

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 12 July 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“I’ve Got a Friend in High Places”

1 Peter 5:10-11

When I was working my way through Bible college in the late 90’s, I did janitorial work at McDonald’s for several years. Now, I often had to work the night shift; and so, when the restaurant closed for the night, and the workers began their clean-up jobs, they would turn on their radios. Unfortunately for me, I couldn’t avoid hearing the foul sounds of Rock, Rap, Hip-Hop, and Country-Western music, which blared from their radios. I played Christian music in the area where I worked; but in every other part of the store, I heard the devil’s music. When I got home, I felt as though I had to take two “baths.” One was a bath of water, to wash the grease, grime, and filth from my body; and the other was a bath in God’s Word, to rinse the sounds of the world’s music out of my mind!

Now, around that time, there was a song that was so popular, that they played it on the local stations nearly every night. I tried not to hear it; but the main line of the song was repeated so many times, that I couldn’t help but remember it. The main line was, “I’ve got friends in low places” (in other words, in bars and nightclubs). The man who sang this song was *proud* of the fact that he had friends in “low places,” and that he dealt with his problems by drowning them in whiskey and beer! Sadly, this world is filled with people just like this. They love their sin; they’re proud of it; and they have no intention of turning from their sin, and surrendering their heart and life to Christ. They may enjoy their beer, or whiskey, or whatever other earthly pleasures suit them, *for now*; but unless they repent, they will one day end up in a *really* “low place”—the Lake of Fire!

Now, I’m here to tell you that I have a Friend in a “*high* place”—a *very* high place! He sits on a throne, with cherubim and seraphim all around Him; and day and night the angels cry out, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!” The name of my Friend is the Lord Jesus Christ! He helps me through my trials in this life; and He doesn’t do it by killing my brain cells with beer, wine, and whiskey. He does it by *renewing* my mind, so that I may think like Him. He *fills* my mind with His precious promises, and *comes through* on His promises, every single time. What’s more, He will one day take me to the beautiful home that He has prepared for me in His “high place”; and I will dwell with Him forever!

This morning I’d like to tell you about my wonderful Friend, the Lord Jesus Christ. Particularly, we will be focusing on what the Apostle Peter said about the Lord Jesus, right at the end of his epistle. Now, just to remind you, Peter wrote this letter to Jewish Christians, who were scattered throughout Asia Minor. These Christians needed encouragement, because they were undergoing great persecution for Christ. To encourage them, Peter reminded these Christians of their faithful Friend on High. Of course, Peter’s letter is not just for Jewish Christians, but for *all* Christians; and so, these encouraging words are for us, as well. Peter reminds us of our Friend’s **kindness** to us, and of His **calling** to us. He also reminds us of what our Friend **deserves** from us.

The title of this message is ***“I’ve Got a Friend in High Places.”***

Read 1 Peter 5:10-11.

I. Our Friend's kindness to us (v. 10)

Back in **verse 7**, Peter made a comforting statement about our Friend on High. He said, ***"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."*** Now, in **verse 10**, Peter calls this loving Friend ***"the God of all grace."*** Let's read that verse again. **(Read verse 8 again.)** What does Peter mean when He calls God ***"the God of all grace"***? Well, the Greek word for "grace" is *charis*; and *charis* literally means "gift." Sometimes *charis* is translated as "grace"; and sometimes it is translated as "gift." In this verse, it is translated as ***"grace,"*** because Peter is talking about an attribute of God. The word ***"grace"*** refers to the favour and kindness of God. It is God's grace that moves Him to give us gifts that we don't deserve.

When Peter calls God the ***"God of all grace,"*** he is saying that God is the One who bestows *all* gifts. The Apostle James wrote, ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).*** Every good thing that you could possibly have is given to you by God. You may *think* that you have acquired it all by yourself; but you haven't. You may work hard to earn your money, and to purchase your food, and your car, or your house; but who gave you the intelligence to develop the skills that you need in order to work? Who is the One who could take all your intelligence away from you in an instant, if He so desired? Who gives you your health, and your physical ability to work? Who causes the rain to fall, and the crops to grow, so that food can be produced for you, and you can eat? Who protects and delivers you from danger, even when you're not aware of it? Who, at this very moment, is holding every sub-atomic particle of your body together, so that you won't blow apart? Our Creator, the **Lord Jesus Christ**, is doing all these things. He is the one who gives you all these gifts. And make no mistake about it: these gifts are not deserved. The Bible makes it very clear that the only thing that that you and I deserve is to be separated from God forever in the Lake of Fire.

That is why the most important gift of all is the gift of **salvation**. Salvation from death and hell is a gift of God's grace. It was purchased for you by Christ's blood, on the cross; and it has been offered to you through the undeserved (and unearned) favour of God.

