

“The Blueprint of Humility” 1 Peter 5:5-14 Jason Bobo 1/12/20

“⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And 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. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹² By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. ¹³ She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. ¹⁴ Greet one another with the kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”

So, I have no business preaching a sermon on humility. My arrogance is matched only by my ignorance and hopefully the only reason that you have to hear this and receive it is that it’s God’s word, not my word. If you knew me, some of you do, I know a few of you in the room deeper than some of the others, Steve, of course, and that would come out in our friendship and our relationship. You would recognize the fact that I am a huge hypocrite in standing up to tell you about humility. But this is God’s word, this is what He has for His people, it’s what He has for me. Actually, I’m preaching this sermon to me and you just happen to be in the room to hear it. So, let’s pray that the Lord would feed us, that He would feed His flock and shepherd us into the ways of Christ, that we would, as His bride, be humble and reliant on Him.

Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, help us to be humble as Christ our Savior was humble. Make us so. Our anxieties in a world like this grow, and our adversary looks so very strong and intimidating, and it looks like the evil one is winning the day. And out of a sense of fear and trepidation we are tempted to lash out and fight back the way the world fights. And so, would you guard our hearts, would you cause us to stand firm, would you make what we’ve sung, that Jesus is enough, real to us? Cause us to love the gospel and stand firm in the finished work of Christ in whose name we pray, Amen.

For the last thirty-five years or so, Ted Talks have exploded and taken over, I'm sure no one doesn't know what a TED Talk is, but because somebody out there might be like me, not aware of certain things, I'll explain. TED stands for Technology Education and Design and their talks now include specialists from even beyond the realms of Technology, Education and Design. Over a million TED Talks are listened to every day and they also have regional and national conferences around the world. The annual main conference that happens in Vancouver costs six thousand dollars a ticket. The greatest reason for their popularity is the speakers that they attract. Now, they've had everyone from Billy Graham to Bill Clinton, from Bono to Mike Rowe with his Dirty Jobs, from Bill Gates of software design fame to Jane Goodall of gorilla fame. To speak at TED, you have to have two things going for you: you have to be a recognized expert in your field, and you have to be a creative and compelling presenter, an expert in your field and a creative and compelling presenter.

And so, with that in mind, our passage this morning that Bethany read, I believe is St. Peter's TED Talk. He's an expert practitioner of pride. Listen as we briefly thumbnail sketch Peter's life, as we read about in the gospels. 'Jesus, stay where You are out on the stormy sea, and I'll come to you!' How does that work for Peter? A couple steps in, he's swimming. Over after the Transfiguration on the mount when Peter says, 'Jesus, I don't know if You've thought about this, we could build some tents and we could stay here, Jesus.' What about the Last Supper as Jesus strips down and ties a cloth around him and washes the apostle's feet? What does Peter say? 'No, no, no, you'll not wash my feet, Jesus. Knock it off. That's not what we do.' And then the final one there just following when Jesus says, 'I have to go to Jerusalem, I have a baptism to undergo,' the baptism of the cross of course, is what's in view, and Peter chastises the Savior. 'You have no idea what you're talking about, Jesus! They're going to kill you, man! That's no way for a king to go out! Let's pump the brakes a little bit.' And what we see in that moment is that Jesus calls one of His best friends by His worst enemy's name. "Get thee behind me, Satan." When God calls you, a close friend, by His hated enemy's name, you have reached a level of pride that few can attain. You are, Peter was, in that moment a recognized expert in the field of pride, but pride is not all that Peter excels in.

He's also an industry leader in humility. Think back again as Peter has fled the Lord's side out of fear and into the garden of Gethsemane, and he runs away, and he gets accused by the people: 'You're one of his friends, aren't you? You were with Him!' 'No, No, not me,' cussing, taking his vow to not be a part of Christ and His work, and Jesus catches his eye to remind him that He had told him that you would deny me three times before the cock crows. And Peter weeps bitterly. Peter runs away. He goes back to a life of fishing, which is what he did before. He ostracized himself out of shame. He left the ministry, returned to his old way of life. He's

night fishing. He turned up empty. Here's a stranger on the shore as they're coming in. Peter's probably still haunted by his abandonment of Christ and frustrated, 'I can't even fish well. I used to be a good fisherman and I can't even do this right anymore!' And he hears somebody yelling from the shore. 'What's that? No. No we didn't catch anything, thank you for that reminder. I appreciate it. Oh, you want what? You want me to put the net on the other side, right? Because I don't know how to fish. I haven't been doing this my whole life. Yeah, I'll put it on the other side.' And he drops the nets down and they catch so many fish the nets start to break, and Peter starts to flash back to the moment he met Christ for the first time, a similar situation.

