

An Antidote to Suffering

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 August 2022

Preacher: Florence Mene

[0 : 00] What a privilege it is to share God's Word with you today, brothers and sisters. I want to start with a personal story. It happened when I was about 16, so that would be about five years ago.

Or something like that. I'm not good with numbers, so bear with me. It was back in my home country. And I live in a mountainous town, but I've never been up the mountain itself. And back then we had no equipment, nothing.

We even had some old shoes, and a friend of mine and I decided to go to the top of the mountain. And we didn't know what we could expect, but we were told that once you reach the top, you could actually see the sea of another town in the horizon.

Now we'd never been to the sea either before, so it would have been a grand sight. Of course, we had no one to guide us. We had no idea how to get there. So, after a few arduous hours, we made it to the top.

It was so difficult. And then what did we see? Another top in the horizon. And by that time, we hadn't calculated how long it would take us, but we hadn't calculated more than like two hours or so.

[1 : 15] And so we were in trouble. What should we do now? So we made it down below to another valley and up the second top of the mountain.

And there it was. Another top. It seemed like they would never end. And as I was thinking about the sermon today, I was reminded of this story, because little did I know at that time that our life is like that in terms of suffering.

It's like a top. You don't see what's behind it. And you think, well, if I reach up there, I'm going to be happy. And you do. You feel exhilarated. But then you see another top, another top, and another top.

Now, when Peter was writing this letter, it takes only 10 minutes to read. It's fun reading it. Go through it if you have time afterwards.

When he was writing this letter, he wrote to different churches scattered around Turkey, back then Asia Minor. And they were not rich.

[2 : 23] Most of them were poor, slaves. They had difficulties, economic, political, because now they represented a small sect that stood against the cult of Caesar.

It made exclusive claims about truth. And these people had no power, basically. They could be easily cancelled, not out of Twitter or Facebook for having the wrong opinion.

But much worse than that, they would lose their jobs, their livelihoods, and sometimes their lives.

And Peter wrote this letter to encourage them on this path of suffering that they were going through. And the reason that that letter still exists to this day is because it is still valid. Because we, in every age, as Christians, face suffering of different kinds.

And we always need encouragement on our path to the time when Jesus returns. And puts an end to all suffering.

[3 : 25] Until then, we need encouragement. And that's what Peter is doing today. We shall focus on only two of those verses. Verses 6 and 7. And I want us to basically look at this through a basic title.

An antidote to suffering. There are four parts of this. Antidote. First, we shall look at what it is. Secondly, what it does.

Third, what it consists of. And finally, why it works. First, what it is.

What is this antidote? The antidote to suffering that Peter mentions is humility. Humble yourselves, therefore. Now, if you look at it in the Greek, it's a passive term.

Which means it's easily understood that it is not something that you do. It's something that you accept in your life. It can also be active, like Peter does earlier in his letter.

[4 : 30] But here particularly, he's saying, accept your humble status. Now, they were already, as Christians, facing so many difficulties because of who they were at that time.

Because they were, like I said, they were not just poor and without political connections. But they represented a sect that stood against everything around them.

Making the exclusive claim of truth and also of power. That there is another person and not Caesar, who is the Lord. Now, Peter is saying, I know that you're suffering.

I know what you're going through. Because I'm going through the same thing. But you know what? You have to accept your humble status. Now, back then, you know about Stoicism.

There were the Stoics who would say, look, if you cannot change the situation, you have to accept it. And sometimes don't even mind it too much, because that too shall pass. So, man up.

[5 : 36] Pull yourself off your bootstraps. Do something about it. Don't cry. Don't weep. Accept reality as it is. And in the face of reality, be strong, indifferent, and you will make it.

Be a hero. That's not what Peter is saying. When he says, accept your humble status. And he's not even saying, well, just resign to the hand of fate.

There is nothing you can do about it. No, what he's saying is, humble yourselves. Because humility is the first path towards something great.

And that's point two. What it does. What it does is, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may lift you up in due time.

So, Peter could have also said, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and he will do this.

[6 : 44] Which would have been completely true. But he wants to be clear that by adding in order that we understand that exaltation is not simply the result of humility.

It is actually its purpose. God is not weak. The reason we are suffering sometimes is not understood by any of us.

Sometimes we'll never understand it. Except to say that we live in a fallen world. We live by making some wrong choices sometimes, or we live because of other people's wrong choices in difficult circumstances.

