

Morning. The final week of our series - pour one out.

I wanna begin our time this morning by going through a bit of history lesson. So week one of our series, I showed you this photo. And this photo was believed to be the site in Caesarea Phillippi where Jesus says, Upon this rock I will build my church.

This morning I've got another one for you. (Picture)

Now pop quiz - now this is in Rome, and in Latin, this is called the Circus Maximus. Does anyone wanna guess what that means in English?

Big circus. If you said largest circus that's also correct.



But this was an ancient site in Rome that held anywhere from 150-250,000 people. To put that into perspective, Williams Brice stadium (go cocks) can seat about 78,000. And it was here where chariot races were held among other things.

And in 64AD, right near this venue - a fire broke out, it started out small but spread throughout the entire city. It took six days to put out the fire - and in the wake of that - two-thirds of Rome had been destroyed by that fire.

This all happened under Emperor Nero's reign- considered one of the worst emperors ever of the Roman Empire. And while no one really knows the truth of what happened, it's rumored that Nero was actually the guy who started the fire, some say it was for political reasons, and some say it was because he was wildly unstable. But either way, once the fire destroyed most of the city - everyone was looking at him, saying, "Hey, what's this all about?" And so, in his desperation, he shifted the blame off of himself - because that's what power-hungry leaders do - they don't take the blame, they blame someone else. And so Nero blames this small group of Christians who were already considered these strange outsiders in the Roman Empire - and says, "They did it."

And thus began this widespread and massive persecution of Christians all throughout the Roman Empire. To be clear, persecution was already happening before this - but now, with Nero shifting the blame onto Christians, this happened on an even wider scale, with the Circus Maximus becoming one major location where Christians would be led to be slaughtered in front of tens of thousands of people.

During this time of Nero's persecution, it is said that the disciple Peter, whose letter we've been studying the last two months, would die under his hand as well. Church history would say Peter was crucified upside down in Nero's Garden because he didn't consider himself worthy to die in the same way as Jesus. **In one photo you have the place where the church began in many ways. On the other, you have where many died.**

But either way, I want you to keep these images in mind: political turmoil. A city on fire. Christians getting blamed. And an aging disciple who lived with Jesus day in and day out for three years, whose life is forever changed, dying a brutal death for following Jesus.

Keep that picture in your mind as we return to the verses we've learned these past two months:

1 Peter 5:6-11

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, **7** casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. **8** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. **9** Resist him, firm in your

faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. **10** 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. **11** To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

What's wild to me is that while this was written a year or two before Peter's death, is that he lived out these words. A man who faced his fair share of suffering and pain and to be able to say through it all, **verse 11**:

1 Peter 5:11

To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

That word dominion is where we get the word domain. Or to fit more into the biblical lingo - dominion is another way to say kingdom. To Jesus be the kingdom forever and ever. Satan's kingdom is crumbling down. The kingdom of Rome will one day come to an end. But the kingdom of God, whose love and power are breaking through like light in the darkness, this kingdom will stand the test of time - forever and ever.

Peter had this vision of the Kingdom of God fixed on his mind. He longed to see the Kingdom of God sink more into his heart and spread more into the world. And after 30 odd years of living for Jesus and His mission - he was able to die a faithful death.

And when I think about that - that stuff messes with me. And here's why, so bear with me a bit. So right now, I'm 35 - and even though I'm one of the youngest of our pastors, I have the grayest hair - and it's fine, totally fine. Not self-conscious about it one bit. But I'm on the edge of what many go through called the "mid-life crisis." And one of the dominant questions of this life season is to ask, "**Who have I become? What kind of person am I becoming? What kind of trajectory am I on?**"

About 10 years ago, I was 25 - and those questions were way more open-ended. I was newly married. No kids. Not yet a homeowner. I was wrapping up seminary. And it seemed like there were so many possibilities - life and ministry had so many different roads. And the questions were, "Who do I want to be? Where do I want to go? What kind of life do I want to build?"

