

1 Peter 5:8–11

Introduction

This morning, we come to the conclusion of the main body of Peter’s letter. (After these verses there’ll be just a short section of “final greetings.”) And what a perfect, wonderful conclusion this will be to all that we’ve seen over the last ten months. We already knew it would be a perfect conclusion because it’s the inspired word of God, but this is also one of those cases where we *see* and *feel* its perfection immediately. Peter starts off His conclusion with these two “rapid-fire” commands:

I. 1 Peter 5:8a — Be sober-minded [*nepho*]; be watchful [*gregoreo*].

We can already feel that there’s a sense of urgency in the shortness of these commands. Whereas before Peter would have elaborated, now he’s already done all the explaining and so he simply repeats the command that he started out with at the very beginning. Remember all the way back in chapter one, verse 13:

- 1 Peter 1:13 — Therefore, preparing your minds for action, **and being sober-minded**, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The call to be sober-minded is set against the backdrop of the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It’s because we live with our eyes to the future that we’re to be sober-minded, now, in the present. In 1 Peter 4, Peter says again:

- 1 Peter 4:7 — The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled **and sober-minded** for the sake of your prayers.

See again how the call to be sober-minded is seen in light of the nearness of the end – the nearness of that goal to which all of history has been moving. To be sober-minded, then, is to be sane and rational; it’s to live in light of the facts of reality. And we know the reality is that we’re a people of the end-times who are waiting now for the revealing of the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ. *Therefore*, we are not to be intoxicated, or in love with this world or any of the things in this world. As John says, “The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (1 Jn. 2:15-17) This is what Peter has been at such pains to tell us throughout this letter. So right after calling us to be sober-minded in chapter one Peter goes on to say:

- 1 Peter 1:14–15 — As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Peter writes in chapter two:

- 1 Peter 2:11 — Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

And right before calling us to be sober-minded in chapter four, Peter writes:

- 1 Peter 4:1-2 — Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

Remember how Peter sets up this really extreme contrast between human passions on the one hand and the will of God on the other. We're not to see life in terms of neutrals and grays – so that as long as we avoid the bad extreme, we're fine. We are to see the entirety of our lives as **either** an active pursuit of human passions **or** as an active, diligent, careful, and purposeful pursuit of the holy will of God in every aspect of living. That's what it means to be sober-minded – not carried away and intoxicated with the ways of this present world, but living as those who know that this world is passing away and who have set our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Be sober-minded, then! And **be watchful**. Here's another word that reminds us right away of the times that we live in relative to the end. (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32-34; Rev. 16:15) Remember how Jesus exhorted His disciples:

- Matthew 24:42-44 — Therefore, **stay awake [be watchful]**, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have **stayed awake** and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must **be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Remember the parable of the five foolish virgins who fell asleep while they were waiting for the bridegroom and how Jesus concluded with these words:

- Matthew 25:13 — **Watch** therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

To “watch,” here, doesn't mean to be always watching the sky but rather to be living in such a way as to always be wholly prepared and ready for the coming of Christ. The true Christian life isn't just about *what* we're doing, but *why* we're doing it – it's about loving and longing for the coming of the one who will save us (2 Tim. 4:8), and showing this loving and longing by our sober-mindedness and watchfulness. (cf. 1 Pet. 1:8-9) In 1 Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul uses the same two words that Peter uses here at the end of his letter:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 — Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us **keep awake [gregoreo]** and **be sober [nepho]**. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us **be sober**, having put on the

breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, be sober-minded; be watchful! Be always spiritually alert and on guard. We must not be dulled, or sluggish, or drowsy, but always diligent and zealous in our pursuit of the will of God – of holiness and love for one another. Be sober-minded; be watchful!

