

“Humility and Watchfulness”

Holiness

1 Peter 5:5-9

Dr. Bruce Bickel

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Bruce: Don? Let’s quietly go before the Lord, know that He is God, and rejoice in His majesty. (*Music.*)

Gracious and sovereign Lord, we pray that Your Holy Spirit would take us to the cross, that we might see the majesty and glory of Your excellent love for us. We pray that Your Spirit would take us to the cross, that we might see our redemption in Jesus Christ. We pray, Lord, that Your Spirit might take us to the cross, that we might see the agony of His suffering and rejoice in the celebration of His victory. Father, take us to the cross, that we might see You in Your majesty, Your glory, Your mercy and all of Your excellence. And may it be so for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: In recent weeks the apostle Peter has been teaching us how to live a holy life in the midst of a system that is really oriented to opposition and persecution of those who are different. Peter has been teaching us to live a holy life, what I would call a separated life—a life that is separated from the system of this world and yet it is in the world. As the Scripture says, (*paraphrase*), “Be in the world but not of the world.” Peter has been teaching us to live a separated life, a life that is motivated by the glory of God in the decisions we make. And in the midst of the opposition of the system of this world that is opposed to what we represent, he has been teaching us how to live a holy life.

And he started with the idea of having leadership in the right situations. When you’re involved in spiritual warfare, you need to have the right leaders. In the early verses of chapter five, Peter taught us that we need to have the right men in the right positions with the right requirements at the right time and for the right reason, with the right weapons and the right perspective, as John mentioned last week.

So first of all, he says that when you’re in battle, you’ve got to have the right leaders because if you don’t have the right leadership in battle, you’re going to be consumed by the enemy. That’s what Peter has been teaching us the last couple of weeks.

Now he goes into a broader sense and says that here is how the rest of the church must respond. Before you go into battle, you’ve got to have the right leaders—the right men in the right positions with the right requirements, at the right time for the right reason, who have the right perspective and the right weapons to lead us in warfare.

Now with that introduction, Peter now goes in and says, “Now here is how the rest of the church is to respond.” And I want us to pick it up at verses 6-9, but I want to read all nine verses for us to keep it in the right context. So let’s turn to 1 Peter chapter five, beginning at verse 1. This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen. “So I exhort the elders among you”—those are the leaders—“as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising

“Humility and Watchfulness”

oversight—not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 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 He gives grace to the humble.””

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you. Be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Amen. Peter now begins to deal with the rest of the church. He has dealt with church leadership, reminding us that when you go into spiritual warfare, you need to have the right men in the right place who have the right qualifications. You need to have the right leadership to go into battle. And now Peter says that, to the rest of you, here is how you need to respond.

And notice that this comes after responding to the elders. One of the ministries that we have as members of a church is to respond to our leadership. Now it makes it a lot easier when you have the right men in the right place for the right reason and all the requirements we’ve gone through.

But Peter now says that there are two things you need to do. You need to have the right attitude of mind and you need to have the right response of spirit. You need to have the right attitude of mind when you go into spiritual warfare and you need to have the right response of spirit. In other words, the Spirit produces within you a response that is correct, based upon the situation in which you find yourself.

The very first thing he says is that you need to have the right attitude of mind. In other words, what are you thinking? Remember what Paul says in Romans 12. “Do not be conformed to the system of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” You see in the little diagram, the card that we pass out—think right, act right, feel right. Peter is now taking that same principle that you see running all through the Scripture—that how you think determines how you act, and how you act determines how you feel.

He now says this. In response to having the right leadership which is going to direct you in spiritual warfare, you now need to have the right attitude of mind. How do I think about myself in the midst of this battle called spiritual warfare? Then secondly, he says, “How do you have the right response after having the right attitude?”

So Peter gives us two things to consider in this particular passage. First of all, he says this in verses 5-9. Be humble. The right attitude of mind is humility. In the midst of warfare you and I need to be humble toward one another.

