

One Sunday morning, pastor McGhee noticed that little Alex was staring up at the large plaque that hung in the foyer of the church. The plaque was covered with names, and small American flags were mounted on either side of it.

The seven-year-old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside the boy, and said quietly, “Good morning Alex.”

“Good morning pastor,” replied the young boy, still focused on the plaque. Then the boy asked, “Pastor McGhee, what is this?”

“Well, son, it’s a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service.”

Soberly, they stood together, staring at the large plaque. Then little Alex, in a barely audible voice, asked, “Which service – the Wednesday service or the Sunday service?”

This morning we are going to talk about service – faithful service, even in the midst of suffering. We have made it to the very end of **1 Peter**, the last three verses, where Peter concludes his letter with some final words to the churches in Asia Minor – churches who were suffering under persecution from the Roman Empire, and in his final words, Peter seems to give us a summary of his letter, and whether he knew it or not, he also gave us a couple of examples of how God’s faithfulness and grace gives us the ability to endure, but also to serve, even in the midst of suffering. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 Peter 5:12**.

Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!

In this verse, Peter said he has written this letter to encourage believers – again, believers who we know were in the midst of suffering. Peter also sought to testify – to declare by his own first-hand experience the truth – the truth that by grace they have found favor with God even though their difficult circumstances might wrongly suggest otherwise. And Peter knows what he is talking about because he has experienced the grace of God – up close and personal, in the person of Jesus Christ, and for Peter, his letter is an expression of those experiences.

Now, since this is a summary of sort, I want to take a moment to review some of the things Peter has written about in his letter. If you recall, Peter made it clear

right out the gate that as followers of Christ, we are strangers in this fallen and broken and hostile world. This is not our home – there's no need to hang pictures on the wall. We are just passing through. Peter told us that we have a living hope because we have a living Savior, and this hope also includes a heavenly inheritance that is waiting for us – it's an inheritance that will not fade away. We have a confirmed reservation for eternal life because of the completed and finished work of Jesus Christ.

Peter told us that God is holy, and in Christ – so are we. And because that is who we are, Peter spent some time telling us how to act like who we are – how to live holy lives in this world – how to be set apart and different in a world that wants to suck us in. Peter also gave us some very difficult instruction pertaining to the “s” word – submission – even submission when unjustly treated. I don't think any of us liked that topic because all of us have a rebellious streak, especially when mistreated. But Jesus is the ultimate example of submission – for He submitted, even to the cross, to pay a sin debt that He did not owe because we had a sin debt that we could not pay.

Peter also encouraged us endure and persevere and yes, even thrive in spite of suffering, explaining that we should not be surprised when we suffer for the sake of Christ because we are called to it, and we should see our suffering as tests, where God is the teacher and we are His students. That was somewhat of a change in perspective because when we are in the midst of suffering, we tend to see God as this sovereign perpetrator and we are His victims. But that's not true. Suffering is all part of God's grand design to promote growth and maturity in our lives. God is faithful and good, and He has a purpose and a plan for what He does – and we can trust Him.

Finally, Peter reminded us that we are God's flock, and he encouraged us to cast our worries and our concerns on the Lord because He cares for us. We are His concern, but with that said, we should not become careless because we have an enemy who opposes God and us as well. This enemy is a cunning deceiver, the father of lies, and he wants us to doubt God.

So, in light of what Peter has expressed us, and granted I just briefly skimmed the surface – we are told to **stand firm**. We are to stand firm in hope. We are to stand firm in our faith in Christ – not just faith – but faith in Christ who is the object, the focus of our faith. We are to stand firm in the truth of God's Word. We are to stand firm in doing what is good and right for the sake of Christ, for His honor and His reputation. We are to stand firm in the grace of our faithful God who gives us

the ability to endure in suffering. And, we are to stand firm in our love and service to one another. Instead of turning inward, as we are prone to do in the midst of suffering, we are to turn outward to others.

Dr. Karl Menninger, a world-famous psychiatrist, was answering questions after giving a lecture on mental health when one person asked, “What would your advice be to someone who felt a nervous breakdown was coming on?” Most people expected Dr. Menninger to give some clinical information and then suggest they say “Consult a psychiatrist” but instead, he said, “Lock up your house, go across the railroad tracks, find someone in need, and do something to serve that person.”

God’s faithfulness and grace gives us the ability to endure, but also to serve, even in the midst of suffering.

Now let’s go back to **verse 12**. If you noticed, at the beginning of this verse, we are introduced to Silvanus who was likely Peter’s secretary and wrote the letter as Peter dictated it to him. That was a common practice – Paul did the same thing as well, and it would seem at this moment in the letter, Peter has taken the pen from Silvanus and is now writing this last portion of the letter in his own hand.