But he's saying, there is no path, other path to exaltation except through suffering. And it is something that is not just said or valid for people at church.

It's valid for everyone, actually. Even for those who are unbelievers, they know that if they want to get somewhere, there is no pain without gain. But this is much more important and much more true for us because what Peter is saying is that exaltation will certainly happen, but not because of your efforts.

[7 : 56] Because if it were up to us, we know how many times we failed and would have failed and failed time and time again. God is not powerless. He is what?

He is powerful. Humble yourselves under his mighty hand. You know how many times that's used in the New Testament? Just once, right here. You know how many times it's used in the Old?

Quite often. And you know in what kind of context? In the context of Exodus. The letter of Peter is written to those who are foreigners, who are exiles.

That's how Peter calls us. He calls us like as if we were Jewish people living in the diaspora. People who were scattered because of the exile and never returned back to Israel.

But who were looking forward to the second exodus. To that exodus that was going to happen when the Messiah was going to return. It hadn't yet happened for them.

[8 : 53] But they were expecting him to return. They had no idea that Jesus had arrived. And Peter is saying, we, you are exiles.

You are living in your own country, but perhaps you feel like foreigners. You feel like exiles. And that's natural. The moment you become a Christian, you realize certain things about life that you didn't before.

And you realize that in a certain sense when you make the choice to follow Christ, you become part of a family of people. But also, you're treated as foreigners by those who are maybe your own family.

And you feel like a foreigner in your own place of work. At your own school. There is something that now makes you understand that this place is wonderful, but it is not my home.

So what do I do when suffering knocks on the door? I want to do something. I need to do something. And Peter is saying, no.

[10:01] At this moment, when you suffer because you're a Christian. And I would venture to say, when you suffer as a Christian. Because the principle is the same.

Whenever we suffer, we realize that we need something more that we don't have. And the moment we suffer, we feel like we need to do something about it. It is our job to do something about it.

But in so doing sometimes, that suffering takes us away from God rather than to Him. And Peter is saying, just humble yourself under God's mighty hand. Like Israel did.

Back when. In the desert. For 40 years. They didn't know exactly where they were going. They didn't know when they would be arriving. And neither did Moses, who was leading them.

But God fed them daily. Took care of them. Through many sufferings. As foreigners in different lands, He took them home.

[11:00] Peter doesn't use his words unintentionally. He reminds us that now that Jesus has arrived, We are exiles on a trip, on a long journey home.

If we lower ourselves before Him, He's going to bring us home. So what does it do? What does humility do? It's exaltation.

In due time. Now, there are some manuscripts, and that's my area to study. That, because they don't understand what is the specification of the term time here, They add something that they've taken from Peter 2.12, I think.

The time of God's visitation. Basically, what they wanted is to make clear to the readers of those manuscripts of the Bible, That the time that Peter is talking about is the end time.

That's when our exaltation will happen. And that is certainly true in this context. But that's not what this verse is saying. It just says, in due time.

[12:12] Because it is certainly true that at the end He will liberate us. He will exalt us. But on our path there, what do we need?

We need encouragement. And that's what He does in all of our life situations. As we can all attest to that. Sometimes when there is a situation that doesn't seem to have any kind of resolution, We despair.

Sometimes when we feel betrayed and don't know what to do about the situation, We still despair. There are many life situations that make us hopeless.

And going back to this, to what Peter is saying, Is a great encouragement. Because if God took together a people, a nation of a few million, Through the desert, against all odds, He put them in a land that didn't belong to them.

And to this day they still survive. And out of that stock came the Savior of this world. God is not powerless in your situation. God is not powerless.

[13:18] In due time, you don't know when. I don't know when. He will exalt you. Exaltation in the Old Testament, if you read through the book of Psalms, Is I think at least of three kinds.

The term lift up, exaltation. God does that to you in terms of vindication. When your enemies are rising against you. Or, when He gives you relief.

When you're sick. When you're between a rock and a hard place. When you're in a desperate situation. And it doesn't seem to go anywhere. He vindicates you.

And gives you relief. And thirdly, He honors you. That's the term exaltation. You, Lord, honor me against my enemies, says the psalmist. That's what the psalmist was always looking after.

God takes you out of a situation where everyone can see you. Lying down. Almost defeated. And He takes you up. And puts you somewhere visible. Where all people can see.