Read Ephesians 2:1-5, 8-9.

In the late 1700's in England, there was a wicked, godless, blaspheming blacksmith named **John Nelson**, who heard the Gospel preached; and he believed on Christ, and was gloriously saved. Though he was not highly educated, he became a preacher himself. One day, he was witnessing to a very self-righteous man. After Nelson had cornered this man with Scripture, the man finally came right out and said out loud what was *really* in his heart. He said, "I don't need your Saviour. My life is all I need. I can present my own life to God, and I am satisfied He won't be hard on me. If anybody gets into heaven I shall, because of all the good works I have done, because of the way I have lived." Nelson's response to him was, "Look here—if you get into heaven, you would bring discord there. All in heaven will be *saved sinners*—and *we* are going to sing, 'Glory to the Lamb that was slain, and hath washed us from our sins in His own blood.' *You* couldn't sing that....you would bring discord. *You* would be singing, 'Glory to *me*, because by my own good life and consistent living, my charity and good behaviour, I fitted *myself* for heaven.'" [Ephesians, H.A. Ironside, p. 67]

I ask you: have *you* received the gift of God’s grace—the gift of salvation? If you think that you’re a “good guy,” or a “good gal,” and that God must surely accept you, then you are lost, and hell-bound! Salvation is *only* by God’s grace. If you have not repented of your self-righteousness and placed your faith in Christ, I urge you to repent and trust in Him today!

Our God is the God of *all* grace. He showed His grace to us when He sent His Son to earth to die for our sins. Yet, this was just the beginning. He gives us many other gifts, besides. For example, He gives every believer a special spiritual gift, which he can use in His service. (There are seven of these gifts.) Peter wrote in **1 Peter 4:10**, “*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another.*” God also gives us physical, mental, and emotional strength beyond what is natural. He gives us grace to get through difficult trials, so that we can glorify His name. All these things are *gifts* of God’s grace.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-10.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

I must say that I can identify with Paul’s words. At this very time of the year eighteen years ago, I was lying on my bed in my parents’ house. I was in incredible pain! A small part of my bowel was protruding outside my abdomen; and powerful pain killers were running through my system. I couldn’t drive a car. I couldn’t work a job of any kind. In fact, it didn’t look likely that I would ever be able to hold down a decent job, because I was constantly sick and in the hospital. The possibility of my ever being a missionary church planter, as I had believed God wanted me to do from age 8, looked very bleak. The possibility of my ever being married and having children looked very bleak. I was about \$9,000 in debt from my hospital bills and other debts; and I couldn’t afford even the cheapest apartment of my own. I was totally dependent upon the kindness of my parents, in whose house I lived. I couldn’t understand how God could get any glory out of my life—unless, perhaps, He planned to bring glory to Himself through my death. The way it was looking, death wasn’t far away for me. However, God wasn’t done with me. God, in His incredible grace, lifted me out of my bed of pain and illness, and reversed my health in a remarkable way. He soon enabled me to begin deputation to come to Ireland. Two summers later, He brought me out of debt. Then, the next summer, He brought Katie into my life, and we were married eight months later. Then, one year later, we were stepping onto Irish soil, and beginning what God had called us to do.

How can I account for this? I can’t! I don’t deserve to be standing up here and ministering to you today. Yet, here I am. God did it all; and He did it through His grace. Paul said, “***Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need***” (Hebrews 4:16). God is truly the “***God of all grace.***” He is the best Friend you could ever have!

II. Our Friend’s calling for us (v. 10)

(**Read verse 10 again.**) There is another fact about my “Friend in High Places,” which I would like to point out: namely, **He has a calling for His people.** Now, the calling to which God has called us is not just one narrow, specific thing: it encompasses many things. However, Peter sums up God’s calling for Christians in two ways.

First of all, God has a calling for us in eternity. Peter says that God has *“called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus.”* Our Friend in High Places will one day call us who are saved to the High Place where He dwells, so that we may live with Him eternally. Jesus gave His disciples a little glimpse of that glory when He said, *“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:2-3).

Isaiah gave us a glimpse of our eternal home on high, as well. In **Isaiah 33:15-17** Isaiah wrote, *“He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.”* Heaven is the eternal abode for all who have heeded God’s call to salvation! By the way, when we who know the Lord go to be with our Friend on high, God will give each of us a special name. Just as a loving father calls his children by special “pet names,” so God the Father will have a special name for each of His children. In **Revelation 2:17**, God says that He will give every saint in heaven a *“white stone”*; and in the stone there will be a *“new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”* When I was growing up, my dad had a special name for me. My full name was “Lamby Laddy Beary Pie.” Over the years, it was shortened to “Lamby Laddy Bear,” and, then to “Lamby Bear”; and he called me by this name into my young adult years! That name finally wore off; but in Heaven, God’s special names for His children will never wear off! They will be an eternal reminder of His love.

