

Message #17

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1 Peter

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## STEEL AND VELVET

1 PETER 5:5-14

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Carl Sandburg described him in this way: **“Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as rock and as soft as a drifting fog, who holds in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and peace unspeakable and perfect. During the four years he was President he at times took to himself the powers of a dictator. He commanded the most powerful armies til then assembled in modern warfare. He enforced conscription of soldiers for the first time in American history. He directed politically and spiritually the wild massive, turbulent forces let loose in civil war. .... [Ultimately] he issued the paper by which he declared the slaves to be free under military necessity.”**

Carl Sandburg, of course, was describing Abraham Lincoln. (PROJECTOR ON--- ABRAHAM LINCOLN) Part of that steel came from his hardworking father who was a farmer and carpenter and who belonged to a church that prohibited alcohol, dancing, and slavery. Almost exactly two hundred years ago ten year old Abraham acquired a stepmother who became close to her stepson and encouraged his reading and writing and gentler virtues.

Sandburg went on to describe this man of steel who also became a man of velvet: **“In the mixed shame and blame of the immense wrongs of two crashing civilizations, often with nothing to say, he said nothing, slept not and on all occasions was seen to weep in a way that made weeping appropriate, decent, majestic. An Indiana man at the White House heard him say, ‘Don’t it seem strange to you that I who could never so much as cut off the head of a chicken, should be elected, or selected, into the midst of all this blood?’”**

A variety of surveys have been done ranking the US Presidents. Abraham Lincoln tends to come in first. For example, C-SPAN has conducted its Survey of Presidential Leadership in 2000, 2009, and 2017. Most recently the network surveyed 91 presidential historians and asked them to rank our presidents in ten

different categories. In each of the three surveys Lincoln was ranked number one overall. Writer and Columbia University professor Mark Van Doren comments, **“To me Lincoln seems in some ways the most interesting man who ever lived. He was gentle, but his gentleness was combined with a terrific toughness, an iron strength.”** (PROJECTOR OFF)

These qualities of gentleness and strength were exhibited to the highest degree in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same person who threw the money changers out of the temple washed the feet of His disciples. The same person who reamed out the religious leaders of His day for their hypocrisy said about His executors while He was nailed to the cross, **“Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.”** The same person who told the people of Capernaum and Bethsaida that they would have a hotter place in hell some day because of their failure to believe His miracles told His disciples to let the little children come to Him so that He could bless them.

Trying times cry out for men and women of steel and velvet--- trying times which involve a nation presented with its Messiah, trying times which involve a nation wracked by civil war, trying times plagued by unyielding partisanship and culture wars.

We have come to the last of our messages on the First Epistle of the Apostle Peter. Next week we will begin a study of David while making a connection with the Thanksgiving holiday. We have learned that the Christians to whom Peter was writing were faced with trying times. These residents of northern Asia Minor were being persecuted for their Christian faith. Their jobs were threatened, their family relationships were threatened, their relationships with the surrounding community were threatened. Within a couple of decades their lives would be threatened.

We have seen in our previous studies the kinds of behavior and attitudes that the apostle deemed appropriate in his Christian audience in these circumstances. Today in our last passage Peter summarizes the qualities of life that are necessary for the believer to succeed in the face of trying times. It seems to me that these qualities can be lumped under the headings of steel and velvet.

I.

First, our passage (PROJECTOR ON--- I. MEN AND WOMEN OF VELVET) deals with the subject of MEN AND WOMEN OF VELVET. In vv. 5-7 Peter describes what is necessary to be a man or woman of velvet.

A.

In v. 5 the apostle says that what is required is a MANWARD HUMILITY (I.A. MANWARD HUMILITY)  
**“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 gives grace to the humble.’”**

Many commentators think that Peter is talking about submission to older men in the church in general. We saw two weeks ago, however, that the focus was upon men who hold the office of elder in the local church. So I suspect that this is the primary reference. But whether mature men in general, or church elders in particular, are in view, the point that Peter has made in this letter is that Christians are obligated to be submissive in certain relationships. All Christians ought to be subject to the governing authorities. Employees should be subject to employers. Wives should be subject to husbands. Now younger people in the congregation are to be subject to the elders.

