

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on June 21, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb on 1 Peter 5:7.

Series: Invisible Suitcases
Today's Focus: "You Don't Care About Me"

"It's True....God Cares For You!"

Many of you know that Monday we had to cancel the first day of our church's soccer camp because of rainy weather and soggy wet fields. But this was nothing like they experienced in the far away country of Georgia (not the state, the country!). This week in the capital of Tbilisi, Georgia they experienced extreme flooding. In fact, did you hear about this?...severe flooding in the Georgian capital left at least 12 people dead and triggered a big-game hunt across the city for lions, tigers, a hippopotamus and other dangerous animals that escaped from Tbilisi's ravaged zoo. Residents were warned to stay indoors as police conducted the hunt, but fear deepened as night fell on the city of 1.1 million with some of the animals still on the loose.

A city resident said, "The daytime wasn't bad, but tonight everyone has to be very careful because all the beasts haven't been captured. They haven't been fed, and in their hungry state they might attack people." A spokesperson from the zoo confirmed that at least five, hungry lions were unaccounted for and still on the loose somewhere in the city. Parents, how would you feel about letting your kids play outside if you knew that a hungry lion might be on the prowl in the neighborhood?

Well today we're going to listen to important advice that the Apostle Peter gives us. Peter was one of Jesus' close friends whom God used to write the Bible. And one of the reasons why we want to listen to his advice is because he says that there actually is a lion on the loose. No, of course all the lions and tigers at the Milwaukee Zoo are still securely fenced in as well as the mountain lions and hyenas and all other animals we talked about at soccer camp this week! So no worries there. But what Peter says is that the devil is like a hungry lion on the prowl looking for lunch. Should you be worried? Peter says in the verse right after our sermon text for today, ⁸*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

Yikes, sounds dangerous, doesn't it? Well it is. Especially when you realize how a lion hunts. A lion looks to find its prey separated from others—alone, injured, and vulnerable. So if you think about it that's why he wants to get you to think, "No one cares about me. I don't matter. And God, if you're out there...you sure must not care about me either or else you wouldn't have let this or that to happen to me. You wouldn't allow me to feel this way."

Friends, you ever think like this? Of course when things are going well in life and everybody wants to be your friend and you've got money in the bank then perhaps this isn't perhaps so great a temptation. I think we can all agree that it's much easier to say thank you to God for blessings when you feel like you're living the good life and you're popular and successful and enjoying the company of your friends. It's much easier to think, "God must really care about me." But sooner or later we all experience the pain of a broken relationship or a business deal gone bad or the betrayal of a friend or someone else you trusted. And if you've been deeply hurt, maybe even unspeakably, horribly hurt by someone who was

supposed to really love you or someone you thought really cared about you...then what the devil wants you to think is that there is no one who truly understands, no one who cares, no one you can turn to, not even God. And if you've been hurt by someone who was supposed to care about you who calls themselves a Christian...then what the devil tries to do is get you to make the mistake of assuming that if they don't care, then God must be like that too. At the very least, he's not to be trusted either.

That's why, friends, this is such a fitting topic today as we continue this series Invisible Suitcases. What we're talking about in this sermon series is all the kinds of emotional baggage that kids, teens and adults accumulate and then carry with them through life because there are so many people who are dealing with broken families, broken marriages, or abusive relationships. They're struggling with feelings of being unloved, of low self-esteem, of powerlessness and an inability to trust. And these invisible suitcases accumulate just going along throughout life except one of the problems is that we don't always see what's going on—both in the lives of others and in our own lives too. The suitcases we carry are invisible, on the inside. So we have this tendency to say, "What's up with so and so?" so that we pull back from them instead of taking the time to understand them, but then we'll feel hurt, act out, and throw a fit when other people do the same to us.

One way this happens sometimes is when the devil gets a person to think, "No one really cares about me. You can't possibly care about me. Therefore God must not care about me either." But friends, today we're going to see how this is just another lie that our enemy the devil wants you to believe. But the good news is that today we're going to counter this lie with true, comforting words because **it's true...God Cares For You!**

Our sermon verse today is short but sweet. Let's read it together and then I'll help unpack it for you. Here's what the Apostle Peter says about God: *⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

What a great little verse this is, isn't it? It sounds like something you might put on a coffee mug or something like that. But make no mistake. This isn't just some little cliché meant to make you feel a little better when you're going through a rough patch like "Keep your chip up, pal." No, this is true comfort even for when things are really bad. For example, when Peter wrote these words, his original hearers were actually experiencing persecution for their faith because they were Christians. So their lives weren't easy. They were hard. He says in a few verses before our sermon verse: *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed"* (1 Peter 4:12-13).