“Humility and Watchfulness”

Now the ones who teach us how to do that would be the leaders of the church. As they demonstrate humility toward us as the leaders of the church, we need to realize now that we need to be humble before one another as members of the church. And you’ll see that in verses 5-7.

And then he says, “Be watchful.” The right attitude of mind is humility. The right response of spirit, in relationship to people and circumstances, is to be watchful—watchfulness. So let’s take a look at these two admonitions that Peter gives us.

First of all, the word *humble*. Notice what he says in verse 5. “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.”

Now let me give you some of the background on this word *clothing*. It’s a wonderful Greek word. The word is derived from a word that literally describes anything that is tied together with a knot. And connected with it is a word that we see in our translations in the New Testament. This word was a garment tied with a knot. It was commonly used for protective clothing. It was used for a pair of sleeves drawn over the sleeves of a robe and tied behind the neck. It was used as a slave’s apron.

Now the importance of that is this. There was a time when Jesus put on this very piece of clothing. And when did He do that? He did that at the Last Supper. John says of Jesus that “He took a towel and girded Himself. Then He took water and began to wash His disciples’ feet.” John chapter 13. You see, Jesus girded Himself with the apron of humility. This is an apron of humility.

And that’s what Peter says. You put on the garb of humility. You clothed yourselves with this attitude and mindset that says that humility is the garb in which I’m going to dress myself. Jesus is the model of that and so we must be the followers of that.

But it also happens that this same word is used of another kind of a garment in other situations in literature. It’s also used of putting on a long, flowing, stole-like garment, which was the sign of honor and preeminence. So to complete this picture that Peter is using in this word under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we’ve got to put both of these pictures of the definition of these words *clothe yourselves* together. It works out like this. Jesus once put on a slave’s apron and undertook the humblest of all duties—to wash His disciples’ feet. We must do the same things. We must put on the apron of humility in the service of Christ in the midst of spiritual warfare.

Notice what Peter says in verse five. “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.” How is it that we treat each other in the midst of spiritual warfare, as we’re trying to live holy lives? We treat each other with humility toward one another. That’s the idea of this rod *garment*. Clothe yourselves.

But there is more to it. Jesus once put on a slave’s apron and undertook the humblest of all duties—washing His disciples’ feet. But it was also the very apron of humility that became the garment of honor. This very apron of humility becomes the garment of honor. For it is the servant of all who is the greatest in the kingdom of God.

And so you take that one little word. *Clothe yourselves* means this. You put on the garment of humility and that becomes your garment of honor.

“Humility and Watchfulness”

Now that’s radically different from what the world says. When you and I become humble, they say, “You’re demeaning yourself.” The Scripture says this—that when you put on humility, you’re wearing your robe of honor because it was the robe that Christ wore. And He brought honor to that humility when He washed the disciples’ feet.

Let me give you some of the history of this word *humility*, which leads into this. The word *humility* as we describe it is really not a New Testament word. It had been used for years in the Greek language in Biblical times, but always as a term of contempt and rebuke. It meant meanness of spirit. To be humble meant to be a coward.

Now what greater example can you find of the transformation that Jesus makes in the world when He takes this word *humility*, which means that you’re a coward, and He changes the meaning of it and brings honor and glory to it in the kingdom that He instituted and inaugurated? It’s the hallmark of what He instituted. You look for a transformation. Just as He transforms us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, He takes this one word which was used in culture as a term of derision and rebuke, and because He used the word He changed the word, transforming it to something of honor. What greater example could we see of the transformation that Jesus brings—not only in our lives personally, but also in our vocabulary, because He has changed the meaning of that word *humility*.

To be humble is to have a low esteem of yourself. That is how it was used in literature. That was considered shameful prior to Christ. But Christ came and made the despised quality the crown and grace of His new culture. Jesus transformed the derision of this word *humility* and it became the hallmark of the new culture that He instituted—the kingdom of God.

