

Victory of the Lamb – The Way of the Exile – 1 Peter 5:5-11

The Kingdom of I and High Anxiety – Pastor Bill Limmer

When Alyssa went off to UW-Madison for school, I gave her a piece of advice and I was pretty transparent in it. I told her, if you are having trouble in a class, I encourage you go to your professor sooner than later. I told her to be honest. I didn't always do that because I was too afraid or proud to ask for help, but I think it will really help. How are you at asking for help?

Today, we are finishing up our study of 1 Peter in our series *The Way of the Exile*. Through this series, Peter has instructed those living in exile either because they are living in a pre-Christian world or a post-Christian world like us that in Jesus we have living hope, that we are to do good, suffer well, and share the hope that we have with family and friends. As we close it out today, Peter, now an elderly man, offers one last sage and wise direction from the Holy Spirit. Let's check it out.

To the exiles who are facing persecution, to those of us isolated due to the pandemic, he says: **⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**

How would you rate your anxiety level right now on a sliding scale? 1 is low anxiety and 10 is high anxiety. I think it is safe to say that it's likely that everybody's anxiety rating has moved up the scale over the last three weeks. This pandemic has touched us all in some way or another. Some of us are saying:

I am anxious about trying to do quality work for my job in my home environment.

I am anxious about losing my about taking a pay cut or losing my job.

I am anxious about where I am going to find work because I have lost my job.

I am anxious about homeschooling my kids. I don't want them to fall behind.

Some of us are thinking, am I going to be able to find what I need at the grocery store?

I wonder if I am going to get the Coronavirus.

Do I have the Coronavirus but in such a mild way that I don't know it and inadvertently passing it on to a family member or friend that might get really sick or worse?

There is a lot of "I" talking going on right now.

Peter, the guy who wrote this letter, knew all about "I" statements too. He said things like this: When he saw Jesus waling on water he said, I want to come out to you. When Jesus told him and the rest of the disciples to get food for the 5K, Peter *thought I don't think we have enough food or money for that*. When the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, there is no doubt that Peter was thinking *I am*. When the disciples were on the boat in the middle of the storm and Jesus was sleeping, Peter was anxious, and said to Jesus (in effect) don't you care if I drown. When Jesus was washing the disciples' feet on Maundy Thursday, Peter said, "I will not let you wash me." Later that night Peter said, "Even if all fall away, I never will." Just hours later when Peter was interrogated about Jesus, he said "I don't know him."

What other I statements do you have rolling around in your head? "I can't do it." "I can't handle it". "I don't know what to do." "I'm not enough." "I feel hopeless." "I am restless." "I feel scared." "I'm upset." "I just wish it would all go away." "I don't know what I would do if that happens."

We are living in the “Kingdom of I”. And the “Kingdom of I” causes high anxiety because we are carrying the weight of the world, the weight we were never meant to carry in the first place. Another way of talking about the Kingdom of I is: **EGO – Edging God Out**

Here is something that a lot of us haven’t considered before but is nevertheless true. Look at the word **anxiety**. What is right in the middle of the word anxious? **anxiety**. You can’t spell anxious or anxiety without the I. In anxiety we place ourselves at the center. You know what other word has I right in the middle of it. **Pride** It is all about me. Pride, it is all about me, and I want it to be about me, I want to be in control. That is why we get anxious. I is right in the middle of **sin** too. I is right in the middle of **guilt**. I is at the center of our problems.

We have this I problem because we have an enemy. ⁸ **Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.** We have this I problem because we have an enemy, an adversary, an accuser, who prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Do you know what he roars? The lion roars lying. He tries to get you to take on what you are not supposed to take on and then he will take one of two directions. He will try to get you to Edge God Out so you think you are doing it on your own. Or two he will pummel you with accusations that you aren’t strong enough to carry the weight, which is a half truth – because no we can’t carry the weight but we were never meant to. It’s not our weigh to carry.

So what do we do? We are to live in the Kingdom of Jesus instead of the Kingdom of I. Here is how. Peter says, **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.** ⁷ **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** Peter says humble yourselves, don’t try to do it on your own you weren’t meant to. No matter how much money you make or how many degrees you have. Novelist and speaker Anne Lamont has this great quote about the difference between God and me. Do you know what the difference is? God never thinks he is me.

Humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand. Do you know about that mighty hand? That is the mighty hand that separated the Red Sea so the Old Testament children of Israel could escape their enemies. (Isaiah 40:11) **He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart;** Do you see where you are at right now? No matter your circumstances you are in God’s hand and close to his heart. The mighty hand of God is the hand of protection. Do you know about that mighty hand of God? Remember when Peter said, I don’t think we have enough food or money to feed the 5,000. Jesus lifted up the two small fish and five loaves of bread in his hand and all the people were fed to the degree that there were 12 baskets full of food left over. That mighty hand of God is the hand of generous provision. Do you know about that mighty hand? That is the hand that reached out and grabbed up all your sins and allowed them to be nailed to them. So that when the devil comes roaring, accusing, that it’s all lies because Jesus has paid for all your sin in full, including the sin of pride, and taken away all of you guilt. That mighty hand is the hand of the plan of salvation.

So, what does humble look like? The verses say this: **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.**⁷ **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** But this is a misrepresentation of the original. The original says, **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time,** ⁷ **cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** Notice the comma instead of the period? What humbling yourself looks like is casting your anxiety on God, not some of it but all of it. Casting isn’t the command. Humble is the command. Humble

yourself by letting go of your anxiety, your pride, your sin, your guilt, and giving it all to God. And when you do so your EGO will go from **Edging God Out to Exalting God Only**.

And here is one way we can do that – pray. Today is Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday the disciples were preparing the colt for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem. One translation says, “they (the disciples) **cast** their garments on the colt.” Casting is an intentional act to relocate an object. So, the disciples took off their garments and relocated them onto the colt Jesus was to ride.

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” In other words, intentionally grab up and throw your anxieties onto Jesus in prayer! It might go something like this: *Jesus, I don't know what to do but I know that you promised to be with me and work in all things for the good. Help me to humbly trust your mighty hand to guide me, lead me in your plan for me to provide for me, and protect me.*

Did you ever have a teacher that said to you, if you have any questions just come to me and I will help you. Here is what your teacher, your friend, Your Savior and your God says to you, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”**

In the book *The Dance of Hope*, one of eleven-year-old Bill's chores was gathering firewood for the small stove and fireplace. He would search the woods for stumps of pine trees that had been cut down and chop them into kindling wood. One day he found a large stump in an open field near the house. I don't know if you have ever tried to get a stump out of the ground but usually you push and pull, back and forth, and rock it trying to snap the roots so that it can come out. Well Bill literally worked for hours on this one stump. He was tired. He was frustrated. His dad saw him working and came over to help. His father said, “I think I see your problem.” “What's that?” Bill asked. “You're not using all your strength,” his dad replied. The eleven year old exploded, ranting and raving about how hard he worked for hours. Exhausted from his work and cooled down from his rant, Bill asked his father what he meant. His father replied, “You haven't asked me to help you yet.”

Ask God for help in your anxiety. And this will be the result: **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.** ¹¹ **To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen**