That is the journey for the believer in Jesus Christ too. Because of his calling and election in Christ he is now an exile on foreign soil and this means that life is going to be hard. But there is coming a day when the Lord will return and his people will be taken to the Promised Land. But until that day of full and final salvation, there is a way forward. They are not just to grit their teeth and bear it as they await their exodus. Rather, there are ways that the true grace of our Lord should direct their hearts and minds.
- c. And so as you read through the letter you realize that it is a commanding and urgent letter. Because it is written to exiles there is an urgency about the words and the style of Peter here. And because of the true grace we have been given in Christ there is a commanding overtone. So, there are over 30 different commands given in this short letter, which averages out to about 1 every 3 verses. He explains to us the theology of true grace and then he lets us know how that

changes our lives with commands of urgent obedience. So, just consider this string of continuous commands that starts in verse 13 of chapter 1 and goes until the middle of chapter 5. He calls us to live in this true grace of God by:

- i. Being sober, setting our hope on future grace, being holy, passing the time in fear, loving one another, longing for the pure spiritual milk of the Word, being subject to every human institution, honoring all men, loving the brotherhood, fearing God, honoring the King, being in submission as slaves and as wives, husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way, having unity of mind, not fearing, or being troubled by suffering, honoring Christ as Lord in our hearts, arming yourselves with the thinking of Christ, being self-controlled and sober minded, don't be surprised by the fiery trials, rejoice in them as you share in Christ's sufferings, don't be ashamed by suffering for wrongdoing, but rather glorify God, committing their souls to a faithful Creator, shepherd the flock of God, being subject to the elders, clothing yourself with humility, humbling yourself before God, being sober and watchful so that you can withstand the devil.
- d. That is a mouthful of directives for the suffering saint! And they are all given with an eye on the true grace known only in Christ. He who suffered for us shows us how we ought to now suffer for Him.
- e. Let's look at just one of those for a moment. Look at the first few verses in chapter 4. Peter links our suffering with Christ's suffering and he guides us through that suffering based on our Lord's mindset and actions in his own suffering. *Read 4:1-2.*
- f. This is just a little flavor of what we will encounter all through this letter. He grounds our suffering in the suffering of our Lord for us. Notice that he assumes a universal suffering here in that we will suffer if we no longer live the rest of our time here in the flesh for human passions, but rather for the will of God. This is why Jesus suffered. He didn't give into human passions. Even at the hardest point in the Garden of longing for relief from impending doom he cried out to His Father and said – not my will, but your will be done! This is the heartbeat of the one who has been transformed by true grace. He no longer wants his own will, but he desires to take up his cross and follow His Lord and have his will done in his life. This makes life harder, not easier. This means that you have now declared war on your sinful flesh and you have become the strangest of exiles on this foreign soil. This means that you have ceased from sin in the sense that it no longer has any place in your life. You are marching to the beat of a different drum and you are taking orders from Christ your King, not the flesh. This means that you will suffer. But Peter wants you to know that this is normal and that Jesus shows you the way through that. You don't have to be a trailblazer here – Jesus shows you the way. This is true grace! This is what this letter is filled with.

III. True Grace Advances Because of Suffering

- a. Lastly, let me show you that true grace advances because of suffering. This is why suffering is part of the will of God for the believer in Jesus Christ. His gracious work in you is advanced because of the hard things. So in 1:6-7 he says that various trials have come and will come into your life so that the tested genuineness of your faith may prove to be full of praise and glory and honor to our Lord on the day of His return. Like gold that is made more pure and more costly by more intense fire, so too, genuine faith in God is made more glorifying to God by the hard things that come at us in life. This makes us love Christ more, even though we haven't yet seen him, and it fills us with an inexpressible joy even in the hard things, because we look forward to the full outcome of our faith, the full and future salvation of our souls!
- b. In 2:19-20 we are told that it is a work of true grace in us when we endure sorrows while suffering unjustly as we are especially mindful of God. If you are doing good in that you are walking in the will of God and you suffer for that – God is pleased with this and His grace is at work in this. His grace is advanced in you and through you because of these hard things you will endure for the name of Christ.
- c. In 3:14 we are told that if we suffer for righteousness' sake then we will be blessed. In other words, God advances his grace-filled blessing in our lives as we suffer for walking according to His will in this world!
- d. And in 4:14 we are told again that we are blessed if we are insulted for the name of Christ. And in that we know that the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. In other words, God is especially mindful and present with those of his people who are being insulted and smeared and even assaulted for the name of Christ. Suffering advances true grace in us and through us – and this a glorious and gracious thing!

Conclusion: This is true grace. It leads us into suffering, it guides us through suffering, and it advances because of suffering. Do you know that kind of grace? Peter did, and he wants you to walk in that grace like he was able to. May God shape us as a church family with this true grace as we walk through the truths of this book! Let's pray.