

Jesu Juva

“Christians in an Unchristian World: Glory”

Text: 1 Peter 5:1-14

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we arrive at the final chapter of First Peter, Peter directs the attention of his flock, these Christians scattered far and wide and living in an unchristian world, to the **glory** promised by Christ. Which is important. For it is quite easy, when you are in the midst of trials and suffering of sometimes great magnitude, to focus only on them; to see nothing but the problems weighing quite heavily right now, and not look beyond them, or even be able to. When there seems to be no end in sight. When you do not even know how you're going to make it to tomorrow. At such times its easy to wallow in self-pity and resignation and think about nothing else.

Peter knew it. He'd been there. In spades. He was, as he says, *a witness of the sufferings of Christ*. Yes, he saw Jesus arrested while he was still wiping the sleep from his eyes. He saw Jesus on trial and condemned while he was busy denying that he even knew the man. Three times. And then he saw Jesus hung on the cross and then dead while he was too scared to even help take his friend down and bury him. He knew the terror of hiding behind locked doors with his friends and thinking that every noise you hear outside is the sound of the Jews coming to lift you up next. He knew what it was like to be arrested and abused for following Jesus, and to be on death row, mere days or hours from having your head removed from your shoulders. If anyone knew what those scattered Christians were going through, it was their shepherd Peter.

And so He reassures them. That though they are suffering now, *when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory*. Now, that is talking about when Jesus comes again in glory at the end of time. But there's more to it than that, I think. Another layer that can help us now. For think about how Peter was on that Easter Sunday night, after he had witnessed the sufferings of Christ and was living with his own cowardice and failure and guilt. *And then the chief Shepherd appeared*. Locked doors couldn't stop Him. He came right to them and said: *Peace be with you* (John 20:19). Peace, not fear. Forgiveness, not punishment. Hope, not despair. Joy, not sorrow. Everything Peter needed right then, Jesus came and provided. Because the chief Shepherd is alive and caring for His flock.

And how He does that, one of the ways He does that now, after His ascension, is through His elders, which is a biblical word for pastors. Peter wants those pastors, those undershepherds, to do what Jesus, the chief Shepherd, had done for him that night. Go to and be with them with the Word of peace, forgiveness, hope, and joy. Go to them and

remind them of the glory of which we are now partakers, yet the fullness of which still awaits us. Go to them and preach to them that the victory has already been won! And that there will be an end to the suffering, to the sin, to the scattering. For when the chief Shepherd appears, it will be for them just as it was for Peter that night. ***So I exhort the elders among you, Peter says, as a fellow elder . . . shepherd the flock of God that is among you.*** Wherever that is, however that is. Be there for them, that they not be alone.

And then Peter adds this admonition: ***Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility.*** I think that too is a word to the pastors, but applicable also to all. Clothe yourselves with humility (or self-forgetfulness), because humility's opposite, pride (or self-focus), is the great enemy of faith. For there are two dangers lurking with pride: thinking too much of self and too little of others, and looking too much to your own abilities and strength. Those are the opposites and enemies of faith because faith always looks out, not in; faith always looks to God in faith and to others in love, not at ourselves.

So if we are proud or looking at ourselves or relying on ourselves, ***God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble,*** Peter says. God humbles the proud so that we will instead turn to Him in repentance for thinking too much of or only of ourselves, and turn to Him in faith to rely on Him and His strength and forgiveness alone. For only in Him are we anything, and only in Him is our strength and our deliverance.

But while God opposes the proud, He gives grace to the humble. So, Peter continues, ***humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.*** For His hand is mighty, not yours. He will exalt, not you. And at the proper time. So do not oppose or resist Him, or even doubt Him or despair of Him, but humble yourself under Him in faith and trust. And ***cast all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.*** He truly does care for you. Do you need more proof than the cross? He cares for you. The devil certainly doesn't, He is looking to divide and devour you. Many in the world do not, and are the cause of your suffering and anxiety. But He does, your God and chief Shepherd does. And at the proper time, ***He Himself will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.***

Because He ***has called you to His eternal glory in Christ.*** Notice that's past tense. He has called you. It's already done. He called you by the Gospel, baptized you into His Son, and has promised you eternal glory. That's all past tense, yours now, though not yet in all its fulness. But that day is coming. And it is as sure and certain for you as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Just as locked doors could not stop Him from appearing to Peter and his frightened friends, so no grave will be able to stop Him either. What He has promised, He will do. For ***to Him belongs all dominion*** - all power and authority and rule and strength - ***forever and ever. Amen.***

And thus Peter ends his letter. A letter which began with the certainty of baptism, and ends with its fulfillment. A letter to the scattered, yet who are united in Christ. A letter to

the suffering that they have the mind of Christ. A letter of hope, when the flock seems small and the struggles loom large. A letter of encouragement, for it will never be easy to live as Christians in an unchristian world, and even moreso when that world is not just unchristian but turns anti-christian and anti-truth.

Does it seem so for you? In your life? In the world? Can you relate to some of what Peter was talking about? You would be a rare Christian indeed who would say no. For satan is an equal opportunity attacker, the world you will always have around you, and your own sinful flesh will constantly battle against the new man in you.

But in the midst of all that is Christ. Who like a conquering king staking his claim to the land he has won by sticking his flag in the ground, so Christ our King has stuck His cross into this earth and claimed the victory for you. A victory that continues to go forth into the world through the Word preached, the water of baptism poured out, and the Body and Blood of Christ given, giving the victory of the forgiveness of your sins. For *the Head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now* (LSB #532).

And your head, too. Now a glory we believe, then a glory we will see. And so until that time we pray, as we will in the final hymn:

*O Christ, do Thou my soul prepare
For that bright home of love
That I may see Thee and adore
With all Thy saints above* (LSB #673 v. 6).

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.