Christian, God has a wonderful calling for you in eternity. It is beyond your comprehension! Yet, it’s important to remember *why* He has called you to His home on high. Paul answers that question for us in **Ephesians chapters 1 and 2**. Let’s take a look.

Read Ephesians 1:17-21.

Now, look again at **verse 20**. Where did Christ go after his resurrection? Paul says that He took His seat in *“heavenly places.”* Now, that is an important truth! Why? Because the Bible says that those who are saved are *joined together* with Christ. If Christ be seated in heaven, and if we be joined to Him, then we are in a very secure position, are we not? We surely are! Let’s see what Paul says about this a few verses later!

Read Ephesians 2:4-7.

Did you catch that? Just as Jesus was raised up from the dead, and was set down in heavenly places, so we who are saved have been raised up from *spiritual* death, and have been made to sit *“together”* with Christ, in heavenly places. *Why* does God see us as though we were seated with Christ in Heaven? Because we are “in Christ.” We can’t be separated from Him. He is in Heaven; thus, we are in Heaven with Him. In reality, we are not in heaven *yet*; but in God’s eyes, it’s as though we were already seated there! (How’s *that* for eternal security?)

With this in mind, let’s return to the question: *“Why has God called us to His home on high?”* What is the reason for all this? *Why* has God been so kind as to raise us up from spiritual

death, and to seat us in heavenly places? Paul answers that question in **verse 7**. God has done all this so that in the “*ages to come*,” He might “*shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*” In other words, we who have been saved by His grace will be *trophies* of His grace, for all eternity! *Our* goodness will not be on display: *God’s* goodness will be on display, through us! He is the one who saved us and made us into new creations; and it is He who will completely eradicate our sin nature on the Resurrection Day. On that day, He will give us bodies that are free from sin, and fit to dwell in “heavenly places”!

I’ve got a Friend in high places; and He has a calling for me in eternity. That calling is to be with Him in heavenly places for eternity, so that He may receive eternal glory for His incredible kindness toward me. This is His calling for you, as well, Christian!

However, there is a part of God’s calling that is being realised *right now*, in the present. God’s calling for every Christian at this present time is to be *holy*. **First Thessalonians 4:7** says that “*God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*”

Read 1 Peter 1:15-16.

On the day when I received Christ as my Saviour, I answered God’s call to a life of holiness. If you are saved, you answered that call on the day of your salvation, as well. Our call to holiness will ultimately be realised on the Resurrection Day, when we will have no more sin nature. However, while we are still in this mortal body, we still have a sin nature; and that sin must be overcome and put to death daily. For that reason, God has included, *as part of our calling*, something that isn’t pleasant, but which is necessary. It’s called “*suffering.*” God has called us to **suffering** in this life. Let’s read **verse 10** once again. (**Read 1 Peter 5:10.**)

The major theme of this letter is suffering. Peter wrote this letter because the Jewish Christians in his audience were going through great suffering and persecution for Christ. Their goods were being confiscated. They were being thrown in prison. Their families were being split apart. Many of them were being put to death. Yet, Peter assured them that there was a reason for all this. God was allowing them to go through suffering in order that He might “*perfect* (in other words, “make complete”), *stablish, strengthen, and settle*” them. God’s desire was to move them from a place of spiritual *immaturity, instability, and wavering faith*, to a place of spiritual maturity, stability, and rock-solid faith. Through suffering, God was teaching them to **rely on Him**, and to step out on faith, even when they couldn’t see visible evidence of how God was going to sustain them.

Now, how long is this suffering to last? That’s the “million-euro question.” If there were a verse that answers that question, I would direct you to it! However, God doesn’t tell us. All God tells us is that the suffering is for “*a while.*” How long is “*a while*”? He doesn’t say! What we do know, from many Scriptures, is that suffering is usually “off and on,” with periods of relief in between. There are many examples of this in the Bible. Let’s look at one.

Read Acts 8:1-3 / 9:1-6, 17-19, 31.

For quite some time, God allowed a vile man named Saul of Tarsus to “make havoc” of His saints. He hunted them down, arrested them, imprisoned them, and had them put to death. But then, God saved Saul by His grace, and made Him into one of the greatest preachers of the

Gospel who ever lived. And what was the result? Suddenly, God’s people had “*rest*” from persecution. (At least, for a time.) There was suffering, and rest, suffering, and rest.