What is the hallmark of the clothes that we wear? It is the clothing of humility, but it’s also the clothing of honor because Christ has transformed the meaning of that word *humility*.

Now Peter says this. He takes this word which Christ redeemed and he instructs us to make it a working virtue, which makes all the other virtues that we have glorious. You see, friends, if we put all the other virtues together in the Christian life, and we’re not clothed with humility, they all call attention to whom?

Participant: Ourselves.

Bruce: Ourselves. But when you’re clothed in humility, who does it call attention to? The One who transformed the meaning of the word. “Clothe yourselves” he says, in the midst of spiritual warfare, under the right leadership. “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another,” because that is what will make all the other virtues of your treatment of each other glorious because you’re wrapped in the clothing of humility, the clothing of honor and prestige. Everything is to be done under the folds of the robes of humility, Peter says.

Now let’s take a look. What is the source of humility? Well humility comes, brothers, from the sense of knowing God and how we see ourselves in relationship to Him. That’s where humility is derived—from seeing God and our relationship to Him. It’s what Jesus said in the Beatitudes. At His very first staff meeting Jesus brought His twelve disciples together and said, “This is who you’re going to become.”

“Humility and Watchfulness”

In the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter five, notice that he doesn't say, “This is what you're going to do. Here is our strategy. Here are our tactics.” He says that this is who you're going to become.

And He says this. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Now those words *poor in spirit* means a spiritual beggar. It means that I'm bankrupt. It means that I have no spiritual resources of my own that are going to do anything for me to be pleasing to God. And the moment that I realize my spiritual bankruptcy, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is” what?

Men: The kingdom of heaven.

Bruce: The kingdom of heaven. You see, the word *blessed* means happy in spite of circumstances. It's a term describing your spiritual prosperity. He said that you will become spiritually prosperous. You will be blessed when you have a right view of yourself. That's “poor in spirit.” That's exactly what Peter is saying when he says to clothe yourselves with this robe of humility.

You see, humility is based upon how you see God and how you see yourself. You see yourself in relationship to who God is. That's the beginning of humility. Humility begins with the knowledge of God and results in how we see ourselves correctly. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

Now how is this knowledge of God—instead of puffing us up, which is often the case, vain conceits—how does this knowledge of God procure and produce humility in our lives?

Well I think we have to understand this first of all, men, that knowledge of God itself is a gift.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It is not something that you and I achieve. It's not something that you and I discover. It is not something that you and I figure out. The knowledge of God is a gift. The knowledge of God is a revelation, not a discovery. And therefore it implies in itself the obligation of the receiver of that gift to respond to the One who is the giver of the gift.

Now let me explain what I mean by that. Do you follow that? The knowledge of God is a gift. It is not a discovery that you and I earn. And as a result of that, there is a response that we have to the Giver. God is the giver of the knowledge of Himself. He does that through the sufficiency of Scripture. Therefore it implies that I'm going to have a certain response to the One who gave me such a great gift. And what is that gift? It is the knowledge of Himself.

Humility starts right there, realizing that whatever knowledge you have of God is a gift. It's a revelation He gave to you. And that generates within you and me a certain response to the Giver of that gift.

What is your response? “Thank You.” It's an attitude of gratitude. It's not “Oh, look how much I know!”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It's how much do I show because of my understanding that humility is my response of my seeing God correctly and seeing myself in reality. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“Humility and Watchfulness”

Thomas Watson says this about humility. “This humility is produced by the impressiveness of the majesty and greatness of the divine Being, as revealed to us in His matchless perfections and infinite glory in the Scripture. This knowledge of the glory of God is not a work of nature, but a gift of grace. This new knowledge becomes a test whereby we measure ourselves. We cannot help this self application since, in knowing God, we have gained a new idea altogether. And it is this immense difference between what God is and what we are that Christian humility originates and grows.”