[14:20] That God is with you. And God is going to do all that in our lives. In our sufferings. But for exaltation to happen. We have to go through sufferings.

I remember at one point during that trek. It was stupid of us when you think about it. But there was one path which was very precarious. And we walked on it.

Because of adrenaline. Now, when we passed that. We realized we had quite a ways to go. But we couldn't go back now. We had already gone through the difficult patch.

The most difficult patch. Now, without that patch. I could not have gone forward there. And that's suffering for us today. That's something that I teach my kids. And I'm sure that you teach your kids.

And those of you who don't have kids. Teach yourselves. Without suffering. There is no exaltation. We don't give the Lord the opportunity.

[15:18] To take us somewhere. So, what it is. This antidote. First. First. First. Is humility. It's not something that you do.

It's something that you accept. And it's. What it does. Is that it gives exaltation. And third. What it consists of. Now. The final two points.

Have always shocked me personally. I know it's. It's easy to say that. Because. When you get to read the scriptures. So many different times. Of course. You know the story. You know the letters. You know how it ends.

But. The word of God. Still manages to shock us. Because. It's so counterintuitive. Compared to what we expect. Because no matter what we do.

We're never actually. Up there. Completely in tune with God's word. In our life. And so. The final two points. Seem counterintuitive. They're.

[16:20] They kind of shock us. And it's good. Because they also awake us. So the third is. What does. Humility do. Exaltation. But. What does it consist of.

What does it look like. And it looks like. Not what we expect. Because. When. We're talking about. The result of humility.

Exaltation. We'll next expect. Something in. In the line of. Humble yourself therefore. God will. God will. Exalt you. And he will put you.

In the high place. He's your fortress. He's your strength. He will never abandon you. What I don't expect. Is to be told. That. Being humble. Is actually.

One of. The aspects of being humble. Is. Not. To worry. Cast. All. Your anxiety. On him. Again.

[17:22] The word. Cast. Is. Easily. Understood. It's what. The disciples. Did. When. Jesus. Was. Walking. Towards. Jerusalem. They put him. On the donkey. On the donkey.

But before doing so. They threw. They cast. That's the. The word. They cast. All of their cloaks. On the donkey. So Jesus. Would ride it. Triumphantly. Into Jerusalem. And that's what we need to do. With our anxiety. Just throw it. On him. And at first sight. I mean. We have to admit. Although. You know where I'm going. We have to admit. That at first sight. It's not.

Easy to understand. How. Anxiety. Is. Related. To humility. But when you think about it. Anxiety. Is. A product. Of worry. And worry. Is natural. We all feel it. But. As natural as it is. It is also.

[18:16] A sign. Of pride. Just think through your life. For a moment. When you're worried.

You expect. To do something. That's what we taught. Ever since we're kids. And in fact. It's not wrong to do things. When something worries you. You have to do something about it.

There are different kinds of situations. That certainly require your action. Right. We've all been there. But there are other kinds of situations. Especially when. You can't do anything.

That we should just humble ourselves. Rather than keep on worrying. It's like. But I need to worry. Because if I worry. Maybe. Maybe the situation is not going to get better. But I'll feel less guilty about it.

Because I'm actually doing something. That's what you keep telling yourself. And instead. Of actually solving your situation. Your blood pressure. Just keeps rising.

[19:22] And the people around you. Suffer. Because of your. Feats of. Anger. And the situation is not solved. And that's why worry. Is a sign of pride.

Because we refuse. To surrender. That particular worry. To the feet of God. And I don't say this. Because I've learned this lesson. I'm not somebody who's. Preaching to you from Mount Olympus. But it is true though. It is absolutely true.

That. When we keep worrying. We know that at some point. That natural feeling. Of anxiety. Becomes something. That.

Shows lack of faith. Now the word that. Peter uses. Cast all your anxiety.

[20:19] On him. The words. These words that he uses. Come from. The book of. Psalms. In particular. Psalm 55.

Verse 22. And it's not. The result that we expect. He says. Cast all your anxiety on him. Because he cares for you. There's a second.

Counterintuitive. Result. The fourth point. Which I mentioned. What does. This antidote. Do. What it is. What it does.

What it consists of. And why it works. Now. If we cast all our anxiety. On him. We know something will happen. Says Peter. Now.

The book of Psalms. Is different. When you. When you read that verse. In Psalms. It says. Cast your. Anxiety. Your burden. On him. And he. Will.