Peter throws his robe off, dives in. Now, I don't know if you've been swimming in Tenkiller or Grand Lake. There's a scent in lake water. I once was a youth pastor, took my kids on a little weekend retreat and middle school boys are terrified of a few things, one of them is showering around their friends and I had this kid who smelled like hot garbage and I was like, "Hey man, don't you think you need to clean up?" And he was like, "No, no, I swam in the lake today. I'm good. I don't need to shower." I'm like, "You're going to need to shower, or I'm going to hose you down. You pick." Peter jumps in the lake, swims to Jesus. As he gets up out, he's still cold, smelly, he's bedraggled, he's still humiliated, he hasn't been restored. But Jesus makes him breakfast, and Jesus asks him the same question three times: "Do you love me?" It breaks Peter's heart, breaks his heart. Humiliates him in a sense, but that humiliation, that sense that Jesus is giving him the gift of being humble before him. 'I don't need you to impress me, I need you to be with me.' And that sets him free to minister, to run so far into the world with the gospel of Christ that he ends up crucified upside down. Peter experientially knows with every fiber of his being that grace follows humility. Peter's an expert in humility because he lives off of grace, it is his food and drink.

And so, when Peter writes, well actually, he pillages from Proverbs. He steals from Proverbs but that's okay because James, Jesus' brother does too. But when he writes, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble," Peter knows exactly what he's talking about, because Jesus has opposed him through his life. Jesus loved him enough to oppose him and Jesus loved him enough to give grace to him when he was humbled. This is a specialist. This is someone who knows his stuff. We've seen Peter's credentials through the gospels and through his letters and we know that he knows about pride and humility, but through the rest of this passage in chapter 5, he sketches out a diagram for us, a blueprint of humility, and it's a blueprint that we need because it's where we're meant to live. Humility is where we're meant to live. When God says in Proverbs 3, what Peter and James both copy, "I oppose the proud but give grace to the humble," it's hard for us to have ears to hear that. We're the richest people, we're the smartest people, we have the most information at our fingertips than anyone in history.

If you could go back twenty years with a smartphone, they would think you were an alien, right? We have everything at our fingertips. None of us knows what it's like to go hungry. How do we listen to this, "God gives grace to the humble"? I don't know what it's like to be humble! As the church in the most affluent and peaceful society in world history, I wonder if we have any idea what Peter is talking about. My bet is, and this is what psychiatrists would call projecting, I'm going to take my own sin and give it to you for a moment, we think that, 'Oh I got a little too haughty, I thought a little too highly of myself, I'm going to swing in and fill up on humbleness for a minute.'

So, I have good memories of coming to Ethos to preach. The last two times I've been here it's been right after a family member has come to faith in Christ. The last time I was here it was my aunt, almost on her deathbed. She died two weeks later, and I got to go down to Houston for her memorial service. She said, "I don't want a memorial service, I want a fish fry." Awesome. My brother in law who's a graduate of UT, smartest kindest atheist I've known for the last ten years, just came to Christ a week and a half ago. That's amazing. It's amazing and so next weekend I'll drive down and I get to baptize him. It's awesome, and on the way down what we'll do is we'll stop at Buc-ee's. Buc-ee's is a little slice of heaven on earth. I've stayed at hotels that were not as clean as those bathrooms and I'll get stuff there. And so, I'm afraid that we think of humility or needing to be humble like a stop in at Buc-ee's. I'll stop in, I'll hang out for a while, there's cool stuff here, but then I'll get back on the road and I'm going to go back to where I'm headed and that's a terrible, terrible way to think about being humble because humble is the place we're meant to dwell. Humble is not the place we stop in like tourists.

When God's children walk away from humility, He lovingly herds us back into it, and that's the history of the church. If you read through church history, you'll see that we do really, really poorly with wealth and influence. So now we live in a world where we've lost the power, and now we're the ones being mocked, we're the ones being derided, we're the ones having laws passed to restrict us and we're terrified of it, and I'm not looking forward to the world ahead but God is in charge of all things and maybe, maybe the church in the west could begin to be desperate for Jesus like the church in Asia, like the church in Africa, like the church in Iran where you're literally killed for conversion? I don't want that for my kids or my grand-kids but I also don't love what we've become, and I don't know that we can be humble in this place. So, what we need is to be convinced of our need. God gives grace to the humble. Peter says: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God." God lifts those up who cast themselves fully and completely on His grace.