What’s the source that produces humility in us, men? It’s how you see God and how you see yourself.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It’s how you see God and how you see yourself. That’s the beginning of clothing ourselves with humility. That’s how we relate to one another in the body of Christ in the midst of spiritual warfare, under the leadership that God has given us. We treat each other and respond to each other with the attitude of mind of humility.

And the reason that people are not humble is because they do not see the greatness of God’s glory and majesty. They don’t see God correctly.

So what are some of the signs of humility? Let me offer several for your consideration. We’ve seen that the origin of humility is the knowledge that God gives us of Himself and how we see ourselves in reality compared to Him. So what are some of the signs of humility in your life and mine?

Well first of all, I would offer this for your consideration. Humility consists of *a proper estimate of our relative importance*. As it relates to God, we are nothing before Him. He is the High and Lofty One who is from everlasting to everlasting, boundless in might and infinite in wisdom, glory and love. As it relates to us, we are, in Paul’s words, to “not think more highly of yourself than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” Romans 12:3.

“Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment.” I just spent last week at Camp of the Woods in Speculating, New York, a wonderful Christian campsite. Bob, people said hello to you. Norm (*last name unclear*) said, Greet Bob, and what’s his last name?” (*Laughter.*) He said, “It starts with an S and it’s real long.” (*Laughter.*) But Norm sends his regards.

I had the privilege of teaching a five-day series on Christian leadership. One of the things I teach is teamwork.

Participant: Yeah.

Bruce: The basis of my teamwork definition is this verse that I just quoted. Here’s the attitude of a team player. “Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment.” You’ve got to think of how do I fit into something bigger than myself? That’s the attitude of a team player. The team player says this. “Whatever I do well by myself, I’m going to do it when I do it better with you.” You can’t act that way unless you think this way. A team member thinks this way. “I can’t think more highly of myself than I should. I need to think of myself in terms of how I relate to other people.” That is the garb of humility.

Participant: Amen.

“Humility and Watchfulness”

Bruce: You see, your best team players are the humble ones, not the ego-centered ones, because they understand this. Whatever you may do well by yourself, you do it better with somebody else.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s the heart and mind of a team player .

But notice what Paul also says in Romans 12:3. “In accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” Now humility, brothers, is not demeaning yourself, or thinking poorly of yourself. Humility is not thinking of yourself at all.

Participant: Interesting! Wow!

Bruce: Humility is not demeaning yourself, or thinking poorly of yourself. Humility is not thinking of yourself at all. You have to have a proper estimate of your relative importance.

I learned a great lesson here recently. As you know, I just resigned from PNC a couple of months ago. In my ego-centeredness and pride, I said that some of the clients that I’ve served are going to leave the bank because I’m not there. (*Laughter.*) Guess what? (*Laughter.*) Nobody left! (*Laughter.*) A great lesson for me.

Participant: Yeah.

Bruce: I realized my relative importance. I was important to them while I was there. Now who’s he? You see, we need to have a sane estimate, a proper estimate of our relative importance to the Person and work of God. It all starts with that. That’s how we clothe ourselves with humility.

The second consideration for you, men, that I would offer is this. Humility consists in *a low estimate of our own knowledge*. It consists of a low estimate of our own knowledge. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 8:2, “The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.” And then in Romans 12 Paul again says in verse 16, “Do not be conceited. Do not be wise in your own conceits.”

Now in society, in our world, vanity and self-conceit are cherished in our literature, in our science and in our culture. But the right view of God in His providence is that you recognize that it’s not your mental superiority that makes the difference, but it’s His relative grace to bestow the knowledge upon you in the first place. How can you take credit for something you didn’t achieve? How can you take credit for something you didn’t earn? How can you take credit for something you didn’t discover?