Now at 35, those possibilities have shrunk. All the different roads have disappeared. And I'm not asking who I want to be or where I want to go or what I wanna build - I know those answers way better now than I did back then. And it gives me more clarity and hope for, Lord willing, the next 35 years of my life.

But for some people going through this season of life - this can be a challenge. You reflect on your life and think, "Do I like what I've built? Do I like where I am? And thus, the mid-life crisis happens - discouragement and disappointment set in. Bitterness and cynicism begin to take root. Some run to affairs or buy a convertible.

And while I have no inkling for that - except maybe buying a convertible because I've always thought they were cool - I mean, I'd have to clear it with you all, and if you're like, "No, that's a bad look, I'll say 'Ok fine.'"

But the mid-life crisis, the temptation that could happen to me - it affects me. It keeps me on guard.

Because the type of person I want to be is the type of person, Peter becomes at the end of his life. Peter is just so filled to the brim with godly wisdom. Who had his fair share of setbacks and stumbles and yet clung to the grace of God, who, even in the face of persecution, stayed faithful to the end and did it with joy.

That's the kind of person I want to be.

- I want to be the kind of person who, 35 years from now, y'all will still let me preach from time to time. Maybe I'm wearing the same thing. 70 in skinny jeans sounds like a rad old dude.

- But I want to be the kind of person who grabs coffee with young leaders, dads and husbands who need encouragement to be there and pray for them. To be with them when they need a shoulder to cry on.
- I want to be the kind of person who spends more time with the Lord and grows in biblical knowledge but doesn't wield that over people but is humble and wants to keep teaching people how to walk with God because Jesus continues to teach me things about himself
- I want to be the kind of person who, when he sees pain and heartache, doesn't grow jaded by it all - even though that gets tempting the older you get - but is soft-hearted and patient. Who bears in all things and hopes in all things.

Now that's the person I want to be. But at the same time, I feel this pull within me:

- I find myself too easily distracted at times
- I find myself too easily discouraged when heartache comes my way
- I find myself too impatient with myself and with others
- I find I am not yet the husband, the dad, the pastor I want to be ... I still find at times that I have a long way to go to get there

But one thing that gives me hope is that when you look at the life of Peter you see he experienced that same tension too. Let me show you what I mean.

So in week 3 of our series, you might remember we taught from **John 21** - the story of Peter's fishing trip. He's disillusioned and frustrated and possibly calling it quits with following Jesus. And then he sees Jesus on the shore, and in this beautiful scene, Jesus restores him back to his calling. Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" And Peter responds, "Yes, I love you."

And soon after that, Jesus tells Peter "Then feed my sheep." And picking up in v.18 - Jesus looks at Peter after just restoring him and tells Peter how he is going to die:

John 21:18-23

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go."

Basically, Jesus is saying - you're going to get arrested. You're going to get publicly executed.

19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

Jesus tells Peter how he will die and then says, "Alright, you ready to come follow me now?"

20 Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them...

That's referring to the disciple John, who's also at the shore with Peter and Jesus...

21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

Translation: Jesus, you just told me I'm going to die for you...what about John? Is he going to die for you too? How is this fair? Peter is channeling all of our "it's not fair" energy at this moment.

22 Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" **23** So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

So catch that. Peter's asking, "Well gosh, if I'm going to die for you, what about John?" And Jesus doesn't answer his question with the answer he wants. Jesus basically says, "That's none of your concern man, you follow me." At first glance, and I'm speaking for myself, Jesus' answer kinda bothers me a bit.

But at the same time, when you realize this is Jesus who just conquered death and is God of everything - I would stand to vote He has permission to answer however he wants to answer, you know?

Peter, it's none of your business how he's going to die - your business is to follow me.

The temptation here that Peter's touching on is the temptation to compare our lives to others. Our suffering to others. But Jesus corrects and says regardless of what's in store for others, your main concern is to follow me with whatever comes your way because, in the end...all of us will have in the next life, life in the Kingdom of God.

