

Hope PCA Sermon: May 19, 2024

*“The Mighty God Cares for You” (1 Peter 5:6–7)*

Rev. Martin Hedman

©2024 Hope Presbyterian Church

This morning, continuing in 1 Peter, we are getting near the end. This morning we'll look at 1 Peter 5, verses 6 and 7. 1 Peter 5, verses 6 and 7, the living God's very living Word to us. So let us be attentive to it.

*<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*

Thus far, this reading from God's holy, infallible, inerrant Word. May it be fruitful for us this morning. Please be seated, and let me pray for us briefly as we come before the Word.

Oh God, do not let us be hearers of the Word only, but also doers of the Word. So again, we ask that you would open our eyes and our ears, send your Spirit to lead us into your truth as we hear from your Word this morning. May it go out, not return to you empty, but accomplish everything for which you have sent it. We pray in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord and our savior. Amen.

One of the things that's been a common story, a common theme in our culture, in our society in recent months and years, is the rising number of people who are experiencing some form of anxiety or depression. It seems to be rampant, especially among our youth. A couple data points I was able to find from the World Health Organization, a report that the COVID pandemic increased the prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide by 25%. 25% increase in people experiencing some sort of anxiety or depression. Loneliness due to social distancing and quarantine, combined with being afraid of getting infected or passing on that infection to someone else, leading to sickness, maybe even up to the point of death, were very significant factors contributing to that 25% increase.

But it's not just COVID, and it's not just recent times either. The polling organization Gallup has been polling people on depression and anxiety since 2015, asking two questions. The first question is: Has a doctor or nurse ever told you that you have depression? And then the second question they ask is: Do you currently have, or are you currently being treated for, depression? Since 2015, the number of people answering yes to the first question (some medical professional has told you you have depression) has increased from 19.6% of people responding to 29%. Three out of ten people — it's almost a 50% increase. That's from 2015 to 2023, so nine years of polling. The percentage of people answering yes to the second question (are you being treated for this, do you have it currently, and are you being treated for it) has increased from 10.5% in 2015 to 17.8% in 2023. My friends, that is almost a 70% increase.

So think about it, as we're gathered here today, even in our small congregation, if we're any reflection of the world around us (and we probably are, reasonably), three out of ten people

here have had a medical professional tell them that they have depression. And one out of five people here are being treated in some way, shape, or form for depression. It could be medicinal, it could be counseling of some kind or another. Three out of ten told that they're depressed. One out of five being treated for it. Just looking around the room. I bring up those statistics in part because this is increasingly part of our public conversation. And in part because anxiety and depression are here in the church itself and in our own church community.

I bring it up also, of course, because that's in the text, isn't it? Two short verses and one very clear instruction. "*Cast all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you*". Spirit-inspired instruction for us and for our lives.

Last week in verses one to five we saw how Peter told us to behave as leaders and followers in the church, finishing by commanding us (and it was an imperative, it was a command), telling us to engage in mutual humility with a promise of God's grace to those who are humble. That's the horizontal aspect of life, right? Being humble with and toward one another. Here again Peter calls us (it's an imperative, it's a command again), but this time to humility before God himself. Here's that vertical relationship, right, with God. Humble toward and with one another, humble before God as well. And then Peter gives us instruction about anxiety. Really that's what I want to cover this morning. That call to humility and then that instruction that he gives about anxiety.

So first of all in verse 6 he says, what he's saying is: because God gives grace to the humble but opposes the proud, for this reason, therefore, "*humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God*." This is an exhortation that is, again, an imperative. It's a command, just like the previous verses, 1 to 5, had the instruction to shepherd, to submit, and to clothe ourselves in humility. This is not a mere helpful suggestion from Peter (you know, this might be a good idea if you humbled yourself before God.). No, he's saying, "Do it." This is required of Christians. "*Humble yourselves before the mighty hand (or under the mighty hand) of God*."