You see, oftentimes, in our vain conceits, we just like to be theologians who can out-duel somebody by giving them greater verses.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Peter says no. In the midst of spiritual welfare, the way you relate to one another is with humility. Have a proper estimate of your relative importance to God and also a proper estimate of your knowledge. Knowledge is a gift, men. We need to act like that. And that means that we’re grateful for the fact that God has intervened in the course of human history, chose us from before the foundation of the world and granted us a saving knowledge of Himself. All that we can do then is just say what? “Thank You!” That’s the beginning of our humility—seeing ourselves properly With a right view of God in His providence, you recognize that it is not our mental capabilities or our

“Humility and Watchfulness”

superiority, but it is His creative grace that bestowed the knowledge of Him upon you in the first place.

Number three for your consideration. Humility consists of *a correct estimate of our moral condition*. Notice Paul’s words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:15. “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.”

Now there’s a man who understood holiness far more than we will ever understand it. And when he sees himself in relationship to the magnificent, glorious, majestic heavenly Father, he says, (*paraphrase*), “I’m nothing more than a worthless sinner.” He says that in 1 Timothy 1:15.

When you and I have a clear vision of God, it creates a greater awareness of our own condition. Go to 1 Corinthians 15:9.

Let me just give you an interesting little tidbit here, another thing from Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15:9, which to the best of our understanding was written about the year 55 A.D., Paul makes this statement—that he is the least of the apostles. That’s in 55 A.D. Seven years later he makes this statement—that (*paraphrase*), “I am the worst of sinners.” To the best of our knowledge that was written in 62 A.D.

Seven years later he goes from the least to the worst. What’s the reason? He saw God more clearly! He saw himself in relationship to the majestic, holy, glorious, sovereign Lord. And he began to say, “Yes. Once I was the least, and now I’m the worst.”

I think that one of the most powerful prayers we have in the Scripture is one of the shortest, found in Luke 18, the prayer of the publican, who could not even lift up his eyes in front of God when he was in the temple. And he said this. “Have mercy upon me, the sinner.”

You see, humility is produced within us when we have a correct estimate of our moral condition. Now that does not mean that you put yourself down. It just means that you lift yourself up when you see that you’re now in Christ. And I see the contrast between who I was and who I am now. Yes, Brian?

Brian: The curious thing about Paul is how humble he was, but how strong he is. You often see either/or. Either people are really strong and confident, or they’re humble and put themselves down. And I think Paul strikes an incredible balance, as did Christ. He was so strong and such a leader, but extremely humble. I don’t get it. I don’t see how to do both.

Bruce: I think Jesus explains that in the Beatitudes at His first staff meeting. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” The word *meekness* does not mean weakness. It means power under control.

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: The person who is humble is the strongest person because you have power under control. You’ve got the power of a gracious God who has redeemed you, who has saved you, who has filled you with His Holy Spirit. You’ve got all the power of the universe at your disposal. But how you use it is that you use it in humility because you see yourself in relationship to His majesty and His glory.

“Humility and Watchfulness”

And so actually, the humble person is the strongest person. The example is Jesus. If you think meekness is weakness, try to be meek next time. Try to be humble the next time somebody does something to you. See how difficult that is. It requires strength. It requires endurance. It requires a right mindset.

You see, the humble person is really the strongest person. It's contrary to what the world says. That's why I wanted to give you the understanding of how Jesus redeemed the word *humility*. It was once a term of derision. He transformed that to become now a word of strength, a word of power, a word of endurance, because it's a reflection of who He is in all of His character and nature. He transformed that word, men. It is no longer weakness. It is now meekness. It is power under control. So the person who is the humble man is really the strong man.

And your example, Brian, of Paul is exactly right. His strength was based upon his humility. “Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment.”

Number four. Another sign of humility in my judgment would be this. Not only does it consist of a proper estimate of our relative importance. Not only does it consist of a proper estimate of our own knowledge. It consists of a correct estimate of our moral condition. But one more I would offer and it would be this. Humility consists of *a ready knowledge of our constant dependence*.

Jesus says in Matthew 18 verse 4 that “whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” What is the characteristic of a humble child?

Participant: Dependence.

Bruce: Dependency. That's what He's talking about. He's not talking about age. He's talking about dependency. And humility is produced when we have already acknowledgment of our constant dependence upon the grace of God.