Think about it this way. It's kind of like we all got a free trip to Hawaii. All-inclusive. All expenses paid. So that's all coming for us. We've all got the ticket in our hands. AND some of us have direct flights there. While others of us will get there, we need to take two planes to get there. Others of us will have delays and layovers. Still, others of us will be next to a screaming baby the entire flight there. But no matter the trip there, we all get to experience Hawaii. We all get the all-inclusive resort experience.

And when you think about that, it puts the comparison and jealousy to rest. To know that all of us, no matter where life will take us, all who put faith in Jesus will one day rise again, in resurrected bodies free from sin and death with Jesus forever and ever. We all will get that.

- So even if this person in your church family has not suffered what you're suffering - they haven't lost what you lost - what is that to you, Jesus says. Come follow me.
- So that person in your group has not experienced addiction as you have, they can't even begin to know how deep the struggle has been for you. That's not your concern, Jesus says, come follow me.
- So that friend of yours who's a Christian and posts on Instagram about their seemingly perfect life - what business is that of yours? Come follow me.

It's so easy to get pulled toward cynicism when you play the Christian comparison game. But Jesus says, that's not yours to deal with - whatever I have mapped out for them or for you - all who trust in me will never taste death. Your concern is to come follow me.

So you have these two images in mind - you have the Peter in **John 21** who's forgiven and fighting jealousy. And then you have Peter some 30 years later, about to die for Jesus.

And what's left is what came between those two points. What's left is Peter's response when Jesus looked at him and said, "What is that to you, you follow me!"

Because he did.

He did exactly what he told us to do in the passage we've studied in **1 Peter 5** for the past two months. He modeled **1 Peter 5:6** and humbled himself under the Lord, and through his humbling, he preached the very first sermon that built the church in Acts 2.

He embodied **1 Peter 5:7** as he faced the difficulties of life and ministry, he cast his anxieties on the one who cared for him.

He remembered **1 Peter 5:8** and kept watch over his soul as he knew the devil, the enemy wanted to take him down

He considered **1 Peter 5:9** as he faced suffering and death - he looked to his friends and disciples who went before him and, most importantly, Jesus, who suffered unto death.

He took to heart **1 Peter 5:10**, knowing his suffering would also last a little while, but soon after, he would be free from pain and with Jesus.

Week after week and day after day, he built his life upon a rock he could stand on, no matter what.

Conclusion

So for this morning, as we wrap up our series, I want to turn our attention to that command Jesus gives Peter in **John 21:22**

John 21:22

You follow me!

In some way, all of us are kind of like Peter in **John 21** in that we are not yet at the end of our lives. As long as we have breath, Jesus still intends to do a work on us. All of us are still a work in progress.

And I would imagine, if you're honest with yourself, you want to be a certain kind of person when all is said and done. Perhaps you want to see more spiritual growth in your life. Perhaps you want to see more spiritual fruit take root in your soul - to be a kinder, gentler, more loving person. Perhaps you have a spiritual legacy you want to leave behind in your wake - for your community to be able to say bittersweet joy at your funeral that you were faithful to the end.

But the thing is - to get to that place, and to be that person, means you have to do what Jesus says. If you want to get there, it requires you to follow Him. It just won't happen. You won't drift into that type of person.

You have to, like Peter, accept and expect that the road to that type of life will likely come with its fair share of suffering and hurt along the way. I can't predict what will happen to you but it likely will be difficult - but it will be so worth it because, in the process, you will become a more beautiful, radiant, lighter, joyful person in the end.