And you know, at first glance that might seem kind of obvious: "Of course I would humble myself. God is God, right? I'm not." We recognize, if we're paying attention, the greatness of God and our lowliness in comparison to Him. It's a regular prominent theme in Scripture. From the very beginning we see God as Creator and mankind being created by God. Our very existence is completely dependent on God's powerful and creative goodness shown towards us. We talk in Reformed circles about how apprehension and acceptance of the basic idea that there is a God and that He is Creator, that there is a God and I am not Him, is a key step on the path to wisdom. So certainly the greatness of God and our humility before Him is, I would think, basic Christianity. And so is Peter just, you know, kind of repeating old news? "Well, that's old hat. We know that already." And indeed, it may be fairly basic teaching and a fairly basic essential command, but the way Peter presents it to us should capture our attention. "*Humble yourselves, therefore,*" he says, "*under the mighty hand of God*." What's he doing there? Humble ourselves before the great Creator God? Sure, that seems obvious. But be humble under "*the mighty hand of God*." This is an interesting phrase that Peter uses here. It's the only time this phrase appears in the New Testament.

But this phrase, or ones like it, occur repeatedly in the Old Testament. Just a few examples. In Exodus 13 verse 9, the Hebrews are commanded to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days as a reminder that it was with the mighty, powerful hand of God that they were led out of Egypt. That theme is repeated over and over in Scripture. In Deuteronomy 4 verse 34, God's people are reminded as they're about to enter into the promised land of God's saving work for them. And the question is asked of them: "Has any other god ventured to take a people for himself by a mighty hand as the Lord your God did for you?" Of course, that's a rhetorical question. No, no other God has done that. "Your God, by a mighty hand, has done it for you," is the reminder from Moses. Repeatedly in Deuteronomy, the people are reminded of what God did in bringing them out of slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand. Solomon, as he's praying at the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8:42, notes that because of this temple, because of the word that goes out from that temple, people afar off will hear of God's mighty hand. In Ezekiel 20 verses 33 and 34, the prophet notes, prophetically of course, that God will restore Israel with a mighty hand, and with the same mighty hand God's wrath will be poured out.

We see the hand of God used in the New Testament, but again the mighty or the strong hand of God is only used by Peter here in verse 6. He's calling to mind, he's recollecting for us, and asking us to remember as well this repeated description of God's omnipotence used throughout the Old Testament to describe God, especially, particularly His saving work on behalf of Israel. And that saving work is described historically: look what He did in bringing you out of Egypt, in the present, This nation here, this temple, will cause people far off to hear of the mighty hand of God, but also the future, the restoration of God's people and His mighty hand executed in wrath.

Peter recalls this theme, but now he applies it or presents it to us in relation to the church itself. God hasn't saved you and I from Egypt. God has saved you and me from a far greater and a far worse slavery, right? Our enslavement to our own sin. Think of that exhaustive list that Jesus gave as we heard from the Word this morning. Peter's already written about this salvation and how we were born again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ back in chapter 1 verse 3. And of course, resurrection implies death. And that death paid the full price for our sins. Jesus himself taking the judgment, the penalty that we deserve. But if we've died with him, we rise to new life with him. Peter says this is God's merciful gift to us in chapter 2 verse 10. And also that the righteous Son would suffer for sin that He did not commit (chapter 3 verse 18): "the righteous for the unrighteous so that he might bring us to God." And the day is coming when Christ returns and ushers in the new heavens and the new earth, when those who have come to Christ Jesus in repentance and faith will enter into the presence of God forever. Jesus ushering us into the very presence of God.

And again, as we think about Pentecost Sunday, in the meantime, Jesus has poured out His Spirit. Jesus accomplishes our salvation, the Spirit applies the work of salvation to us in raising us from death to life, calling us to repentance and faith, giving us the gift of faith, working in our hearts and minds to seek to do the will of our Heavenly Father, and strengthens us to be actually able to do that will. All this great saving work of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for us is captured in Peter's use of this phrase, "the mighty hand of God." The mighty hand of God has saved you, Christian, in a way more profound and powerful than

bringing Israel out of Egypt. They taught us a song in Sunday school: “we are weak, but He is strong.” Our God, says Isaiah chapter 63 verse 1, is mighty and strong to save. *“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God and at the proper time (at the right time) He will exalt you.”*

Now Peter’s been writing to us about suffering and persecution. He’s told us along the way that God will avenge those who persecute His people unjustly. And we understand this as referring to the end of all things when Christ comes again. The dead are raised to life and every single person is judged. Our enemies, God’s enemies, in the end are going to receive their just punishment. But God’s people will be exalted, counted among the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ Himself, considered children of God, the very body of Christ, the temple of the living God. Our glorified bodies will enter into eternity and never die again. Life will be full of peace and joy and love and happiness. All worry and fear and pain and sorrow, depression and anxiety, completely and permanently taken away, gone.

And this, of course, forms the backdrop for what Peter says next in verse 7: *“cast your anxieties on God for He cares for you.”* He cares for you. Casting (in verse 7) and being humble (in verse 6) are connected grammatically. One follows after the other. They go together. So casting our anxieties, the way Peter writes it, is an aspect of part of the way we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

Now as we get into this topic, I want to say this: I know(believe me I know) anxiety and depression can indeed arise from certain physical causes, some sort of imbalance in the body of one kind or another, chemicals or hormones or whatever it might be. And I know that there are many Christians out there who treat anxiety or depression as only some sort of mental or spiritual condition that we can somehow work ourselves out of. But, you know, I can think of it as: think about something as simple as the common cold. You get a bad cold, you feel a little grumpy, you feel a little down. Whether it’s the cold, the flu, sick or fatigued or injured in some way or another, physical changes in us can cause emotional, mental reactions. Man, go without sleep for a couple days and see how that feels. Our brains don’t work well when we’re sick or fatigued, and we know this. And so it shouldn’t be surprising that in some cases, depression or anxiety can have a physical root cause.

Still, all that being true (and it is true, I believe), it doesn’t exempt us from the command, and that’s where it can get a little bit tricky for us. Doesn’t exempt us from the command: *“cast your anxieties upon God.”* Medicine of one kind or another, treatment of one kind or another, then it is not so much a cure, but it may be an aid, a tool that God might allow us to use to help us do what Peter is commanding us to do here: cast your anxieties upon the Lord. In fact, the picture there in the word is: just take your anxieties and throw them on God. It’s the same kind of word that’s used when Jesus is entering into Jerusalem there on Palm Sunday, and the people throw their garments on the donkey so that he can ride it, casting them upon this donkey so that the Lord can ride it into Jerusalem. Or picture a saddle being put on a horse. I’ve only been horse riding a couple, three times, but I’ve seen a lot of Westerns. I’ve seen them throw that saddle on the back of the horse, right? That’s the idea. Take that thing, heavy, lug it up there and throw it on the back. Cast your anxieties upon God. Do you have anxieties? Do you have worry? Heave it up upon the Lord God.

There are things that Peter assumes here. One is: doesn't this text kind of tell us that he assumes we're going to have worry and anxiety and depression in life? He's not saying: don't have them. Paul, for example, was anxious for the Corinthian church, we're told in 2 Corinthians 11:28. But what Peter is saying is: when you do have them, when you are worried, when you are anxious, the proper thing to do: heave them up upon the Lord. Cast them upon Him. Jesus Himself calls us to do this in Matthew 11 verses 28 and 29: "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden. I will give you rest, and you will find rest for your soul." Paul encourages us to "rejoice in the Lord at all times". Rejoice in Jesus, who has saved us from sin and death, from God's wrath and punishment, and in that we have rest for our souls. God will, as Peter says, exalt us at the right time. And so it's in this context that Paul himself also commands us "not to be anxious about anything," (Philippians 4) "but in everything, by prayer and supplication, make your requests known to God." Peter says: "Heave your anxieties, cast them upon the Lord."

Paul says to do this by praying. Do this in everything. Think about prayer. Prayer has a way of calming us. Prayer has a way of settling us down. For me, it's a dangerous thing to try to pray as I get in bed to go to sleep. I'll be out like that. I mean, normally I don't have trouble falling asleep anyway, but prayer relaxes us. It calms us. And I think what Paul is saying "in everything by prayer and supplication, make your requests known to God", is that whatever it might be, whatever you might worry about, whatever you might be anxious about, whenever it arises: go to God in prayer. Heave your anxieties on the One who cares for you. And in Him, find medicine for your heart, your mind, and soul in that simple act of prayer.