A prideful man will not acknowledge his dependency upon anyone or anything. So why do we ask ourselves the question? Why does God oppose the proud? Notice the word in our passage. “For God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Now what's the significance of that little word *oppose*? It's really fascinating. It's a military term, which is logical because we're in what?

Men: Spiritual warfare.

Bruce: Spiritual warfare. Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is going to use military terms because we are in a military operation called spiritual warfare. He uses another military term. It is the word *opposes*. It's a military term used to describe an army drawn up for battle.

Pride calls out God's armies against you. That's what Peter is saying. God opposes you and me when we are proud, and what it means is this. God is going to call out His armies to line up for battle against us because He is going to oppose our pride.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Do you see that? This is an issue of spiritual warfare. He's going to draw up His armies. He's going to oppose us when we're proud.

But notice the contrast. “But He gives grace to the humble”—to those who see themselves correctly, who recognize their absolute dependency upon Him. Those are the

“Humility and Watchfulness”

ones who He will not oppose. He will not draw up His armies. He will give you the grace of humility. Yes, Don?

Don: Isn't it interesting and ironic, Bruce, that as Americans we pride ourselves on independence.

Bruce: Oh my, yes!

Don: The Declaration of Independence.

Bruce: Yes.

Don: And yet, you know, John Bishop last week was talking about how Christianity is so opposite of our natural mindset.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: We must be dependent instead of proud. We must give in order to receive. We must die in order to live.

Bruce: Amen.

Don: That goes against everything that is natural in us.

Bruce: Absolutely. That's why God opposes us. Let me give you some more understanding on this word *oppose*. It literally means this—that God sets Himself in battle array against a proud person. God sets Himself in battle array—lines up for battle—against a proud person.

Let me give you some indications of why. God hates the sin of pride—Proverbs 6. God hates the sin of pride. He lines up His armies to do battle with us when we are proud.

Pride turned Lucifer into Satan—Isaiah chapter 14. Pride stirred Eve to eat the fruit in the garden—to be like God, to become less dependent and more prideful—Genesis chapter 3. And in 1 John chapter 2 the apostle says this, that “the pride of life” is an indication of worldliness.

So what is the only antidote to pride? If God hates pride, drawing up His armies against the proud person, what's the antidote?

Men: Humility.

Bruce: The antidote is grace—the grace of humility. And that comes only when we respond to God with dependency and humility. The antidote is grace! And how is grace brought to us? Through our dependency! That's why one of the indications and signs of humility is a ready acknowledgment of our constant dependency, exactly the opposite of our human nature.

Now notice verse 6 of 1 Peter chapter 5. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time He may exalt you.”

I need to explain this little phrase *humble yourselves*. It's in the passive voice, and that means something. It means that the subject of the verb, which is us, is in the hands of God who does the acting. We do the receiving. God does the acting. We do the receiving. It's in the passive voice.

And so God acts upon the subject, which is who?

Participant: Us.

Bruce: Us. And so the humbling process that God uses to humble us is persecution and suffering. God humbles us. We receive humility, through God's grace, through the

“Humility and Watchfulness”

circumstances of our lives, because what do those circumstances force us to do? Be more dependent upon Him! Grace is the only antidote for pride. And it is our understanding of this—that God is going to use the circumstances, He’s going to use the persecutions, the frustrations that we have in this life to reduce pride within us because He is acting on us.

It means that God is in control. Notice verse 6 again. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God.” Who is in control of your circumstances?

Men: God.

Bruce: God is. The mighty hand of God is controlling those circumstances. And what is He doing in your life?

Participant: Humbling us.

Bruce: Humbling us! What should our response be to the circumstances of life? Thank You for the gift of Your love! The circumstances are teaching me that You love me because You are building humility in me because I’m under the mighty hand of God that is controlling the circumstances of life. That’s how He produces humility in us through the spiritual warfare efforts that we go through. Do you see how that works?