Now we know that in the eyes of the world, and for that matter, in much of the “professing” church, a sober-minded and watchful Christian is the worst kind of “wet blanket.” What’s a wet blanket? The dictionary says it’s someone who spoils [or at least dampens] other people’s fun by failing to join in with or by disapproving of their activities.” (Eph. 5:11-12) So just the existence of a truly sober-minded and watchful Christian is a constant, living rebuke to the world and a reminder to the world of the coming judgment. (cf. Phil. 1:27-28; Jn. 3:19-21) And so how should we expect the world to respond to those whose very existence is a rebuke and a warning? Should we be surprised if we’re rejected, if we’re mocked, if we’re treated unjustly? What did Peter say? “Do *not* be surprised”! (4:12) So using his typical extreme, “black and white” language, Peter says in chapter four:

- 1 Peter 4:3–4 — The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.

To put it plainly, it’s not popular to be a sober-minded and watchful Christian – one who truly lives today in light of the coming of Christ and the final judgment, and it never, ever will be. These are the Christians who need to lighten up, who need to stop raining on other people’s parade. And when they don’t, there will usually, eventually, be a price to pay. Peter has helped us to see these sufferings at the hand of the world as a sharing in the sufferings of Christ and so a guarantee that we will one day share with Him in his glory. He’s also helped us to see these sufferings at the hand of the world as the fires of the final judgment already burning now, in the church, testing and purifying God’s people. But now Peter wants us to see in these sufferings something very different:

II. 1 Peter 5:8b — Be sober-minded; be watchful. *Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

Brothers and sisters, perhaps we just need to stop, here, and remember that the devil is real. We do have a real enemy and adversary of our souls who is pictured here very vividly – not just as a lion, but as a *roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*. That’s scary imagery isn’t it? In the Old Testament, Israel’s enemies (both without and within) are also pictured as roaring, devouring lions.

- Jeremiah 50:17 (cf. Jer. 51:34-39) — “Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by **lions**. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has gnawed his bones.

- Ezekiel 22:25 — The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a **roaring lion** tearing the prey; they have devoured human lives.

Peter's word for devoured is a word that means to "swallow up"; it's a picture of total and complete destruction. So once again, in the Old Testament the enemies of Israel are pictured as those who seek to swallow her up. (cf. Ps 35:25; 124:2-3; Isa. 49:19; Hos. 8:8)

- Lamentations 2:16 — All your enemies rail against you; they hiss, they gnash their teeth, they cry: "We have **swallowed** her! Ah, this is the day we longed for; now we have it; we see it!"
- Jeremiah 51:34 (cf. 51:44) — Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me; he has crushed me; he has made me an empty vessel; he has **swallowed** me like a monster; he has filled his stomach with my delicacies; he has rinsed me out.

Not only do we need to remember that we have an enemy, but we need to always remember what his intentions and purposes are. He prowls around, just like a roaring lion, seeking someone to swallow up. The point here isn't just a physical, temporal destruction, but a spiritual, and eternal destruction.

Satan has different strategies that he uses. One strategy is to entice us and lure us, and numb us and desensitize us with the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. (Mat. 13:22)

Remember what the Apostle Paul says:

- 1 Timothy 6:9-10 — Those who desire to be rich (those who crave more than their daily food and clothing) fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

It's not a wise thing to play with the devil! But the strategy of our adversary that Peter has in mind here is different – it's the pressure of rejection, or scorn, or persecution and suffering as the *price* of our watchfulness and sober-mindedness. (cf. Mat. 13:20-21) Satan wants to convince us that being sober-minded and watchful, that being the perpetual wet blanket on the world's party and then being rejected or scorned or persecuted as a result just isn't worth it. And so behind all the Christian's suffering in this world, what Peter says we are to *see* is a prowling, roaring lion, seeking to swallow us up – seeking not just a temporal and physical, but an eternal and spiritual destruction.

