

Fourth Sunday in Pentecost
June 9/12, 2005
1 Peter 5:6-11

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

God's Promises Cultivate the Christian Kind of Confidence

1. Confident Humility
2. Confident Vigilance
3. Confident Patience

^{NIV} 1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. ¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Confidence isn't always a virtue. Sometimes it's a hindrance to true faith. Think of the group to whom Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Bible says that audience was made up of people who were "**confident of their own righteousness.**" (Luke 18:9) That was a misplaced confidence. When the Apostle Paul told the story of his earlier life as a Pharisee, he claimed that he had numerous reasons to "**put confidence in the flesh.**" (Php. 3:4) He was referring to his pedigree, his achievements, and his zeal for legalistic righteousness. But then he acknowledged that this, too, was a false source of confidence, really nothing more than rubbish when compared with the value of knowing his Savior, Jesus. The wrong kind of confidence can be a problem. If I'm confident that I'm a good person in my own right, I won't see my need for a Savior. And if I'm confident that I can solve any problem I might encounter, I probably won't see much value in prayer.

So...what? Is confidence dangerous? Is a sense of confidence something that a Christian should avoid at all costs? The opposite of

confidence is uncertainty. Is that how God wants his people to live? Clearly not. These verses from the last chapter of 1 Peter are all about confidence: confidence that the Lord will take care of our anxieties, confidence that the Lord will enable us to put the devil to flight, and confidence that the Lord will give us the strength we need to persevere until the day he returns. The difference with this kind of confidence is that its source is not in us, but in God's promises. **God's Promises Cultivate the Christian Kind of Confidence.** This includes 1) confident humility, 2) confident vigilance, and 3) confident patience.

1. Confident humility

We begin with "confident humility." That sounds like a contradiction, doesn't it? Is it even possible to be confident and humble at the same time? Let Peter explain: *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.* These verses occur in a section where Peter has been addressing young men. Peter, though he was older now, surely remembered that false source of confidence that gifted young men sometimes have. It's a confidence that comes quite easily to those who perceive themselves to be capable, tough and smart. It can lead to a kind of swagger, to impatience and impertinence with older people, to saying things like, "No one tells me what to do!" That's why Peter wrote earlier, **"Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"** (5:5)

But in this verse Peter is encouraging humility before God. *"Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand."* That would be the supreme example of ill-advised confidence, wouldn't it; to think we can tell God what to do? And yet that does happen. "Why, God?" we ask. "Why do I have to bear this cross?" "Why do I have to suffer this opposition to my faith?" "Why did you let this happen to me?" Behind that question "Why?" lurks the belief that God could have done things better if he'd done them differently—if he'd consulted us first. Of course, in our calmer moments we know better. We can admit the foolishness of offering to relieve God of the responsibility of charting the course of our lives. Why, that would be disastrous! So we go back to entrusting the course of our lives to our omniscient, omnipotent God. And if it's his will to humble us somehow, to allow some kind of loss or reversal or suffering to come, well, then, we say with the hymn writer, ***"What God ordains is always good, his will is just and holy, As he directs my life for me, I follow meek and lowly."***

That's the humility. But where's the source of confidence? That comes, first, from hearing the Lord's promise to "*lift you up in due time.*" When the time is right, in God's time, when it serves our best interests and his glory, the God who humbled us will lift us up. Remember Joseph? He was humbled as a slave, then as a prisoner in Egypt, but later exalted to the second highest office in the land of Egypt. Or David? He was hunted through the length and breadth of Israel by King Saul, lacking food and even the most basic sense of security, but later exalted to the throne of Israel. If not here on earth, then most certainly when this life is over all those who trust in Jesus will be exalted to the company of the saints and angels around the throne of God. The knowledge that this exaltation is coming gives us confidence even in our most humbling times.

And there's another source of confidence for Christians here. It's in this wonderful invitation from God: "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" Praying is an exercise in humility, isn't it? When I pray, I acknowledge that there is a God who is greater than I am. I acknowledge that he has capabilities and knowledge that I don't have. But then to know that he cares for me, that my anxieties and worries are a matter of utmost concern to him, gives me confidence. God, after all, demonstrated that he cares about us in convincing fashion. Rather than writing us and the rest of fallen humanity off as a failed experiment, he planned our salvation. He arranged that Jesus would bear our sins in his body on the tree of the cross, so that we don't have to be anxious about facing God at the end of life, or anxious about being condemned to hell. He gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead so that we don't have to be anxious about death. And now he continues to invite, "If you're anxious about anything at all, throw it over to me and I will take your worries on me. I care for you." That's the kind of promise that cultivates confidence.