What greater love demonstration could we have than this, how God controls our circumstances, because the end result is what? The fruit of grace is our humility! God is the One who produces humility within us. It is not something that you and I discover or earn or achieve. It is something that God gives us.

That means that the sufferings you’re going through—now get this!—are expressions of God’s grace!

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: That’s contrary to everything the world is going to teach us. But the frustrations, the sufferings that you’re going through are expressions of God’s grace. And that is because grace is the only antidote to pride.

That’s why Peter says this: to be submissive in a God-honoring way to what God is doing in your life through circumstances to make us humble. And you see, when you wear the clothing of humility, you are wearing what? The robe of honor! Honor! “He gives grace to the humble.” When you are humble, men, you and I are putting on the robe of honor, the very robe that Jesus wore.

That comes as a result of circumstances in God’s providence producing grace within us because of the circumstances He takes us through for all of His glory. What greater demonstration could we have of God’s grace? Yes, please?

Participant: In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul says this in verse 9. “And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you.””

Bruce: Oh, amen!

Participant: “For My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast of my weakness so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”

Bruce: Amen. Thank you for that cross reference. Give us that number again.

Participant: It’s 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Bruce: How many times have you read books on leadership that say, “Lead from your strength?” (*Laughter.*) In one of the sessions I taught last week, I taught that you lead from your weakness because that highlights your dependence upon God. You see, if

“Humility and Watchfulness”

we led from our strength, then nobody else would talk. If I led from my strength, nobody else would have a chance to talk. I need to lead from my weakness. I discover what my weaknesses are, submit those to Christ and understand this. He will use your weakness because He is the source of grace and strength. Yes, please?

Participant: And this is the most amazing thing in verse 10, what he says next. “Therefore I am well content with weakness, with insults, distresses, persecution and difficulties for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Bruce: Amen. That’s humility, men. It’s a man who realized this. *Paraphrase.*) “At one time I was the least of the apostles. Now I’m the worst of sinners,” because he saw himself in relationship to the majesty and glory of God. Yes, Tom?

Tom: What is amazing, I think, too, is that it doesn’t end with us because Paul is talking about that he is the worst of sinners. “But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Jesus Christ might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life.”

Bruce: Amen.

Tom: So all this relationship between us and God, how He is changing us, people are watching.

Bruce: Absolutely. It’s part of our witness. It’s part of our having a separated life. It’s part of our holiness. Holiness is the greatest form of evangelism that we have. It’s not a program; it’s a lifestyle.

Now I want you to follow through on one more thing. Go back to verse 6 and verse 7. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time He may exalt you.” Now do you understand what we’re saying? Grace is the only antidote to pride. God creates humility in us. As we humble ourselves, we are the recipients of all the circumstances that God works in our lives for His glory, creating humility within us. And when you understand that, notice what the result is. We can cast all our anxieties on Him because He—

Participant: Cares for us.

Bruce: Cares for us! Do you understand that, men? This is so radically different. In the difficulties of your life God is demonstrating His care for you, because what is He doing? He’s producing humility!

You see, when you understand the sovereignty of God, when you understand God’s providential working in your life, that’s what gives you the freedom to “cast your anxieties upon Him,” because you know this. In these persecutions and afflictions I’m going through, He’s caring for me because He’s building humility in my life for His glory. Therefore I can trust Him because I know that He cares for me. He loves me. His grace is a demonstration of His commitment to me. Therefore I can cast all my anxieties upon Him because I know this. He cares for me! He cares for me in the midst of these circumstances.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Now that is so radically different from what the world says, totally different from our human nature. It’s our understanding of who we are in our relationship to God.

“Humility and Watchfulness”

Such an awareness of God’s sovereignty and such an awareness of God’s providential control—that all things are under the mighty hand of God—that is what permits us to cast ourselves and all of our anxieties upon Him.