Peter goes on in v. 5 to describe the attitude, or approach to life, that must lie behind the demonstration of subjection. That necessary attitude is humility. The writer says, **“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility...”** “Clothe yourself” is a rare word in the Greek that the New Testament writers used. It was used of a slave who fastened on an apron before he went to work. It means literally “to fasten firmly on.”

I wonder if the picture that Peter had in his mind as he wrote these words was that of the Lord Jesus, who in the midst of an argument among His disciples at the Last Supper about who was the greatest, laid aside His garments, took a towel, fastened it firmly on, and washed His disciples’ feet. When He came to Peter, the apostle at first refused to let Jesus wash his feet. (JOHN 13:8) But Jesus said, **“If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”** Peter then responded (JOHN 13:9), **“Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”** Peter learned in a vivid way about the necessity of displaying humility toward fellow Christians. (PROJECTOR OFF)

To support his argument about humility Peter refers to the Book of Proverbs, as he has done several times in this epistle. He quotes here Proverbs 3 v. 34: **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** Pride is at the root of sin. C. S. Lewis once observed that we live in a world where each **“person’s pride is in competition with everyone else’s pride. .... Pride is essentially competitive--- is competitive by its very nature.... Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man.”** (*Mere Christianity*, p. 122)

Isaiah #14 (PROJECTOR ON--- ISAIAH 14:14) suggests that when Satan first sinned against God, he said, **“I will make myself like the Most High.”** He wanted to be God. When Eve committed her sin in the Garden of Eden, she determined that God was keeping something good from her. She wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil. It was the sin of pride at work. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Notice that God does not simply turn aside from the proud. He does not just let them go their own way. He actively opposes them. But He gives grace to the humble. In times of suffering we need grace. We need help from God in order to persevere. The means to that is humility, first in our attitude toward fellow Christians. For when times of suffering come upon us, we are not usually alone in our suffering. There are others in our family or circle of friends or church family or Christian community at large who are hurting because of the trying circumstances that confront us. A humble attitude will reflect itself in a concern for their well-being, too.

Things did not go well for the North in the first part of the Civil War. One difficulty that President Lincoln had was getting his commanding general, George McClellan (PROJECTOR ON--- GENERAL GEORGE MCCLELLAN), to fight. The general kept objecting that he didn't have enough men and that they were not sufficiently prepared. One evening in November of 1861 Lincoln and his Secretary of State came to McClellan's home for a chat. The general was attending a wedding party, but Lincoln decided to wait. When McClellan returned an hour later and learned of his visitors, he ignored them and went upstairs. A servant informed the President and his companion that the general had gone to bed.

Shortly after that, McClellan did not show up for a scheduled meeting with the President. Lincoln's private secretary was livid at this callous disrespect for the President. But the President reportedly replied, **“Better at this time not to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity. I will hold McClellan's horse if he will only bring us success.”** (Michael Beschloss, *Presidents of War*, p. 198) One of the keys to Lincoln's greatness was his humility toward other people. It is a quality that we would do well to emulate. One commentator observes, **“Humility is the oil that allows relationships in the church to run smoothly and lovingly.”** (Thomas Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, p. 238)

B.

Manward humility, however, is difficult to achieve without GODWARD HUMILITY. (1 A. B. GODWARD HUMILITY) Verse 6 reads, **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God...”** More literally it reads, **“Therefore allow yourselves to be humbled beneath the mighty hand of God.”**

The term “hand of God” was often used in the Old Testament in reference to God’s deliverance. In Exodus #3 vv. 19 & 20 (EXODUS 3:19) God said to Moses, **“But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. (EXODUS 3:20) So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go.”**

In Deuteronomy #26 vv. 7 & 8 (DEUTERONOMY 26: 7-8) Moses declared, **“...the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm...”**

The suffering that these Asian Christians faced, and the suffering that we sometimes face, comes from hostile governments, unfair employers, unsaved husbands, and non-Christian neighbors. (PROJECTOR OFF) The natural temptation in these situations is to strike out at the sources of suffering. Sometimes under stress we take out our frustrations on other believers. But Peter says, “You Christians need to allow yourselves to be humbled under the mighty hand of God. You need to let Him act in your behalf. You need to wait for Him to deliver you--- **‘so that at the proper time he may exalt you.’”**

Sometimes we experience deliverance after a time of suffering. But the proper time that Peter has in mind here is probably the Second Coming of Christ. For Jesus’ return is another theme that we find frequently mentioned in this letter. Believers are to persevere in the face of suffering because Christ is coming back. When that happens, Christians will receive, and participate in, real glory.