[21 : 14] Sustain you. He will not let. His holy ones. Go wanting. Be. But rather. Shall be firm. Something along those lines. So.

Peter is not doing that. He still stops. His quotation. Of the word of God. In the middle. To tell us something different. When we.

Give all of our worries. To him. We know something good. Will happen. Because he cares for you. Now. At first sight. Again. Why is. Why am I kind of.

Not. If not shocked. At least. Kind of. Underwhelmed. When I first read. This. Particular part. Of the verse. Because I expect. Something bigger. Myself. I expect. Cast all your anxiety.

On him. He will sustain you. As the psalm goes. Cast all your anxiety. On him. And he will make you firm. Unmovable. Like a fortress. No enemy.

[22 : 09] Shall stand against you. A thousand. Shall fall. On your left side. A thousand. Shall fall. On your right side. But you. Will stand. Because God is with you. This is all true.

Right? That's what I expected. But Peter says. Because he cares for you. And when. When I first read this. I thought. I've heard this somewhere. This complaint. That God doesn't care.

So I went back to. To the book of Mark. This situation is mentioned. In three. Different gospels. But only in Mark. Written by Mark.

After hearing. Peter's. Peter's stories. About Jesus. That's what. The church history. Tells us anyway. This particular verse. Comes up.

When. The disciples. Are about to drown. And they go to Jesus. Who is actually sleeping. Quite peacefully. In the midst of.

[23 : 04] This calamity. That was about to occur. They were about. You know. To go down. Sink. And die. And they came to Jesus. And. It doesn't say it's Peter. But.

It says the disciples. So. Peter was no exception there. And we know. He could not have been. An exception. Because we know. He had the foot in mouth disease. And used it more than once. And Peter goes and says.

Together with disciples. Lord. The other gospels say. Lord. Help us. We are drowning. You know what Mark. Also adds. Because of Peter's. Great memory.

And humility. Lord. Don't you care. That we are drowning. It's the same. Word in Greek. That's used here. Did Peter do this. Consciously.

I have no idea. But I know this. When we go through. A difficult situation. That's exactly. What we feel. Two things. When the suffering. Gets great.

[23 : 58] We think. Is God in control. Is he powerful. Does he have a mighty hand. Or. B. Is he. Caring. Or is he simply indifferent.

Now. I know. We might not say this out loud. But that's exactly. What we feel. It's. And again. It's natural. As wrong as it is. It is natural. And that's why.

Peter. Surprises me. And all of us. By taking out. The second part of the psalm. And just putting this. He cares for you. And he's written. An entire letter. Where. He basically says.

You know what. You're doing. Nothing new. What's happening to you. Is absolutely horrendous. Is absolutely unjust. It's something that shouldn't happen. To any human being at all.

To suffer. For being a Christian. You know what. Christ. Did the same. And he died. He says. To give an example. For you to follow. And he was exalted. Because he went through.

[24 : 53] This path of suffering. And. The same is going to happen. To you. But you know. God cares for you. Well. Does he really care Peter?

He does. How about. God himself. Living everything. Coming down.

Becoming weak. Like all of us. Living like a poor. Teacher. Very pathetic teacher. Who had no house of his own. Being misunderstood.

By everybody. Being abandoned. At the very end of his life. By all of his friends. Being crucified. For a crime. That he did not commit. Suffering on the cross.

Bearing a shame. The most shameful. Manner of execution. In the known world. Of the time. Dying like a criminal. For you.

[25 : 55] Does he care? Yeah. Yeah. Peter. Peter. Peter. Peter. Wrote this letter.

And when we read it. And when I say it to you. I know that you feel ashamed. I know I do. I do. Even as I'm talking to you. I feel ashamed. Because. I know that I haven't done so.

I. I. I've not. Consistently. In all my worries. Consistently gone to him. And surrendered them to him. Or even when that's happened. When I've reached that top. Of one's suffering. I seem to have

forgotten it.

Straight away. As I look at the other top. Of the mountain. Peter. Wasn't perfect. Either though. You know. You know the story.

They were in the storm. And he said. Don't you care. That we're drowning. At another time. Lord. Let me walk with you on water. He's invited to do so. He looks at the wave.

[26 : 53] Gets scared. Sinks down. Fails. Because of what he sees around him. Rather than Jesus. And then at the very end. Another story is.