You know, how often do we Christians admit that we don't pray enough? This means that God gives us spiritual medicine for helping us with our problems, and it's like we just let it sit in that medicine cabinet and gather dust. We live in a society today, in my opinion, we over-medicate. Got a problem? Here's some medicine. Take this. It'll make you better physically, whatever it might be. Again, sometimes that's needed, sometimes it's necessary. But why are we so ready to pour medicine into our bodies? And so reluctant to use the medicine that God has given to us? Do you believe He cares for you? Do you rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ who saved you from your sins? Is not that the supreme example of Him caring for us? "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." He cares for you. Cast your anxieties upon Him. Just as surely as Jesus took on Himself our sins on the cross, dealt with them completely, Peter is saying, He will take our anxieties and bear them with us and for us.

In this life, as we await the coming of Christ Jesus, we continue to struggle with sin, don't we? It's a burden we continually bear. It's frustrating. It's that Paul's words in Romans 7: "the things I don't want to do, I do. The things I do want to do, I don't do." It's the story of the Christian life. God sent His Spirit to help us continue to put off sin and to put on Christ, and over time we grow and mature in our understanding of these things and our obedience to God. Would it also not be true that while we continue to worry and have anxiety, that God would help us in this area of life as well? That the Spirit who's been given to comfort us, the Comforter, would actually do what His name says and give comfort to more and more ease those anxieties and find increasing peace and joy in God and in His Christ.

We can't be cavalier about either sin or worry and anxiety or ignore the reality of the struggle. It is a struggle. And I'm not saying anxiety and sin are the same thing. They're not. Nor am I saying anxiety is a sin. I think anxiety, worry, is a reflection of the fact that our faith struggles. Sometimes we doubt. Sometimes it causes us to worry. But just as we continue to sin (and there's the command: don't sin), we continue to struggle with anxiety (and there's the command: don't be anxious). We're not in trouble if we're anxious. We're not going to hell if we're anxious. But God is setting before us an opportunity: "Cast your cares upon Me, because I care about you." If battling against sin is hard (and it is), the struggle with anxiety is going to be hard as well, and for some more than others.

Just as we can't deal with sin by ourselves, neither can we deal with worry or anxiety by ourselves. In both cases, we have to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. With sin, we have to admit it. We have to admit that we need God's help and accept the help that He offers in Jesus Christ. And I think it's true in anxiety as well. This is why the command, I think, is connected to *"humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God."* I have to trust that He's gonna take care of me, even in the most difficult and trying of circumstances, where I have (quite honestly) a right, if you will, right, to worry and to be anxious. Sometimes there's legitimate cause to be worried about something, and yet the command comes: "Do not be anxious. Cast your cares upon Me because I care for you."

So our hope and strength in both of these situations: it's not in ourselves, our own will, our own strength, to persevere and make it go away, but in Christ Jesus, who defeated sin on the one hand, and in whom we have peace, and then from Him, as He promised, we can find true rest for our weary souls. So, my friends, hear from Peter, our elder brother. Cast your anxieties on Him, for He cares for you. He cares for you. He sent His son to save you. I am weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me. And yes, Jesus loves you. He cares for you. Cast your anxieties upon Him. It's not easy, but it's what we're called to do. May God grant us strength and perseverance to do the very things He's called us to do.

Let me pray for us.

Indeed, O Lord, we do ask that You would grant us strength to do what You've called us to do, for our thoughts to be modeled after in harmony with Your thoughts. There are many things in life about which we have cause to worry, to be anxious. In those times, O Lord, remind us to turn our hearts and minds to You and to throw these things upon You. Remind us how You care for us. Remind us of Your saving work accomplished by Your mighty hand and that that same mighty hand protects and cares for and watches over and tends us in everything. We forget. Remind us. Teach us. Help us to learn. Strengthen us, O Lord, when we are weak. Forgive us when we are not strong. Guide us in Your paths. We believe, O Lord. Help our unbelief. And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.