What was going on? Well the man in charge of the Roman government was a dude named Nero. You ever hear about him? He was a vicious man not unlike Hitler or Stalin. He was a mean man. Nero murdered his way to becoming emperor. He even had his own mother killed. And in 64 A.D. shortly after Peter wrote this letter, Nero launched a great attack on Christians after he blamed them for setting fire to Rome. So Nero came up with all sorts of horrible ways of hurting and killing Christians. Can you imagine what it would have been like to be a Christian in Rome during the reign of Nero? To be a Christian was to be part of an intensely persecuted minority group. How many of you would remain

followers of Jesus Christ if your livelihood or life were put in jeopardy? God's not looking for fair weather fans but obedient, faithful followers. Yet in the midst of suffering persecution and the threats of torture and death might you be tempted to think, "God must not care about me"?

Friends, what causes you anxiety in your life? What causes you to worry? Any of you worry about stuff sometimes? Anything? Peter says, *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.* I find it interesting that the word for "anxiety" that Peter uses here is the same word Jesus uses in a story where he compares all the worries of life here on this earth to thorns or thistles, noxious weeds, which as you let them grow can choke out the tender little plant of a person's faith. Jesus told the story like this:

14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. (Mark 4:14-19).

In Jesus' story we can learn how the devil works. He wants to get us to think that being a Christian ought to mean that life will be easy and everyone will like us and we'll always be happy. But that's not the case here on this earth. Peter says that future glory awaits, but first will come many struggles. And when we start to doubt God's mercy and grace in the midst of our struggles, when we start to worry, when we think God must not really care so that we pull back from gathering together with other believers in church and we pull away from God and stop praying... that's when our enemy the devil, that roaring lion, starts to come in for the kill.

And that's why Peter says, *Cast all your anxiety on him [GOD!] because he cares for you.* What does it mean to *cast* your anxiety on God? It means to pray. It means to do what we do with all the thistles and weeds that we pull up from our garden...we don't let them grow up to choke out our little bean plants (it least most of the time) but rather we pull them up and throw them onto a big pile and then they get hauled them away. "There's a weed...onto the pile." "There's another thistle...bye bye." This is what prayer is like, friends. Take all your worries. Take all your doubts. Take all your frustrations. Take all your fears...and don't take 'em back. Throw them, cast them onto one big pile before God who invites you to do so because he alone is strong enough to haul them away. *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Finally, how do we know God cares? Does God care about *you*? Well you don't have to wonder. You just have to witness Jesus on the cross to be overwhelmed by how much he really does. Friends, **it's true...God cares for you.** You see God didn't just sit up there in heaven where every once in a while he'd look down and see all this horrible suffering here on earth and then go, "Oh well...glad I'm up here where it's nice and comfortable and just the way I like it." Instead his heart of love was so moved that he sent his one and only Son, Jesus who came willingly, into this world. Did Jesus have it all handed to him...everything easy along with the admiration of everybody? No not even close. Rather from the

moment he was born into this world there was not even room in the inn at Bethlehem much less in people's hearts for him. Yet he came, our human brother, to take our place which meant he experienced brokenness and betrayal. He endured isolation and insults. He suffered unimaginable pain not only physical but emotional and spiritual. He was flogged and nailed to the cross carrying all the invisible suitcases, all our baggage, and all the sins we've accumulated and piled up over the years. And there he died, the only righteous one for unrighteous sinners like us, so that by his death he could destroy the lion's power to hurt and harm us ever again so that now Peter says, ¹⁰ *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast (1 Peter 5:10).*

Friends, this week at soccer camp I got to coach a group of 6 and 7 year olds. We were Team Caribou. And our motto was this: Team Caribou, God Cares For You! With childlike faith we would chant this phrase. We talked about how this is true whether we win or lose. God cares. We know because Jesus Christ came into this world and he won the victory over sin, death, and the devil. And at the end of camp each day we got together in a little group and we prayed. We cast all our anxiety on God who cares for us for Jesus' sake. And you know what? What's true for team caribou is also true for you. God cares.

So cast your anxiety on him. Accept his invitation to pray. Believe his invitation to trust. And maybe you're not sure what to say, how to say it, or even where to begin. And friends, that's ok. It doesn't have to be that hard. Just throw it all at God. Say, "Here God, I'm giving this you because I can't handle it on my own. I'm going to unpack my invisible suitcases today and put it all at the foot of the cross of my Savior, Jesus where he took it all away. So I'm going to leave it behind and look ahead to the future you have prepared for me."

And to help you out I've printed in the My Next Steps section of your sermon notes a little prayer that you might begin to use after today. It's just a simple prayer for you to write out, perhaps put on sticky note, and put someplace where you will see it and say it. Let's finish up by praying this prayer together as we cast all our anxiety on God who cares for us:

"Dear GOD, into your hands, I place my worries, cares and troubles. Into your wisdom, I place my path, direction and my goal. Into your love, I place my life. Thank you for caring for me and hearing this prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen."