

*Dr. James Dobson tells of a time when he watched his daughter's pet hamster trying to gnaw its way out of its cage to what, no doubt, looked to the hamster like freedom. But Dobson saw what the hamster did not: the family's pet dog, watching expectantly from a few feet away. If the hamster had worked its way free, it would have met sudden death. The cage was really for its protection and blessing.*

*We're often like that pet hamster. We try to escape from the trial or the suffering that God has put us in – we struggle and strive against it, thinking that breaking free is what we really need to live, but God sees what we don't, and our real need is to surrender to Him and trust Him in the midst of our suffering.*

**In a roundabout way, isn't this what Peter has been telling these churches who were suffering from persecution?** Yes, it was extremely hard for them. Yes, life seemed completely unfair. Yes, it appeared that the world had turned against them. And yes, at times, they may have thought God had turned His back on them or was punishing them for some reason – but that was not the case at all, it couldn't have been any further from the truth.

Like the hamster protected in the cage, what God was doing was actually for their good. In their suffering – suffering they likely wanted no part of and wanted to escape from, God had a purpose and a plan for them, and in the end, they would fully experience and come to realize all that God had for them, and they would see it was all worth it in the end – but in the meantime, they had to endure and persevere through their suffering. In the meantime, they had to do what is right and good for the sake of righteousness – for the sake of Christ, for His honor and His reputation. In the meantime, they had to understand that God was up to something – something much greater and farther reaching than they could have ever imagined. In the meantime, in their suffering, they had to trust and follow Christ who is the Chief Shepherd.

Last week, we looked at the first four verses of **1 Peter 5**, where Peter spoke directly to pastors who were called by the Chief Shepherd to lead the flock of God – and Peter focused on pastors because it was vitally important that they be at their very best and lead the churches through their suffering so that God's flock could grow and mature.

This morning, we are picking up where we left off, where Peter focuses on the attitudes which are necessary for growth and maturity, especially in those times of suffering. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 Peter 5:5**. Peter says,

**You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**

In this verse, Peter turns from the shepherds to the sheep and he says, that just like the pastors who are to submit to the authority of the Chief Shepherd, the **younger men** are to submit to their pastors. Now, we are not told who these younger men are or why they have been singled out here, but I don't think that is too important, because just a few words later Peter says **“and all of you.”** So, this is really for all church members, all the sheep – from the highest in rank to the lowest, or we might say, *“the youngest in rank.”* All of us are to humbly defer to one another, to submit to one another – but also have the understanding that God has called certain men to spiritual leadership roles within the church and they should be supported as they carry out their responsibilities.

Now, if you noticed, Peter said that all of you are to **“clothe yourselves with humility”** That word **“clothe”** is an interesting word which literally means to *put on something with a knot, or a bow, or a roll*, such as someone might do when tying on an apron or wrapping a towel the waist – the typical activity that a humble slave would do in preparation to serve others, and surely as Peter said this, his experience with Jesus must have come to mind.

If you recall, Peter had a firsthand experience of this kind of humble service because the same night in which Jesus was arrested, the same night Peter would later deny Jesus – Jesus had earlier taken a towel, wrapped it around His waist, poured water into a basin, and washed the feet of His disciples. And after Jesus had finished, He said this in **John 13**, beginning with **verse 13**,

***<sup>13</sup> You call Me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’; and you are correct, for so I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you. <sup>16</sup> Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.***

We don't hear much about feet washing these days because there really isn't a need for it, but it was different in Jesus' day, and this was a job most often reserved for a lowly house slave. No wonder the disciples were confused when the Lord put a towel around His waist and began to work His way around the room like a slave. Doing the work of a humble slave was not really the task these disciples had in

mind for themselves, and if we are honest, it's generally not something on our minds either. But Jesus did this as an unforgettable example to remind believers – both then and now – of the greater spiritual necessity of humble submission and service to one another, where we consider others first. The Apostle Paul spoke on this as well, and in **Philippians 2:3-5**, he said,

*<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; <sup>4</sup> do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,*

That's humility. Now, humility doesn't mean that what's going on in our own lives doesn't matter or isn't important – but we don't have to be in the starring role of our lives either. Our focus is to be on other people. Humility leads us to think of others first, and Peter says we are to wear humility like a garment just like Jesus did – and in case you are wondering, humility is a one size fits all garment. All followers of Christ are told to put it on.

Then to stress his point about humility, Peter completes **verse 5** with a reference to **Proverbs 3:34**, where he says, **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**

God stands against the **proud**, while He extends **grace to the humble**.

**Why is God opposed to the proud?** Well, there are several reasons, but I will give you two that stay within context. First, the proud focus on themselves and invariably trust only in themselves. The proud lift themselves up only to pull God down, and in essence, by the way they live their lives, they say to Him, “*I don't need You!*” That's what the proud say, but secondly, the proud also say, “*I don't need anyone else either,*” for the proud think of themselves as being more important, and wiser, and more capable than others.