Think of Satan's strategy with Jesus. First, he tried and tempted Him in the wilderness with the ease and the pleasures of the world. (Mat. 4:1-11) Then, he tried and tempted Him in the garden with the prospect of suffering and death and all the powers of darkness. (Luke 22:3-4, 41-43, 53) All along, Satan's goal was to destroy Jesus' trust in and reliance upon His Father and so to cause Him to compromise in His obedience to the Father's will. So, brothers and sisters, let us worship Jesus for the victory that he has gained for us. Psalm 22 is a Psalm of Jesus in His suffering and then in his vindication.

- Psalm 22:1, 7–8, 16–18, 22 (cf. Mat. 27:46; 27:39-43; 27:35; Lk. 23:35; Heb. 2:11-12) — My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? ... All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; “He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” ... For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.

So with this in mind, listen to these words which are also from Psalm 22 and which Peter probably has in mind here in chapter five:

- Psalm 22:12–13 — Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and **roaring lion**.

For Peter, and also for Jesus in the garden and on the cross, the ravening, roaring lion was not ultimately the human persecutors who only wanted a temporal, physical destruction, but Satan himself, who was seeking something far, far worse. And so by exposing the roaring lion who lies **behind** all of the Christian’s worldly sufferings, Peter actually exhorts us and encourages us to be **all the more** sober-minded and **all the more** watchful. As he exhorts us, Peter must certainly have been remembering how Jesus once exhorted him, with James and John:

- Matthew 26:38–41 — [Jesus] said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and **watch [gregoreo]** with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not **watch [gregoreo]** with me one hour? **Watch [gregoreo]** and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Be sober-minded! Be watchful! Be always spiritually alert, prayerful, and on guard. We must not be dulled, or sluggish, or drowsy, but always diligent and zealous in our pursuit of the will of God – of holiness and of love for one another. Peter doesn’t describe the adversary so vividly and dramatically to terrify us, but rather to motivate us to stay firm, trusting in God. And so he says in verse 9:

III. 1 Peter 5:9a — Resist him, firm [*stereos*] in your faith...

As Christians, we **are** called to resistance – not of our human persecutors, but rather of our adversary, the devil. And how is it that we resist the devil? Peter says, “Resist him, **firm in your faith**.” (cf. 1:5, 7, 9, 21) One commentator really just sums this up beautifully:

- “The call to resistance does not summon believers to do Herculean acts on God’s behalf. Believers are not encouraged to gather all their resources to do great works for God. No, resisting the devil means that believers remain firm in their faith, that is, in their trust in God. Believers triumph over the devil as they continue to trust God, believing that he truly cares

for them and will sustain them until the end. Perseverance until the last day is accomplished from first to last by faith.” (Schreiner)

What is the source of all our sober-mindedness and watchfulness? It’s ultimately our **trust** in and our faith in God and the promise of His salvation when Christ comes again. What is the means of resisting the roaring lion who seeks to swallow us up? It is to firmly continue to **trust** in God and His promise of the grace that will be brought to us at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Remember that Satan’s goal was to destroy Jesus’ trust in and reliance upon His Father and as a result to cause Him to compromise in His obedience to the Father’s will. So listen, now, to the words of the Servant of the Lord—the Messiah—in Isaiah chapter fifty:

- Isaiah 50:6–9 (cf. Mat. 26:67; 27:26) — I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint [LXX: “I set my face as a solid (*stereos**) rock”], and I know that I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

What does it mean when Jesus sets His face **firmly**, like a **rock** (Heb, “like a flint”)? It doesn’t mean that He’s unfeeling and stoic and resigned to His fate. Remember how Psalm 22 is ultimately the Psalm of Jesus when His persecutors opened wide their mouths at Him like a ravening, roaring lion. So it’s also Psalm 22 that reveals to us the prayers and supplications of Jesus with loud cries and tears (Heb. 5:7). Listen in these words to the prayers of our suffering Savior:

- Psalm 22:19–21 — But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! **Save me from the mouth of the lion!**