As you remember. He says to Jesus. You know. What's going to happen now. I'm going to serve you. With all my life. I'll do great things for you. When he's basically told. You know what. Yes you will.

But at the end. You'll go somewhere. Where you have not expected to go. Someone will tie you. And take you. To the place. Basically of execution. That's how your life will end. For me.

30 years have passed. About. From that time. Till the period. Where he is writing this letter. 30 years. And he still made other mistakes. If you remember. With Paul.

Peter was. Eating with all of the Gentiles. And then somebody comes. From Jerusalem. And Peter is thinking. Of all of the political. Repercussions. And he doesn't want. To create problems. With the church in Jerusalem.

[27 : 47] He has a name. To maintain. And he doesn't want. To offend the Jews. And he actually breaks. Fellowship with the Gentiles. With us. Shies away from them. He's afraid.

Peter is a human being. To the very end. Of his life. And I don't know. The manner of execution. He said. It's. I mean. Church history tells us. That he wanted. And preferred to be. Executed.

By being. Hung upside down. So that he would not. Imitate his Lord. We don't know. But that's the kind of. Stoic story. But we know that human beings. Have fears. And I'm sure that at the very end. He had a fear. But he also knew. That the path. He had chosen. Was going to be followed. By exaltation. He was not perfect. But he had gone through. Suffering himself.

And he had seen Jesus. And he was not perfect. But he had seen what Jesus did. What happened to Jesus. He saw Jesus when he was alive. When he went up.

[28 : 41] And was exalted. And that's why he's writing. To us. To encourage us. Just as he did back then. Two thousand years ago. This ends. In victory.

This ends in victory. Now. Since you insist to know. What happened to us was. As you can guess. First top. Second mountain top. Third mountain top.

We actually made it. I know it's unbelievable. But we did. And then. We actually saw the sea. Now. That was just a story. But it happened to be true. And. I've never had a.

Greater feeling. Of exhilaration. And happiness. More than I felt at that time. Until that time.

Because then I got married. Of course. That's a. That's a much better experience.

But. After that. We got back home. Now. At the end of our story.

[29 : 41] We're going home too. We're going to find that place of exaltation. Which I had. That mountain top experience. But we're not going back home. We are going to be home. We're going to be home.

Until then. We have an antidote. To suffering. And it's so simple. And it's so. Counterintuitive. But it is so effective. And it's basically four things.

That antidote. Is humility. Before God. Surrendering yourself. And your situation to him. And saying. God. I don't know where this is going. I have no idea. And I feel so hopeless.

But I. I give it up to you. And that will be followed. Eventually. By exaltation. That's what it does. And it consists of. Just casting all of your worries to him.

No matter what that worry is. How big or small. If it creates. A barrier before you. And God. You know what to do. Just keep giving it to him. Just keep giving it. Suffer.

[30 : 44] Cry. Weep. Feel powerless. Because. But remember this. God is neither powerless. And is neither indifferent. He cares.

He cares enough. To have Christ die for us. And he cares enough. For me and you. Because we are part of a bigger story. Than our own life. We are part.

Of the story. Of a kingdom of people. Who have been chosen. To show the whole world. Not that we are better. Because we are not. But to show the whole world.

That we can actually get. Somewhere. Where no political system. Can take us. And that's because of God. Our God is the end of the journey.

His pleasant and glorious domain. For there are the children of mercy. Thanking him for Calvary Spain. We can make it. We will make it.

[31 : 42] I don't know when. I don't know how. But we know. What God will do. And let's encourage each other. Until that point. Just like Peter did. In his letter. Because it gets so lonely.

When you suffer. It gets so painful. And if we remind each other. From time to time. Brother. Sister. You're on the right path. That does. A lot more than any kind of medicine.

In this entire world. Let us pray. Lord. Lord. I just thank you. For your wonderful word. To which we can not do any justice. When we preach it.

Lord. We come before you. And. We ask. That this antidote. Works in our life. Humility before you. Casting all of our anxieties.

Before your feet. Lord. We come to you. Powerless. Knowing that you're powerful. And while we are often indifferent. To other people's.

[32 : 41] Plight. And problems. You are not indifferent. You cared enough for us. To give your only son. To the whole world. That all of us. Who believe. May not have just eternal life.

But actually look forward to it. And live. Knowing. That one day. All of this suffering. Will lead. To ultimate. Exaltation. Amen.