None of us in this room have been through this kind of persecution for the name of Christ. How, then, can we relate this truth about suffering? Well, we may not have ever been in jeopardy of our lives; but we *do* go through suffering in our lives, of many different sorts. I know many Christians who have experienced long periods of suffering in their lives; yet, they never grow bitter. Even in the midst of their trial they always say, “The Lord is in control. He has a reason. He knows what He’s doing; and He will bring me through this.” They don’t stop going to church; they don’t stop being involved in the ministry of their church; they don’t stop giving to God and others; they don’t stop witnessing; they don’t stop reading their Bibles; they don’t stop praying; and they *never* accuse God. God has often given them relief, right when they needed it most; but then, trials came again. Yet, through all their trials, they became stronger in the Lord, not weaker. God has used suffering to strengthen their faith in Him.

Sometimes intense suffering goes on for years, with little relief. But then, relief finally comes; and the trials afterward are mild compared to what they were earlier. **Joseph** is a perfect example of this. For thirteen years he suffered unjustly. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers, and taken to Egypt. Then, after he had been exalted to a stewardship position, he was faced with a temptation; and when he wouldn’t yield to it, he was falsely accused of attempted rape, and thrown into prison. Then, during the short time when the king’s butler was in prison, Joseph did a great kindness to him; but after the butler was restored to his position, he forgot all about Joseph, and said nothing on his behalf. For two more years Joseph rotted in jail. But when the time was right—when Joseph was “perfected, stablished, strengthened, and settled,” and prepared for the task that God had for him—God lifted him out of prison, and made him second-in-command to the king of Egypt. And it all happened *in one day!*

Now, I wish I could say that every believer is appointed to a “happy ending,” as Joseph was. Yet, such is not the case. For some believers, there is little to no relief in this lifetime. The lot of some believers is to suffer for the rest of their days here on earth, with no deliverance.

Read Hebrews 11:32-38.

No matter what plan of suffering God has charted for you, and no matter how *long* your suffering may be, you may be assured, if you are God’s child, that there *will* be suffering in this life. God has *called* you to suffering during this life on earth. However, never forget God’s calling for you *in eternity!* This life is just a vapour. This life is a mere a wind, and a shadow. It will soon be gone; but eternity will never end! Your Friend in High Places has a plan for you, Christian: so let Him do His work through you *now*. Let Him do His work of suffering in you for a little while, so that He may “*perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*”

III. What our Friend deserves from us (v. 11)

(Read verses 10 and 11 again.) Here in verse 11, Peter is ending the sentence that he began back in verse 10; and he ends it with the word “*Amen*” (which means “Truth”). Verses 10 and 11 are a benediction—a “prayer of blessing” upon the people to whom Peter is writing.

Now, don't breeze over these words in **verse 11**. These aren't merely nice little words that Peter thought would sound good at the end of his letter. These are powerful words! Peter says, "***To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.***" Now, think about that. Why would Peter say, "***To him be glory and dominion***"? Doesn't God already *have* all the "***glory and dominion***"? Does our saying these words give God glory and dominion that He wouldn't have had otherwise? Of course not. When all is said and done, God will get *all* the glory from His creation—whether they *willingly* give it to Him or not! Every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So, what's the point? The point is that when we pray, we should *acknowledge* that all glory and dominion belong to God. God doesn't *need* us to glorify His name: but he does *deserve* for us to glorify Him. We should declare His greatness voluntarily and cheerfully. When God blesses you, stop and praise him for it! The Bible says, "***By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.***"

However, God deserves more than words. It is one thing to *say* "Glory to God"; but words mean nothing if they be not backed up with faith and obedience. If you come to church and sing "To God be the glory," yet you blatantly disobey Him in some area of your life, you are not glorifying His name. God's name is glorified when His people manifest His righteous character before the world! If you are saved, God has attached His name to *you*. This means that His character is attached to you, as well. Don't malign God's character by disobeying Him. God wants more than your words of praise; He wants your whole heart and life.

Conclusion: The lost world out there brags that they have "friends in low places." The only comfort they know comes from things below—from things of this earth. In sharp contrast, God's people have a Friend in High Places. If you know Jesus Christ as your Saviour, this Friend in High Places has shown His fathomless grace to you. He has given you a marvellous calling for time and eternity; and He deserves all your praise. However, in order to make you *fit* to bring praise to His name, He has ordained a measure of suffering for you in this lifetime. Are you submitting to that purpose without complaint? The suffering will be only for "a while." Won't you let Him "***perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you***"? I would also ask, "Are you saved?" If not, please trust in Christ today! He is ready and willing to save you!