When Jesus sets His face firmly like a rock (“like a flint”) it doesn’t mean He’s unfeeling or resigned to His fate; it *means* that He absolutely will not budge or be moved at all from His **trust** in God’s word and God’s promise of salvation. And so even as Peter calls us to resist the devil, **firm in our faith**, so the very next words in Isaiah chapter fifty are these:

- Isaiah 50:10 — Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

IV. 1 Peter 5:8–9 — 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 suffering are being completed by your brotherhood throughout the world.**

One way for us to stay firm in faith – trusting in the name of the Lord and relying on our God – is to remember that we have brothers and we have sisters all throughout this world who are also resisting the devil with us, and standing firm in faith with us. When Peter says that the same

* This adjective appears only two other times in the NT and only 16 times in the OT.

kinds of suffering are “being completed”[†] (or “accomplished”), he reminds us that these sufferings can only last as long as God wills (1:6; 3:17) – until the day of Christ’s return. And so when Peter uses the language of “being completed, he’s also emphasizing the faithfulness and the perseverance of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Peter’s main point, here, isn’t just that lots of other people happen to be suffering just like we are, but rather that we have brothers and sisters everywhere who are standing with us firm in faith. I love how Paul says to the church at Corinth:

- 1 Corinthians 1:2 — ...to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints **together with all** those who in **every** place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours...

And so we’re encouraged and strengthened to stand firm in faith *together* – to believe and trust in God’s word *together*. And now we come to the closing words of Peter’s conclusion:

V. 1 Peter 5:10–11 — And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him belongs dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Already, Peter has been echoing words and themes from previous parts of his letter (be **sober-minded**; be firm in **faith**), but now it seems like Peter gathers up every major theme in his letter thus far and condenses it all into this single, resounding crescendo of glory and praise. First, Peter reaches all the way back to chapter one, verse 6 where we read these words:

- 1 Peter 1:6 — ...in this you greatly rejoice, though now for **a little while**, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.

And now here at the end, he says again: “After you have suffered **a little while**...” What does Peter mean by a “little while”? Is it a few days? A few months? A few years? It’s the duration of our entire life on this earth before Christ returns. *That’s* the “little while,” because the glory that follows is eternal. The point of Peter’s twice repeated “a little while” at the opening and at the close of his letter is to fix our hope on **ETERNAL glory**. And so now Peter gathers up the themes that we’ve seen throughout this letter of God’s “**grace**” (1:13; 4:10; 5:5), and God’s “**calling**” (1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:9), and the “**glory**” to be revealed at Christ’s appearing (1:7-8, 21; 4:13-14; 5:1, 4), and our union with Christ, and from all these themes all put together he shows us the true **guarantee** of our hope (cf. 1:3, 13, 21; 3:15): it’s not *our* sober-mindedness and it’s not *our* watchfulness, **essential** as these things are, but God Himself – the one who even now is keeping us and guarding us **through faith**. (cf. 1:5)

- “Having suffered a little while, the God **of all grace**, who has **called you to his eternal glory in Christ**, will **HIMSELF restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish** you.”

Peter piles up four different words that all mean the same thing in order to assure us that the work that **God** has begun, **HE** will complete. We are weak, but **He** is strong. We are frail, but **He** is powerful. We are helpless, but **He** is sovereign. The roaring lion is real, but we **will** resist Him

[†] Cf. Rom. 15:28; 2 Cor. 7:1; 8:6, 11; Gal. 3:3 (perfected); Phil. 1:6; Heb. 8:5 (“erect”)

firm in faith. How do we know this? Because **He** will do it. *He will do it. He will surely do it.* (1 Thess. 5:24) He will save us. And so we lift up our hands and our hearts to heaven and we praise and worship Him with Peter! “To him belongs the dominion[‡] [the rule and authority and the power to save] forever and ever. **AMEN.**”[§]

[‡] *kratos*; Cf. 1 Pet. 4:11; 5:6 (*krataios*)

[§] For a wonderful illustration and example of all these truths, see 2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18.