2. Confident vigilance

Now if there's one thing that ought to rattle anyone's confidence, it's the fact that there's a supernatural predator on the prowl, who is hungry, and hunting for us. That's precisely what Peter describes when he says here, "*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*" In the King James Version, this verse starts, "Be sober, be vigilant..." To be sober means to be self-controlled in the sense that we're not under the influence of something—alcohol, drugs, or anything that dulls the senses or leaves us spiritually sluggish. Peter must have

remembered his state of mind in Gethsemane when Jesus wanted him to watch and pray with him. Instead of watching and praying, Peter slept because, though his spirit was willing, his flesh was weak. Later, his lack of vigilance caused him to go where he didn't belong—into the courtyard of the high priest while Jesus was being arraigned nearby. He was overly confident in his ability to stand up for Jesus and ended up denying the very Lord he intended to confess no matter what.

But Peter is hardly alone at this. In our 21st century sophistication, we've pretty much lost the concept of a personal devil who is on a mission to devour us. I don't know that most Christians would put on their list of Top Ten Concerns that the devil is constantly plotting to deceive them. But he is. Lies are his native language. He's extremely deceptive and persuasive. He also happens to be tirelessly persistent. If he leaves us alone for a while, it's only because he has in mind to return at a more opportune time. Knowing this doesn't exactly make for confidence.

But listen to what Peter advises. "Resist him." He doesn't say, "Give up. Resistance is futile." No! He says, "Keep on resisting him" and then he explains how in the next words of the verse: "...standing firm in the faith." The devil isn't all-powerful. There are things he can't do. One of the things he can't do is devour someone who is standing firm in the faith, that is, in the Christian faith. As we stand firm in the conviction that Jesus, God's Son, healed us of our sin-sickness, Satan's accusations that we deserve nothing but hell don't stick in us. As we grow in our knowledge of the Christian faith, we become better able to detect the false teachings by which he'd like to separate us from Christ. As we become more aware of the role that suffering plays in the life of a Christian, we become less likely to succumb to that kind of disappointment with God which leads some people to abandon the faith. These are the ways in which we do what James encouraged in his epistle: **"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."** (4:7) This is the kind of confidence that God wants: That a vigilant Christian, armed with God's Word and certain of his salvation in Christ, can put the devil to flight.

3. Confident patience

This little letter of 1 Peter is all about suffering in the life of a believer. Peter mentions suffering in every chapter. He serves notice that suffering will inevitably come. In fact, he says suffering is allowed to come by God's will and we ought not to think that something strange is happening when we're called upon to suffer. God's way is to lead us through suffering to glory. It says that here: *"And the God of all*

grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." But believing that calls for patience.

Actually, in this section Peter says two things about suffering. When he says, "*Your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings,*" he wants his readers to know that suffering is the universal Christian experience, not some anomaly that they alone are experiencing. Christianity is, in a sense, a brotherhood of suffering, as we follow Jesus, our Brother, who suffered for us. And then Peter also says that the suffering will last only "*a little while.*" "Light and momentary" is what Paul calls our suffering in one place (2 Cor. 4:17). Even if our suffering lasted a lifetime, it would be only a little while when compared to the eternity that awaits. But ultimately the patience of those who continue to trust Jesus throughout their suffering will be vindicated. God is a gracious God. What he determined to do before Creation when he called us to his eternal glory, he will most certainly carry out. He will restore us and make us strong, firm and steadfast. If we know there's a purpose to our suffering, and if we know that there will eventually be an end to our suffering, we can be patient—confidently patient because we know what lies ahead.

So what about confidence? Is it helpful or a hindrance to us as Christians? There's no doubt that the wrong kind of confidence can pose a spiritual danger, but there's a Christian kind of confidence that the Bible encourages here. Peter says it's wise to be humble because God knows far more than we do, but we can be confident even while we're humble, because we know that he will answer our prayers and lift us up. Peter also says that it's wise to be vigilant because there's a powerful evil angel who poses a real threat to our souls. But here, too, we can be confident because the devil can be resisted and sent packing as we stand firm in our faith in Jesus. And, finally, patience is a wise course, too, because even while we concede that suffering is not enjoyable, we know that God is working through our sufferings, that there's an end to them when we finally and fully enjoy the eternal glory to which our gracious God has called us. Yes, we can be confident—humbly, vigilantly, patiently. Amen.