

1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

Seventh Sunday of Easter (Series A)

Lessons: Acts 1:12-26; 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

Troubles, Trials and the Promise of Victory

May 17, 2026

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

"I don't know how much more of this I can take", Bob thought, as he fell into his favourite chair at the end of a long, tiring day. It was bad enough that things at work hadn't been going well, what with the company in the midst of restructuring, and the fact that he regularly had to work 12 hour days. Now he wasn't sure he was going to have a job that much longer. Things weren't good at home, either. His wife had been going for medical tests, but they just didn't seem to be able to pinpoint the problem. No matter what the doctor tried, it didn't seem to help alleviate the pain she was going through—pain so bad that she was often bed-ridden. And his drug plan didn't cover half of the medications she had been taking. Bit by bit he was seeing their savings account dwindling down. All this wasn't helping with their marriage, which had been a bit rocky even before her illness. And the kids! His son was a bright boy, who used to do so well at school. But this year, he was so indifferent to his classes that it looked like he was going to have to repeat the year. And his daughter—why didn't she believe him when they talked about the dangers of pre-marital sex? Now she found out the hard way that anyone can get a sexually transmitted infection, even when they think they are being careful. "I guess it could have been worse", he thought. "She could have been exposed to AIDS. She could have gotten pregnant." But this was bad enough, and it was something he couldn't believe about his little girl—nor was he ready to handle this.

"What next?", Bob wondered. The thought had barely crossed his mind when he heard a snap, and then found himself in a heap on the floor because his chair—his favourite chair—had broken. "Great, just great!", Bob cried out. His son came running into the room. "What's the matter, dad", he asked. "Everything's the matter!", Bob screamed. "Nothing ever works for me. What have I done to deserve all this?"

There was no prayer on Bob's lips as he lay down that night. In fact, he hadn't felt like praying for the last few weeks. "What's the use?", he thought. He was hurt and angry with God. "I thought all this nonsense would change when I became a Christian. But it seems that things are worse, not better." Maybe the things his co-workers had been saying to him for the past while were true. They often ridiculed Bob for his faith. They thought he was silly to go to church. They thought church was just an emotional crutch for those who were too weak to deal with life in the real world. They didn't think that there really was a living, personal God who was going to help people with their problems.

Bob's mind continued to focus on his frustration, even after he drifted off to sleep. In a dream, he began to live in the past again. He had not been brought up in a Christian home. His father had died when he was young, and his mother had always had a hard time making ends meet. Bob always felt that he didn't belong, especially when the kids at school would tease him about his hand-me-down clothes or about the fact that he couldn't do many of the things they did, because his family couldn't afford it. He didn't like being poor, and he always hoped that someday he would strike it rich. He worked hard, and had found a good job. But he wasn't going to get rich at this job. It was still tough making ends meet, which was one

reason he worked the long hours of overtime. And after he got married, it was harder, still. The kids came along far too quickly, and there always seemed to be something going on that drained their bank account. Unfortunately, that led to ongoing arguments between him and Betty. He knew their financial difficulties weren't her fault; in fact, she was good with money, and did the best she could with their resources. And she knew that he worked hard to provide for the family. But those things weren't often remembered when they were struggling to pay bills. If only they could get ahead for a bit. Maybe the stress wouldn't be there, and they could actually concentrate on their marriage.

In his dream, Bob also remembered the day a friend had invited him to church. With all the things that were happening in his life, Bob was ready to try anything that might help. And it did seem to help. It surprised him to realize he liked church. It felt good to know that there was a God who loved him; a God whose love was so great that He even gave His Son to die on a cross for sinners so that He could bring us the forgiveness we need. He found great comfort and hope in the fact that this same Jesus had risen again from the dead, and promised to give life to all who believed in Him. As he attended church, Bob started to change. He was different. He and Betty were fighting less. He was more patient with the kids. Even the stress of work and finances didn't seem so bad. Bob had also learned to pray, and to ask God to help him through the problems of each day.