Now Peter had seen this desperation for grace play out again and again while walking with Christ. In Mark 5 there's three beautiful vignettes of God's abounding grace to the undeserving, to the humble. The first is the crazy, naked demoniac who lives in the tombs. Jesus saves him and clothes him and right after that we see this hemorrhaging woman who sneaks up and pickpockets grace from Jesus and He stops. He could have just let her be healed, but that's not enough grace for her. He has to help her understand what it means that she touched Him. And then right after that we see a political heavyweight beside himself in worry and regret with a daughter who is dying, who in fact, dies before he can get home and Jesus raises her. Now, each of those people were unclean in the Jewish mindset, they were unclean. And the grace of God is for the desperate and unclean, it's for the humble. And when you have nowhere else to run in your life, it's in that moment that you're almost where you need to be. Everything else falls apart, everything else fails, it deconstructs, it comes to ruin, but not God's hand of protecting love for His humble child. When you pray like the righteous Pharisee, 'God I thank you that I'm not like other men, but that you've made me better and purer and wiser,' when you pray that sort of prayer, you should be ready for God to get you back into humility. His opposition to the proud is active and it's violent and so, our prayers are supposed to be like the tax collector's, who averts his eyes and beats his breast and says, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner.' When we pray that kind of prayer, we should expect to be flooded with grace because God opposes the proud but effusively pours out grace on that man.

There's a story of a woman and her family and their friends, Esther Stermer, she lived in a small Ukrainian village when the Nazis began rounding up Jews and sending them to the camps in 1941, and so she fled with her six children and what they could carry. She led five other families into a system of underground caves, much like what I experienced under here but bigger, I think. They lived those fifty some odd people for 500 days in this cave system and at night they would sneak out and forage what they could and after the war this family was found, and they were interviewed, and the kids described living in the cave as paradise. And the cave that we're in, hidden under God's protective hand is bigger and safer and better, because we don't have to sneak out, we don't have to steal what we need. Every need that that group of people faced had to be addressed creatively and stealthily, but from our hiding place, dwelling under the hand of God we can simply cry out as God's beloved children and trust that He hears our prayer, that everything that we face, every temptation and fear, every desire and confession, every hope and every sorrow, Peter says, give all that to Christ. Pour out your anxieties to Him. He waits for the humble to cry out in desperation because we are the needy ones that He waits to bless in Christ.

Now, humble is a hard word to draw a circle around, but it starts at least with this, a recognition of your dire condition. Humble is a mindset, a heart-set, it's a life-set that says, even in this moment right now, God is good and His grace to me is generous. Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," blessed are the humble, "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Theirs is the hand of God, and this is the safest place we can hide. With His hand cupped around us, we are secure. Being secure doesn't mean you will be spared, but it does mean you will be saved, saved even though we are certain of our suffering, which is the second point.

While we humbly rest under God's hand, our troubles and sufferings, they don't go away, they don't disappear. So, as I said earlier, prior to the toe touch, I grew up in Houston. If you've been to Houston, it's a great place to be from. Most air-conditioned city in the world and most diverse city in the world. I had something like 92 countries represented in my graduating class, awesome food, right? Iranian Mexican combo fusion, I'd be 400 lb. if I lived there still. One of the funkiest things about Houston is they have a lack of zoning laws. So if you've ever traveled there, it's insane; it's insanity.

So, my elementary school from grades 3-5, you can look it up in your spare time, it was Raymond Grace Elementary and it had a crazy neighbor. It was still there last time I checked. He's an exotic pet collector and his backyard had a 12-foot corrugated tin fence that ran around it, it was a big spread. But the fence didn't silence the roars. He had lions and tigers, he had orangutans and howling monkeys. The guy, I don't know how he got away with it, except Houston. So anyway, we'd go out to play freeze tag and every once and awhile you'd hear this astounding roar. You couldn't see what was there, but you'd hear it. Now imagine being a fourth grader, you're not at the zoo where you can see what's making that noise, and you know it can't get to you. It's corrugated tin! And you hear that roar! And there'd be times we'd go out for recreation and we'd just stand along the brick wall: "So what's up with you?" "I'm not going out there. Mm-mm." And I imagine the people that drove by on the road saw the kids outside for recreation lined up against the wall and they just complained about the state of kids, "You know, in my day we'd play and throw rocks." Well, on those days when they were roaring, we didn't play.