*C.S. Lewis wrote: “A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you.” Humble people don't look down, they look up, and what they see of the vast love of God for His creation conditions how they see everyone else.*

I like that. It's unlikely that we will be humble towards one another and submit to one another until we first humble ourselves and submit to God. It starts with Him – and that leads us to **verse 6**.

**Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,**

God has the His ability to humble the proud, but He can also graciously promote the humble in His due time.

When I thought about this verse, my thoughts quickly drifted to the life of Joseph in the book of **Genesis**. Now, I know that many of you are very familiar with the story, but I want to summarize it for you and point out truths that are so relevant to this letter by Peter.

As we know, Joseph was the son of Jacob and Rachel, and he lived in Canaan with his brothers and at least one half-sister. Joseph was Rachel's firstborn and Jacob's eleventh son, and we are told that Jacob displayed extra affection toward Joseph, and it did not go unnoticed. His brothers saw that Joseph was daddy's favorite, and they hated Joseph for it. But if that wasn't enough to create tension with his older brothers, when Joseph was about 17 years old, he told his family about some dreams he was having in which he would rule over them. That was probably something Joseph should have kept to himself, for it seemed to be the straw that broke the camel's back, but God would use it for His purpose.

Soon enough, the tension came to a head. One day, Jacob told Joseph to go check on his brothers who were out tending sheep in Shechem. Well, when the brothers saw Joseph approaching from a distance, they seized their opportunity to deal with Joseph once and for all, and they took Joseph and threw him into a deep pit. A short time later, they spotted a caravan of foreign traders in the distance, so they pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him, and to cover up their dastardly deed, they told their father Jacob that Joseph had been devoured by a wild animal. So, as far as everyone knows, Joseph is totally out of the picture – he's gone.

Now, turn to **Genesis 39:1** to see what happens next. We read,

*Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.*

So, Joseph was thrown in a pit, sold by his own brothers, and brought against his will from his home to the foreign land of Egypt where he was sold as a slave to an Egyptian officer named Potiphar. It doesn't sound good for Joseph, but what we read next is so important. Please don't miss this. We are told in **verse 2**,

*The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.*

Out of hatred, Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers and sold to foreign traders. One moment he was a free man – now he is a slave. Surely this is not right, surely his suffering was unjust, but the **Lord was with** him and blessed Joseph in the midst of his difficult circumstances. God was not uncaring. God did not abandon Joseph. God was not punishing him, rather, God was with Joseph on this difficult and rocky road – step by step. And the story continues.

After a while, Joseph finds favor with his master Potiphar, and he is appointed as the overseer of the estate where he manages all of the affairs for his master. Even though a slave, things were looking up for Joseph – but not so fast. Apparently, Joseph was cursed with good looks, and Potiphar's wife had other ideas for him. She desired some extra-curricular activity, and I'm not talking about calisthenics. Well, Joseph wanted to part of that, so he refused her repeated advances toward him. Then one day, the wife made another advance toward Joseph and she grabbed his cloak, but Joseph *did the right thing* and bolted out of there leaving his cloak in her hand. She was a woman scorned, and in her rage, she lied and told her husband that Joseph had attempted to take advantage of her. That can't be good, and look at what happened next in **Genesis 39:19-20**.

*<sup>19</sup> Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned. <sup>20</sup> So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.*

So, let's sum this up. Out of hatred, Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers. He was thrown into a pit, then sold to traders. He was sent to a foreign land against his will and then sold as a slave. And just as things were looking up for Joseph, he was falsely accused of attempted sexual assault, and now Joseph finds himself in jail – with no opportunity to defend himself. He did the right thing but no one seems to care, and now he finds himself in a dungeon. But then we are told in **verse 21**, and again this is so important,

***But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.***

In the midst of his unfair and unjust suffering, where Joseph goes from a pit to a dungeon, from a slave to a prisoner – God did not abandon Joseph. God was still with him and still in complete control.

Maybe, just maybe, God knows something that Joseph does not. Maybe God is doing something in Joseph. Maybe God is more concerned about character than comfort. Maybe God has bigger plans for Joseph. Well, the story continues.

Because of God's grace – in time, Joseph is given favor with the warden, and Joseph became his right-hand man and was responsible for all of the other prisoners.

Now, we are told that sometime later, two high ranking servants in Pharaoh's house – the cupbearer and the baker were thrown into jail. One night, these two had dreams and they asked Joseph to interpret them. Joseph did, and his interpretation of their dreams came to pass just as he had explained. One was set free and returned to his previous position as the cupbearer, but the baker was hanged. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him before Pharaoh, but unfortunately, he forgot. Two years later, Pharaoh had a couple of disturbing dreams and his own magicians and wise men could not interpret them, and it was then that the cupbearer recalled his experience with Joseph in the jail and he told Pharaoh about it.