Now, in summary, what Peter means is this. Not only is God in control of all that happens to you and me, but no matter what happens, He can be trusted to exercise His control for the benefit of His children because He cares for us.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: He cares for us. You see, men, that’s why I was led to pray this morning, “Take me to the cross.”

Participant: Yeah.

Bruce: I just need to see the cross again. As I look at the circumstances that I’m going to go through, and as you look at the circumstances that you’re going to go through, you look at them through the eyes of the cross. Take us to the cross.

We submit with humility not only to the circumstances, but we submit in the circumstances to the Hand that controls them.

So how do you and I look at life, men? Do we only see the circumstances? Do we see the sufferings? Do we see the objections that people throw at us? Or do you see the caring hand of a loving God behind all the circumstances of your life? And by His grace He permits these circumstances to increase our humility, so He will not have to bring the armies of heaven against us.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: The last thing I want for any of us is that God would bring the armies of heaven against us. When you understand His providential care and His sovereignty, you can cast all of your anxieties upon Him because you know this. In the midst of that, He cares for us. Yes, please?

Participant: Can you give me a quick example of what that would look like in a believer’s life—God bringing His armies?

Bruce: I have no idea.

Participant: Okay. (*Laughter.*)

Let me just give you a reminder of something that’s so important for us. Remember Deuteronomy 29:29?

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: We talked about this before we gave out that little card. “The secret things belong to God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children to the next generations, so that we might obey them and walk in them.” There are a lot of things that we don’t know. And you know what? You’re not designed to know them. Quit worrying about the things you don’t know.

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: Worry about the things that God has shown you, just like today. I don’t know what it would be like to have the armies of heaven thrown against me. All I know is this. I don’t want that to happen. (*Laughter.*) And I don’t want that to happen to you. I can translate that, but I don’t know what that would look like in your life. Don’t try to figure that out.

“Humility and Watchfulness”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Just trust the fact that you know this. I don't want the armies of heaven coming against me, whatever it would look like! Therefore I'm going to be dependent on Him. Yes, Ted?

Ted: Venturing into saying that I might know what that looks like, I think it certainly means that God would turn up the heat.

Bruce: If you can figure that out, it means that you're probably proud enough to figure it out. *(Laughter.)*

Ted: It was given to me by revelation. *(Laughter.)*

Participant: Which chapter? *(Laughter.)*

Bruce: I think you got that from Hesitations 6:4. *(Laughter.)*

Well, let me bring this to a conclusion. Do you understand what an act of love this is on God's part—to use suffering and circumstances to breed us to be humble men—what an act of love that is? That means this, dear men. “Cast your anxieties on Him.” What is anxiety? It's fear that your needs won't be met. Anxiety is a self-contradiction to true humility. Do you understand that? Anxiety is a self-contradiction to true humility.

May God be pleased to give us a correct view of Himself in all of His majesty and His glory. Lord, take us to the cross, so we can see you behind all the circumstances of life.

Participant: And see, Bruce, the thing is that the world and our sinful natures would say the exact opposite—that when these things come into our lives, it must mean that God doesn't care for me because He wouldn't let these things come if He did. And that's the exact opposite of what Scripture teaches.

Bruce: Absolutely. That's why it's so important, friends, that you and I get our vision of who God is from the sufficiency of Scripture, not the information of our own minds. Scripture is sufficient to give us everything we need for life and godliness.

May it be so that God would be pleased to give us a clear vision of Himself and who we are in relationship to Him, so that we will say, “Thank You for the circumstances that are breeding in me and producing in me the robe of honor, the robe of—“

Men: Humility.

Bruce: May it be so for Jesus' sake.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Let's pray. Father, we thank You for the clarity of this truth. Father, forgive us for our ineptitude in trying to decipher what this means. May Your grace flow upon us through Your Spirit. Help us understand the knowledge that You're giving us. Don't let us try to think that we can figure this out by ourselves. Let us be absolutely dependent upon the work of Your Spirit to guide us into all truth, to exalt the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to make us humble for His sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen!” *(Applause.)*