It seems asinine to me that the school allowed that. In 1987, the owner, so this was maybe right after I finished school there, the owner had his lion at a flea market where you could get your photo taken with it and I don't know if it was the flash or what, but the lion freaked out and mauled a little eight-year-old girl and we didn't have to go outside and play for a couple weeks after that. Somehow he lost his license, but got it back, so I don't know what to think about that

other than that Jesus doesn't share my school's concern. He knows that the accuser is prowling about roaring like a lion and He says, 'Go out. You're not staying inside. He's out there.' Instead of destroying our adversary, instead of taking us out of danger, God says, 'Keep your eyes peeled. Keep your mind sober. Be steady.' And so, as God's beloved children because of Christ's work, we follow the steps of our Savior and we can be absolutely certain that yes, suffering does await us. Even as grace surrounds us, suffering awaits us, and God holds us near.

Suffering belongs to the church by God's design, it belongs to us by God's design to glorify Himself and to purify His bride. But we're not without weapons, we're not without strength. Elementary school children may be helpless against a lion, but we've been given the entire armor of God. We have the indwelling of God's very spirit poured into us in the finished work of Christ. We're not passive in this fight against the accuser. And though he is terrifying, he is fearful, we don't shrink back because we know the promise that God will soon crush Satan under our feet. He's going to crush Satan with your feet! He is at work in us defeating our enemy. And so, Peter encourages us and warns us with the very thing that he, himself, couldn't manage in that garden of Gethsemane. He says, "Watch and pray." Peter speaks from personal experience, from personal failure. Watch and pray with humble hearts, hearts hidden in God, and this is our call and we must be diligent. And in our watching and in our praying sometimes we have to break ranks with society out of humility.

You may have to warn one another here at Ethos, in our denomination, in the church at large, we can stand up in our cultures and say from a place of humble suffering, this is wrong. This is dangerous. This is vile. And we can and should protest and speak to issues like abortion, like culturally redefined marriage, like racial inequality, the church has to have a voice to those things, because we have to stand against God's adversary in all these ways, but we have to stand humbly, as those who desperately long for grace. And oftentimes the church is as proud and is as arrogant as America, or even as proud as Texas, and in our opposition to evil from a place of pride we often rely on our own strength, and that's not the way of Christ, it's not the way of Peter, and it's not the direction that God has for us. And so, we protest when we have to from the belief that God is in control, that there's nothing out of control, and so as we protest we can maintain a spirit of humility and faithfulness.

Let's be examples of the grace to watch and pray as we suffer. Think of the men and women in the persecuted church the world over. One of our reformed pastors in China was recently sentenced to nine years in prison; pray for his faithfulness, pray for him to have a ministry while he is in prison in China. Pray for the church in China that he's left. Pray that they

would be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. They are leading us in a way that we need to learn from. The fellowship we share with them completes the blueprint for humility.

So, we need to be committed to the community of Christ. Here's the blueprint so far: we have need, we have suffering, and finally, we have community. Humility knows that it's impossible to love God alone. We have to have each other. Those are your groups. The elders here have blessed and encouraged you to be a part of your Ethos groups. We have to have each other and that's easy enough and sometimes it's even enjoyable, but we don't just hang out for an hour or two each week, we have to open ourselves up in all of our suffering and all of our sin. We have to share the anxieties we've been casting on God with our brothers and sisters. The church is the place that we tell each other our secrets. We admit how needy we really are to the people around us and Jesus becomes more real as we're heard and called to confession and receive the promise of pardon. The suffering brotherhood that Peter references were humbly seeking God by linking arms together. The promise that Peter has for them and for us in verse 10 is that all that is lost is being remade in Christ, all that was broken is undergoing restoration, all that was doubted will receive confirmation, where once there was weakness, God is granting His people strength and where we used to struggle for footing in the mire, we are now becoming established in Christ.

Peter reminds us in this blueprint for humility that God had dominion before, He has dominion during, and He will have dominion after every bout of suffering forever and forever. That nothing comes into your life that doesn't first pass through the nail scarred hands, and so if it's happening to you, it's a gift of grace. It may be sanctifying grace that hurts for a moment, God is in that moment with you. And just as Christ shares this glory and grace with us, He calls us to share it with one another. This is no secret but it's very hard for us to suffer honestly together, sometimes more so in the church than even in the world. So, I want to tell you this from your sister church down the road that if you, yourself, are struggling with shame in your sin, at Christ Pres we have strained marriages stretched to the point of breaking. In fact, this morning we are excommunicating a wayward former spouse who walked away from the faith. We have children who are wandering away from the faith. We have substance abuse at our church. We have various physical and mental disabilities at Christ Pres. And those are just a few of the sufferings I know of.