But right now, Bob didn't believe that God answered those prayers. "If you love me, God, why are you doing all this to me? Why are things always so hard for me? Why is my family in such a mess? Why don't you fix it?"

When Bob got up the next morning, he was still angry with God. In fact, he was so angry, he wasn't even going to go to church this week. It was all just a bunch of words, anyway. "Either fix things for me, God, or don't expect me to worship you." But when Sunday came, Bob felt compelled to go to church. He didn't understand why, because he sure didn't think it would help his mood right now. And yet, he went. It didn't help his mood when they sang the opening hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus". It actually annoyed Bob when the words of the hymn declared: *have we trials and temptations; is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness—take it to the Lord in prayer.* "I tried that", Bob thought, but what did it get me? My life is still a mess! That same thought was in his heart as the pastor got up to preach. Bob crossed his arms on his chest, and scowled, as if to say, "Go ahead. Prove to me that this faith stuff all makes sense." And then, the pastor read the sermon text: (see above). Bob's jaw dropped a little bit. He suddenly realized that these words were written for him. He pulled out one of the pew bibles to read the words as the pastor preached on them. ***Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*** And when Peter emphasized ***that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world,*** Bob began to understand that the troubles and trials of his life were not unique. Other faithful people also had problems in their lives. As the pastor talked about the persecution that Christians experienced in the world, Bob saw that being a Christian was tough. And it wasn't because God didn't care. It wasn't because God was too busy to pay attention to every believer's needs. It was because Christians have an enemy who hates them and wants to destroy them and their faith. ***Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*** Bob understood it was the devil who was using all the problems and frustrations and difficulties of life to get him to the point he had been at the beginning of worship—to the point where he was angry, frustrated and indifferent toward God. And if the problems of his life seemed more pronounced since he became a Christian, it was only because the devil was working that much harder against him.

But the best part of all came when the pastor spoke the words that Bob needed to hear the most. There is no escaping the reality of suffering and pain in this world, and it will often be worse for the Christians who have some great enemies in this unbelieving world, not the least of whom is the devil himself. Troubles and trials will come, and they will put our faith to the test. But the words of Peter assure us of our victory: ***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.***

Bob looked up at the stain glass window at the front of the church. It had several panels, each one depicting a part of the passion of Jesus Christ. He looked at the scene where Christ was nailed to the cross, to suffer for the sins of the world. He realized how wrong that picture was. Jesus didn't deserve to suffer. He didn't deserve the pain that he had to endure. It didn't make sense that the very God of heaven and earth should have to die because of our sins—and yet, Jesus did suffer and die so that by His death He could destroy the works of the devil. As he looked at the windows again, he saw the Risen Lord ascending into heaven. Bob remembered Jesus' promise, too: ***And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*** (John 14:3 - ESV) God never promised that life in this

world would be easy, but He did promise to see His people through it all. Bob then remembered that Jesus told His followers: ***In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.***” (John 16:33 - ESV) As Peter said, God would deliver His people. He would let them share in His glory. When that day comes, then all the suffering of the world will be forgotten. The victory will be ours forever.

Bob heard the pastor speak the wonderful words God had inspired Peter to write: ***[cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*** Bob squeezed Betty's hand. He looked and noticed that there was a little tear in her eye, too. Things had been tough—and they might get tougher. But Bob realized that his co-workers were wrong. His faith was not in vain. Bob also realized that he had been wrong. God had not forgotten him. The cross and empty tomb were proof of that. And that same loving God would be with them, no matter what happened, to restore them, to help them and to strengthen through their suffering, so that they could resist the devil's attacks. Best of all, God would see them through the suffering and give them eternal life with Him. Now Bob felt like praying—but all that came out was one simple thought: “Thank you, Lord, that you care for me. Help me to see that, no matter how dark the day may be. Amen.”