According to v. 7, Godward humility is accompanied by **“casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”** The Greek word for “anxiety” comes from a term that means “to divide or pull in different directions.” Anxiety has just that effect upon our spiritual lives. It distracts and divides the mind, preventing wholehearted devotion to God.

Peter may well have been thinking of Psalm 55 vv. 22 & 23 (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 55:22), which say, **“Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved. (PSALM 55:23) But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you.”**

It is natural for the sufferings of life that come our way to produce anxiety. The issue is what we choose to do with that anxiety. If we allow it to control our lives, we are in effect telling God: “I don’t believe

that you are sufficient to bear my burdens. I don't believe that you are really sovereign, and I don't believe that you care about me." (PROJECTOR OFF)

This is the response that we too often have toward the trials of life. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that anxiety disorders are the number one mental health problem for women and the number two mental health problem for men, after drug and alcohol abuse. Modern life is stressful. We have personal anxieties, financial anxieties, school anxieties, and work anxieties.

What Peter tells us to do is to cast our anxieties on God. If we have trusted in Jesus as our personal Savior and are seeking to follow Him, He will take care of us. Allowing ourselves to be humbled under the mighty hand of God means that we submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ. It means that after we have been obedient to God's Word and have taken care of our responsibility, we trust Him to work out the results--- believing that He does care for us and that He will exalt us at the proper time--- the proper time as determined by Him, not by us.

Abraham Lincoln had this Godward humility. In 1863 in the midst of the Civil War he proclaimed a national day of fasting and prayer. This is what he said in his proclamation: **"...whereas it is fit and becoming in all people, at all times, to acknowledge and revere the supreme government of God; to bow in humble submission to his chastisements; to confess and deplore their sins...; and to pray with all fervence and contrition for the pardon of their past offenses, and for a blessing upon their present and prospective action: And whereas when our own beloved country, once, by the blessing of God, united, prosperous, and happy, is now afflicted with faction and civil war, it is peculiarly fit for us to recognize the hand of God [notice] in this terrible visitation, and in sorrowful remembrance of our own faults and crimes as a nation and as individuals, to humble ourselves before him and to pray for his mercy--- to pray that we may be spared further punishment, though most justly deserved; that our arms may be blessed and made effectual for the reestablishment of law, order, and peace...; and that the inestimable boon of civil and religious liberty... may be restored in all its original excellence: Therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do appoint the last Thursday in September next as a day of humiliation, prayer, and fasting..."** If we only had more leaders in government today who had that kind of Godward humility!

Even though Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, He humbled Himself by submitting to the will of His Heavenly Father. In Philippians #2 (PROJECTOR ON--- PHILIPPIANS 2:5-6) the Apostle Paul told fellow Christians, **"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, (PHILIPPIANS 2:7) but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (PHILIPPIANS 2:8) And**

**being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

Trying times require men and women of velvet, men and women of humility. (PROJECTOR OFF) Andrew Murray described humility in these terms: **“Humility is perfect quietness of heart. It is to expect nothing, to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised. It is to have a blessed home in the Lord, where I can go in and shut the door and kneel to my Father in secret, and am at peace..., when all around and above is trouble.”** In times of suffering it is this velvet quality of humility which we must pursue.

II.

Trying times (PROJECTOR ON--- II. MEN AND WOMEN OF STEEL) not only cry out for men and women of velvet, they also cry out for MEN AND WOMEN OF STEEL. Such is the message of v. 8 through the end of the chapter.

A.