If you're here and you're silently trying to gut it out, to outlast your suffering, don't. That's not the way of Christ. He cried out on the cross. You can cry out. That's a gift of mercy too, because when you cry out, you'll find that these people will come around and support you. God opposes your pride, and He's given you the grace of a people who will walk with you

through suffering and through sorrow. The pain may not end in the moment, but you won't be alone with that pain. And so, if you're humble enough to share the ugly parts of your life and your heart with this church, they will share God's grace for the humble with you.

For purely aesthetic reasons, Peter should have ended this chapter and this letter with the high and lofty promise of God's dominion and the amen in verse 11. It would have been fitting for him to end it there, but he goes on talking about Silvanus and how he sends him there, and how the people in Babylon, which was in Peter's mind was Rome, how they loved them too. An impressive way to end it would be with the amen, but he gives a P.S., a postscript here. He gives us a life example of what God expects by sending Silvanus he's sending one of his best friends to share the gospel and encourage them to stand in grace. This odd ending is not simply random details about Silvanus and Mark and the church in Rome. This is the reason why Christ came in the first place: to build a people from the nations that reflect His light in the darkness, His love for the loveless. It would have sounded cool to end with the amen, but it's almost like Peter gives the lab results to them. Look what happens when God blesses the humble. People grow in fruit, they grow in love, they serve one another! This is what I'm talking about. Look, it's happening right before your eyes! Even as we're persecuted in exile, God's reconciling grace is at work, and Peter says, and if you believe it, smooch, pucker up and give a kiss, the holy kiss of love. It's a promise of peace, it's the warmest, it's the closest, it's the most personal greeting, which is why when Judas kisses Christ in the garden it's such a stab in the back and a twist of the blade. When you embrace one another with the kiss of peace, it's the embrace and kiss of our Savior in one another. Now, we don't do that anymore, we tend to fist bump, which the fist bump of peace doesn't quite carry the same amount, but we're all concerned with flu and that's fine. What the kiss symbolizes though can't be substituted.

The welcome and the warmth that you extend to one another should be the welcome and the warmth with which Christ, the Father, who looks out and sees the prodigal, hitches up his robe and runs out. This is Christ in you, the hope of glory, as he comes and embraces you and brings you in! Just like it's easy to read 1 Peter and forget that he's writing from experience, it's easy to overlook that God, Himself, when He took flesh, when He became man, why didn't they expect the way Jesus came? Because He had no form or beauty that we should look upon Him. God, Himself, why does He oppose the proud? Because God is not proud! Why does He bless the humble? Because God is humble! He's not calling you to anything that He is not. God lived a humble, suffering life in community first. Jesus isn't asking us to do anything that He hasn't done Himself. God opposes the proud, so Jesus came humbly. God opposes the proud, so Jesus Christ cried out to His Father while He suffered. God opposes the proud so Jesus is gathering a humble people from every nation, from every tribe, from every tongue to Himself, that we might

glory in His grace and receive His kiss of love in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Would you pray with me?

Father, you know how difficult and almost impossible it is for us to be humble in a day and age when need is one of the fewest things we ever experience. You know how repulsive the church looks and sounds to a world awash in selfishness, to a world convinced that it can deal with the haunting shame of its own sin. You know how arrogant we have been collectively, and we have been individually, and so, Holy Spirit, would you work an astounding miracle of grace? Would you give your people humility? Would you teach us to live on our knees? Would you teach us to rely on Christ in a sense of desperation that few of us have ever experienced? And out of our falling and dying as we cast the seed of the gospel out in our humility, would you rain down in your grace and cause us to bear fruit? The fruit of Christ, the fruit in keeping with humility, and prove yourself the great God and giver of all life. Give us that life, cause us to share it with others, Amen.

So this is an easy Segway into the Lord's Supper because Paul writing to the church in Corinth, which was lost in a culture awash with sin, he says, I received from the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, from the Lord Jesus on the night that He was betrayed, your God was betrayed, and knowing that betrayal was coming in that community with His friends that would walk away from Him, He blessed them and said, "This is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me." In the same way after supper, He also took the cup and He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you preach, you proclaim, you prove the Lord's death until He comes. The Lord's body was broken, His blood was poured out, He experienced all the hell and wrath that belonged to me, that belonged to us. But in His resurrection, we can take and eat and know that new life is coming. That all that is ugly, all that is vile, all that is painful, all that is evil will be undone.