You know, when I think of New Testament figures, I think of Jesus – of course, but I also think of these giants of the faith like John, and Paul, and Peter. Their ministry was instrumental in starting the early church and we who are here today are products of their ministry, but sometimes, it’s so easy to overlook the many others who supported these giants of the faith, and Silvanus is one such individual.

Now you may not quickly recognize the name Silvanus – it appears to be a Roman name, but it is commonly accepted that he also goes by his Hebrew name of Silas, and that name just might ring a bell. Turn in your Bible to **Acts 15**, beginning with **verse 36**.

³⁶ After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. ³⁸ But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. ⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and left,

being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ *And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

So, at that time, Silas was a leader and a teacher in the church in Jerusalem and after a large council meeting in Jerusalem, a decision was made to send Silas with the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey.

This was the start of a great partnership between Paul and Silas – a partnership filled with both glorious highs and grueling lows as they faithfully served the Lord together in the mission field. It must have been an exciting time as they revisited churches from Paul’s first missionary journey and likely started others in Asia Minor, but there was also difficulty and hardship and suffering in store for them as well. For example, let’s look at one of their well-known experiences in **Acts 16**, beginning with **verse 22**.

²² The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. ²³ When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; ²⁴ and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; ²⁶ and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” ²⁹ And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, ³⁰ and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

That experience was a combination of both highs and lows, and the point I want to make is this – it wasn’t just Paul. It was Paul and Silas. Silas was there. He sang songs with Paul at midnight in the Philippian jail, as his back was bruised and battered from a brutal beating and his feet were held in stocks. And after being supernaturally released by the grace of God, Silas continued in his faithful service with Paul and also later with Timothy despite the suffering and the persecution he would endure. Eventually, Paul would be imprisoned and that door of service for Silas would be closed.

God closed that door, but He opened another one for Silas, and once again, he is doing what he does best – he is faithfully serving – this time with Peter. This had to be such a great blessing to Peter because he is writing to churches in Asia Minor already well known to Silas, and some have even speculated that Silas may have had taken some oversight of these churches in Paul’s absence. So, identifying Silas could be very comforting to the recipients of this letter, and just like Peter, Silas also serves as a great example to them of God’s faithfulness and grace that gives the ability to endure, but also to serve, even in the midst of suffering.

Okay, let's press on to **verse 13**. This one is interesting.

She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.

This a greeting by Peter – odd to us because it comes at the end of the letter, but it’s my understanding this was a custom in the first century. It’s a simple greeting, but Peter’s choice of words has created a lot of discussion amongst Bible scholars. Peter begins this verse by saying, **“She who is in Babylon”** and that phrase has prompted several questions. **First, who is she, and secondly, where is Babylon?**

When it comes to **“she”**, some believe Peter is referring to his wife, and that could be the case here, but I doubt it. Others believe **“she”** actually refers the church he is associating with, and I think that is more accurate, but if it is the church, **why doesn’t Peter just say the “church”?** **Why leave us guessing?** Well, maybe his reference to **Babylon** will help.

When we think of Babylon, we think of the ancient city of Babylon in Mesopotamia – which is in modern day Iraq, and the ruins of Babylon are still present, some 55 miles south of Bagdad. **But, was Peter ever in Babylon?** There is no biblical or historical evidence that his ministry ever extended there, plus, the literal city of Babylon had dwindled in size and significance by the first century and it’s questionable there was even a body of believers there at the time.

So then, what is Peter referring to? It appears the majority of Bible scholars believe that the mention of **Babylon** by Peter is actually a veiled reference to Rome, as most people think that Peter was writing this letter from Rome at the time. **Well, if this was the case, then why not just say “Rome” then?**

I think the simple answer is that Peter is writing from the belly of the beast, so to speak. If you recall, the Roman Empire is same empire which executed Jesus,

persecuted the Jews, and at time when the letter was written, it's the same empire under Emperor Nero who is savagely persecuting the churches. The city of Rome was an oppressor of God's people, especially after Nero set the city on fire and then falsely blamed the Christians for doing it, so, Peter probably used "**Babylon**" as a code name to protect the believers in the city of Rome in case the letter was intercepted and censored by government officials leading to more persecution. For me, this explains why Peter was vague with his word "**she**" and his use of the word "**Babylon.**" Hopefully, that makes sense without sounding like a "Mission Impossible" spy movie.

So, the church in Rome sends greetings to the churches in Asia Minor, and according to Peter, so does **Mark**. Now wait a minute, **didn't I make mention Mark a little earlier?** Let's turn back to that passage in **Acts 15**, beginning with verse **36**.

³⁶ After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. ³⁸ But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. ⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Mark was the cousin of Barnabas, and if you recall, Mark accompanied Barnabas and the Apostle Paul on their first missionary journey. But during that journey, for some unknown reason, Mark deserted them, he abandoned them, he just quit in the middle of the journey and returned home – and that didn't set well with Paul.

Later, as we just read, Paul and Barnabas are planning a second missionary journey, and Barnabas – who is a really encouraging guy, wanted to bring along Mark again, but Paul wasn't having any of it. The work was just too important and Paul didn't want to risk it on someone they couldn't count on. Well, that prompted a significant disagreement which led to a split between Paul and Barnabas, and I'm sure Satan was excited to see Paul and Barnabas part ways, but God turned their division into His multiplication. Paul took Silas on his missionary journey while Barnabas took Mark and they went in another direction to Cyprus, and the gospel multiplied and spread everywhere they went.

But that's not the end of the story. Guess what – years later, Mark is with Paul of all people. In fact, Mark is mentioned by Paul in his letter to the **Colossians**, and later in the second letter to **Timothy**, Paul acknowledged Mark as being profitable to him. Also, in his letter to **Philemon**, Paul described Mark as a fellow worker.

So, Mark had a difficult start with Paul, but reconciled with Paul and worked alongside him, and now we find Mark partnered with Peter in Rome – in the belly of the beast, and that partnership led to the Gospel of Mark. The gospel that bears Mark's name comes from Peter's first-hand account of walking with Jesus during His earthly ministry. The Gospel of Mark is the first gospel to have been written and it's written for a Gentile audience, more specifically a Roman audience – ironically, the very same people who are persecuting the church.

If you think about this partnership between Peter and Mark, both had failed – Peter had denied Jesus and Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas, but both were restored, both recovered, and both became faithful servants for Christ. It speaks of the true grace and faithfulness of God. God closes doors and He opens doors, and God only knows where those doors may lead for a person who serves Him.

Okay, let's look at the very last verse of this letter – **verse 14**.

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.

Before we start breaking out the breath mints – let me explain this. You should know that this **kiss** was simply the customary way for people to greet one another in those days. As I understand it, in that time and culture, the kiss consisted of a peck on the cheek – men kissing men and women kissing women as an expression of brotherly **love** and a desire for **peace** with one another. For us, in our western culture, a handshake or a hug serves the same purpose, and it's not so much the act as it is the motivation behind the act – that's the point. But there's another point, a subtle point, that I don't want to overlook.

This verse speaks of togetherness. When we are suffering, we should go through it together, because just like Peter and Paul, Silas and Mark, God has called us to come together, and to serve one another together where we have been planted.

Philip Yancey shares a letter he received from a woman in Grand Rapids who had experienced her church's acts of submission and attitude of humility in the greatest time of her and her husband's suffering. For seven years she cared for her husband who was a well-known musician. Her letter read:

Ever since the first symptoms of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) appeared over eight years ago, you have surrounded us with love and support. You have cheered us with innumerable notes and letters and cards, some hilarious, some profound, some just warm and caring, but all greatly valued.

You visited and you phoned, often from faraway places. Many of you prepared and brought marvelous food which nourished our spirits as well as our bodies. You shopped and ran errands for us and repaired our broken and out-of-order things while yours waited. You swept and shoveled our walks, brought our mail, dumped our trash. It was possible for us to be a part of our church services because you recorded them. And you brought gifts of love, too many to count, to brighten our hours.

You "doctored" and even repaired a tooth right here in our home. You did ingenious things that made life easier for both of us, like the "coughing jacket" and signal switch that Norm was able to use until the last few days of his life. You shared Scripture verses with us, and some of you made it your ministry to pray for those who came to our home regularly to give respiratory treatments. You made him feel like he was still a vital part of the music industry and of the church music ministry.

And how you prayed!!! Day after day, month after month, even year after year! Those prayers buoyed us up, lifted us through particularly hard places, gave us strength that would have been humanly impossible to have, and helped us to reach out on our own for God's resources. Someday we'll understand why Norm's perfect healing did not take place here. But we do know that he was with us much longer and in much better condition than is the norm for an ALS victim. Love is not a strong enough word to tell you how we feel about you!

Because this woman's church, on countless occasions, came together and put her before themselves, she was not tormented by doubts over whether God loved her. She sensed His love, even in her suffering, through their acts of love and service.

Source Material:

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