Peter says that men and women of steel are, first of all, Christians who are characterized by ALERTNESS. (II. MEN... A. ALERTNESS) Notice v. 8: **“Be sober-minded; be watchful.”** Why? **“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”**

Strong Christians have an awareness of the enemy. They realize that they are involved in a spiritual war. They realize that the enemy is a spiritual one, and they are aware that their weapons must also be spiritual. Men and women of steel look at challenging circumstances and are sensitive to the dangers that come from failing to follow God’s Word.

The terms that Peter uses to describe the enemy are themselves instructive. First, he calls the enemy our “adversary.” He is our enemy, our opponent, but he presents himself as our friend. He says to Eve, “Look, Eve, I’m on your side. God is keeping something good from you. I want you to be able to experience the fullness of life. Take some good advice from your friend. Just try the fruit on that tree.”

Satan says to Jesus, “You look awfully hungry. I’m concerned about your health. You need to eat. Why don’t you turn those stones into bread? You can do it. You deserve it.” Satan and his forces try to

convince us that they are our friends, too. But the man and woman of steel knows that Satan is our enemy, and he or she is alert to his efforts to subvert us.

Peter also calls the enemy “the devil.” The Greek word for “devil” is “accuser.” Satan accuses God’s children of coming short of God’s standards. He seeks to keep Christians from recognizing their true identity in Christ. He tries to overwhelm us with guilt and failure. He encourages us to think that we have to earn acceptance from God.

He is also like a lion. The devil may present himself like a friend, but he really wants to eat us up. He wants to destroy us. Therefore, men and women of steel need to be on the alert.

Peter himself learned a painful lesson about alertness and about a devil who lurks about, waiting to pounce. At the Last Supper the apostle announced his undying loyalty to Jesus. A short time later he fell asleep when Jesus asked him and the other disciples three times to pray with him. Then after Jesus was arrested, Peter ran away. A bit later in the courtyard of the high priest where Jesus was being questioned, Peter denied to a servant girl that he even knew Jesus. The apostle was almost eaten up by the painful guilt of his own sin. He had not been alert. We need to be alert.

B.

According to vv. 9-14 men and women of steel must also be characterized by RESILIENCE. (II. A. B. RESILIENCE) At times we need to be as hard as steel. British writer G. K. Chesterton once remarked, **“What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth...”** “A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth...”

One of these fundamental truths is the need to resist the devil. Peter says in v. 9, **“Resist him...”** The Bible says that we are to forsake the world and the flesh, but we are to resist the devil. (JAMES 4:7) James says, **“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”**

This week we got the classic Social Security scamming call on our home phone. Your Social Security number has been suspended because of suspicious activity on your account. Call us back at this number, or else we will have to suspend your account. Sometimes the scammers call us with the promise of a

great and wonderful thing if we will only give them certain information. Sometimes the offers come by phone, sometimes they come via e-mail, sometimes they come via other social media.

The devil and his forces are a lot like scammers. They just want us to talk to them. They want us to listen to their warning, or to their sales pitch. Just consider what they have to offer, and before you know it, we can be sucked into their trap.

Men and women of steel should resist the devil. In order to do that effectively, we should seek four characteristics. The first of these is **firmness in faith**. (FOUR CHARACTERISTICS... 1. FIRMNESS IN FAITH) Such is the message of v. 9: **“Resist him, firm in your faith...”** In times of oppression and suffering and discouragement, we need to review our identity in Christ. We need to remind ourselves that we are accepted by God, not on the basis of good works, but on the basis of grace through faith in Christ. We must be hard as steel in clinging to God’s word. We must resist the devil, who in times of persecution would seek to have us compromise our faith.

In the first part of the Civil War, when the war effort was not going well, there were many in the North who pressured Abraham Lincoln to compromise with the South. But Lincoln would not compromise on his basic principles. He was a man of steel. His conviction was that the Union needed to be preserved at all costs. He also grew to the conviction that the slaves must be freed. Eventually that steely determination carried the day.

Resistance to the devil entails not only a firmness in faith but also, secondly, **an awareness of our fellow sufferers**. (FOUR CHARACTERISTICS... 1. 2. AN AWARENESS OF OUR FELLOW SUFFERERS) Peter includes the phrase at the end of v. 9, **“knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”**

When we are faced with a situation of suffering, we are frequently tempted to think, “Woe is me. I am the only person in the world who is faced with this difficulty. Nobody else can understand.” We get depressed. We are tempted to withdraw from fellowship. We may stop going to church.