- For some of us this morning, maybe the Spirit is convicting you to see the current trajectory of your life. Where you're coming around(ish). You come on Sundays sometimes, and you come to Group time fairly often, but the trajectory of becoming a person who looks like Jesus is off. You find yourself giving all sorts of excuses. You might find yourself saying things like:
 - *It's harder than it used to be. Following Jesus is harder now that I have kids, now that I have so many kids, now that my kids are grown and gone. My group is difficult sometimes so I just bow out instead of helping it get better. I don't connect with others that easily. I know Jesus says to do _____ but I'm just not there right now. I know what he says about confessing sin but I'm just not on board right now, my heart is cold. I know what he says about finances, but I want to prioritize other things. I know I need to be spending time in Scripture in prayer, but at the end of the day I just don't want to.*
 - The road to an insignificant life is paved with a million excuses
 - These words of Jesus are an invitation to the life you truly want, he's calling out to you now, "Come follow me. Put away the excuses, and follow me."
- For some of us, maybe the takeaway today needs to be to go to your Group this week, "I'm still here. I'm in it. I'm with y'all, but I don't see myself on the trajectory I want to be. Will you pray with me, will you help me?"
- For some of us, maybe you like our church, and you've been coming around for a while. And that's great, and we're glad you're here. I like us too. And maybe the Spirit is leading you to go all-in with this community, to open up yourself to others and allow yourself to pour into others by signing up for a LifeGroup or looking into becoming a member so that leaders and pastors can help shepherd your soul because you can't do it on your own.
- For others of you, maybe you're experiencing some mid-life crisis stuff. Some of you see the different paths in front of you, you see them disappearing, and you're left with some hard realities about your life. Take that to Jesus, take that to community this week. You have the freedom to lament and grieve.
- And also, maybe what you need at this moment is for Jesus to speak to you right now and say in the most tender of words, "if so-and-so gets more of the life you wanted, will you still trust me? Will you still follow me? If this life on Earth doesn't turn out to be all that you hoped, will you still follow me?"

Conclusion

No matter where you are, my prayer is that we become the kind of people who withstand whatever may come. That we become people who endure to the end because we've built our lives on the rock of Jesus and His promises. Who's lives slowly grow into the trajectory we want, and by God's grace, through His Spirit, through obedience to Jesus, that will happen.

Recently I met up with a friend who mentored me in college, who I've talked about here occasionally. He's in his mid60s now, loves Jesus, is in ministry and a professor, and was telling me this - he's recently read some stuff on spiritual growth and impact. And we were talking about following Jesus, and the midlife crisis, and how people react when they hit that wall. And he told me, "do you know when people tend to see the greatest spiritual fruit and make the most significant spiritual impact?" He said the number one season of life is when ppl are in their 70-80s. Second is their 60s. Third is their 50s. And he was basically saying that...

...when someone whose heart is fixed on Christ, there will come a time, often much later in life, when they see their spiritual growth spike like a compound interest chart that goes up and up faster toward the end.

Our church is walking through the season of Lent, and last week we had Ash Wednesday...where we remember we will die one day. And what happens as you grow older and follow Jesus, the more you see the pain in this life...the more you see that death is coming for you...the more the Spirit uses that time you have left to out the pressure you, so that you begin to see that exponential growth in your soul - and its only through going through the mid-life season and undergoing so much pain, all the while clinging to Jesus, that your life begins to look and fit into the trajectory you've always wanted.

And I don't know about you, but I want to get there. I want you to get there too. I want us to leave behind, Lord willing, some beautiful, Holy Spirit-moving stories to hand down to the next generations of our church family. But, as we've mentioned in this series before, to get there will mean we are going to have to experience pain and suffering and go through some heavy stuff together - I mean, when we started this series two months ago, we had no idea how much our church would be rocked by everything. And at the same time, you know what I've seen? I've seen a deeper dependence on Jesus, a deeper reliance on the Spirit, a desperation that is a work of the Lord - in my life, our pastors, our leaders, and our church family.

God is on the move. And He will continue to build His church.

And one day...years and years and years from now...Jesus will finish His work. And we will be standing with Jesus in renewed bodies in a renewed world. Where sin will no longer be present. And suffering will no longer take hold of us. Where the Kingdom of God will finally come down once and for all and rule and reign forever and ever. And our joy will be made complete.

And at the end of our lives, may we be the kind of people who have followed Jesus week in and week out, becoming more solid, mature, and compelling with each passing year so that the words of Peter will become our deepest desire and our truest reality.

So to end our time, I want to read this passage over us one last time. And if your hope is for this to be true of us, then just like we did our first week, I invite you to stand up as I read this passage over us.

1 Peter 5:6-11

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, **7** casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. **8** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. **9** Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. **10** 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. **11** To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Pray.