So, Joseph, now 30 years old, is summoned from the dungeon – that's where he has been all this time, he's given a shave and suitable clothing, and he appears before Pharaoh. If you recall, Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh, which anticipated seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh recognizes Joseph's God-given ability and promotes him as the Chief Administrator of Egypt – essentially the #2 man in Egypt, where Joseph leads the nation through the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine.

Now, if you remember the rest of the story, the famine was fierce. It spread over the earth, and everyone came to Egypt to buy grain to include God's people, and more specifically Joseph's own brothers. Eventually, after some well-played family drama, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. Look at **Genesis 45:4-8**,

***<sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold to Egypt. <sup>5</sup> Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me ahead of you to save lives. <sup>6</sup> For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. <sup>7</sup> So God sent me ahead of you to ensure for you a remnant on the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup> Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.***

So, think about it. Joseph went from a pit, to a dungeon, to a palace, and it was all by God's design. Joseph needed to go through the difficulty before he could take on the responsibility. So, step by step, God was with him and preparing him as a

teacher would a student. It began as a slave, where Joseph first learned to manage Potiphar's estate. Then as a prisoner, he became responsible for all of the other prisoners. And when the time was right, in God's time, Joseph was ready and put in charge of Egypt. It was a tailor-made task for Joseph.

In his suffering, from each painful experience, Joseph learned to humbly accept whatever came from God – for God was with him, God was in control, and God had a purpose and a plan that went far beyond what Joseph could have ever imagined.

In humble submission, we too may find ourselves in the pit or the dungeon, so to speak, but these are only steps – necessary steps on our way to the palace. We don't need to question God's wisdom for we know He is wise. We don't need to doubt His righteousness for we know He is good. We don't need fight with Him, and argue with Him for we know He is sovereign and knows what is best for us. And there is no need to hurry things along according to our concept of time, because we know God is in an entirely different time zone, and He will carry out His purposes and His plans for our ultimate good in His perfect time. Then Peter says in **verse 7**,

**casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.**

In light of what we just covered; this seems like a foregone conclusion, but it's not. God knows we worry. He knows we are prone to get distracted and take our eyes off of Him and excessively dwell on future trouble that most likely will never ever happen. God knows it's a struggle for us all, so He urges us to cast our worry on Him.

The word “**casting**” is a word that means to *throw something on something*, like throwing a blanket over a horse. Peter says, just throw your worry on God – all the discouragement, the questioning, the doubt – just cast your cares and your worries on Him because you and I are His concern – God cares for us. God's care and concern for us is constant, it's ongoing, and it's never ending. God is not indifferent to our problems nor blind to our suffering – He's our Father, He cares, and He simply asks that we trust Him, especially in hard and difficult times.

So, we can cast our worries on God, and if trouble does come knocking on our door – **guess what?** We know it's all part of God's plan and He can use it – just like He did with Joseph who went from the pit, to the dungeon, to the palace – with a purpose.

*I read this story that kind of sums up my message. A stranger came by the other day with an offer that set me to thinking. He wanted to buy the old barn that sits out by the highway. I told him right off that he was crazy. He was a city type. You could tell by his clothes, his car, his hands, and the way he talked.*

*He said he was driving by and saw that beautiful barn sitting out in the tall grass and wanted to know if it was for sale. I told him he had a funny idea of beauty. Sure, it was a handsome building in its day. But then, there's been a lot of winters come and go with their snow and ice and howling wind. The summer sun's beat down on that ole' barn till all the paint's gone, and the wood has turned silver gray. Now the old building leans a good deal, looking kind of tired. Yet, that fellow called it beautiful.*

*That set me to thinking. I walked out to the field and just stood there, gazing at that old barn. The stranger said he planned to use the lumber to line the walls of his den in a new country home he's building down the road. He said you couldn't get paint that beautiful. Only years of standing in the weather, bearing the storms and scorching sun...only that can produce beautiful barn wood.*

*It came to me then. We're a lot like that, you and I. Only it's on the inside that the beauty grows with us. Sure, we turn silver gray, too... and lean a bit more than we did when we were young and full of sap. But the Good Lord knows what He's doing. And as the years pass, He's busy using the hard wealth of our lives, the dry spells and the stormy seasons, to do a job of beautifying our souls that nothing else can produce. And to think how often folks holler because they want life easy!*

*They took the old barn down today and hauled it away to beautify a rich man's house. And I reckon someday you and I will be hauled off to heaven to take on whatever chores the Good Lord has for us. And I suspect we'll be more beautiful then, for the seasons we've been through... Like the seasoned barn wood is used to beautify a home, the hard seasons in our lives, will surely bring a little bit of beauty into heaven.*

Source Material:

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