The reality of the matter, as Peter points out, is that there are other Christians in the world who are experiencing similar kinds of suffering. Each situation has a certain uniqueness, but it also has similarities to the experiences of others. In the midst of trials and suffering, we usually need more, not less, fellowship.

My wife has fibromyalgia. Occasionally we go to a monthly lunch in Henderson that is a support group for people who suffer from fibromyalgia. It is always an encouragement to encounter other families dealing with the disease who have similar symptoms and similar experiences that we do. They get similar reactions from other people. "You look fine." The message received is that you can't really be that sick. There is encouragement that comes from knowing that we are not alone.

The awareness that we are not alone in our suffering should encourage us to persevere, not only because we sense that others can identify with our situation but also because our perseverance itself is an encouragement to other Christians. When we hang in there, we are a testimony to God's grace toward fellow believers.

Resilience, the ability to resist Satan, involves firmness in faith, awareness of fellow sufferers, and, thirdly, **sensitivity to the brevity of suffering**. (FOUR CHARACTERISTICS... 1. 2. 3. SENSITIVITY TO THE BREVITY OF SUFFERING) Verse 10 begins, "**And after you have suffered for a little while...**"

When we are in the midst of our suffering, it may seem like a long time. From the perspective of eternity, it is only a little while. We need to have that longer perspective in view. (ROMANS 8:18) The Apostle Paul argues in Romans #8, "**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**"

The fourth thing that should help us to become and remain strong and resilient is **the conviction that God has a purpose in our suffering**. (FOUR... 1. 2. 3. 4. THE CONVICTION THAT GOD...) The God who possesses all grace and who calls us to eternal glory is seeking to perfect us. That is what Peter says at the end of v. 10: "**[God] will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.**"

The original word for "restore" means "to make complete, to put in order." The word for "confirm" means "to strengthen or make stable." The third verb translated in our text as "strengthen" means "to make steadfast, to settle, to put on a firm foundation." The fourth verb is "to establish." In short, God desires to use suffering to develop our character. A key purpose for suffering in God's plan is to make us more like Jesus. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In the final verses of the letter Peter sends his final greetings. He identifies Silvanus, or Silas, as the one who is delivering the letter. He speaks of "she who is in Babylon" as sending greetings. Most suspect that he is speaking of the church which is in Babylon. Babylon at this time was in ruins. There is no evidence that there was a church there, let alone many people at all. So the suspicion is that Peter is speaking of Rome in a symbolic sense.

At the beginning of this letter Peter said that God wants us Christians to be holy. To support that contention the Apostle quoted from the Old Testament book of Leviticus, **"You shall be holy; for I am holy."** Throughout this short book he has said that suffering is an instrument used by God to make this happen. For the Lord desires to produce men and women of character--- men and women of steel--- men and women of steel and velvet.

There is a variety of experiences of suffering represented here this morning. Some of them we know about. Some of them we do not. But such has been the experience of suffering since the beginning of the Christian church. Such has been the experience in this local church. This church has survived and had an impact upon the world around us because men and women have chosen to pursue these qualities of steel and velvet. This church and your family and you as individuals will succeed in accomplishing God's purposes if you will choose to continue in that pursuit.

There is a poem attributed by some to an Anglican hymn writer by the name of Henry Lyte. It goes like this: **"When God wants to drill a man and thrill a man and skill a man--- when God wants to mold a man to play the noblest part--- when [He] yearns with all His heart to create so great and bold a man that all the world shall be amazed, watch His methods. Watch His ways. How He ruthlessly perfects whom He royally elects. How he hammers him and hurts him and with mighty blows converts him into trial shapes of clay which only God understands. While his tortured heart is crying and he lifts beseeching hands, how he bends but never breaks when His good he undertakes. How He uses whom He chooses and with every purpose fuses him, by every act induces him to try His splendor out. God knows what He's about."**

Do you believe that? Does God care and know what he is about? Will it be your aim to become men and women of steel and velvet?