

*“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,”* John 12:21.

*“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,”* Mark 9:24.

## 1 PETER 5

<sup>6</sup>Therefore humble yourselves under God’s powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time. <sup>7</sup>Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup>Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him by being firm in the faith. You know that the same kinds of sufferings are being laid on your brotherhood all over the world.” <sup>10</sup>After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you. <sup>11</sup>To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.



“I got a kitty.” That’s what Tyler, a sophomore boy when I was teaching high school, told me after one school break. He had taken his vacation into the South Dakota hills to hunt mountain lions (a.k.a.; cougars, pumas, or panthers). He found one in his hunt.

The words “kitty” or “cat” never shows up once in the Bible. There are no house cats in the Bible, but there are ten dozen big cats. The word “lion” occurs 120 times and the word “leopard” 8 times. Usually the lions in the Bible would be more like mountain lions or panthers. Peter wasn’t writing to people in the African jungle or savannah, where you might find Mufasa-sized lions with a flowing mane. Peter was writing to believers at or near the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor, in modern-day Turkey.

But often when the Bible talks about lions, it’s not talking about big cats in captivity. It is often a comparison of strength and power. Peter pictures a well-known spiritual being for us as a lion. The lion is a good picture of the devil. The devil is powerful and strong, and he prowls around for someone to gulp up.

Peter talked about this lion because he knew these believers in Asia Minor were suffering. Their suffering was real. Peter faced that suffering head-on, and even used the word “suffering” 17 times in his first epistle.

The emperor at the time was Nero, whose mother, Agrippina, was very wicked. Agrippina had a number of people killed to secure Nero's throne. But later Nero rebelled against his mother and was behind a plot that had her murdered. A few years later, in A.D. 64, he probably set Rome on fire, which raged for a week long, destroyed three-out-of-fourteen districts, and damaged several more. They say Nero fiddled while Rome burned, and he may have done it just to build his golden palace where the seaside mansions and temples used to be. The point is that Nero blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians, and it set off, what some church fathers called, the first great persecution of Christians.

According to the Roman historian Tacitus, hundreds of Christians were arrested, accused of antisocial beliefs, thrown into the arenas for entertainment, and torn to death by wild beasts. Others were crucified, coated with pitch, and set on fire. When darkness fell, they burned like torches in the night. In his second letter to Timothy, St. Paul says, he "*was delivered from the lion's mouth*"

In this way, the big cat of the Bible, namely the devil, wanted to convince believers they should give up the faith. They should give up now. To believe in Jesus is to be doomed to suffer. If they faced torture and even death, the "big cat of the Bible" thought and tempted, then maybe you would think twice about loving and believing in Jesus Christ.

As we have said, the devil prowls around looking for you to gulp up believers like you. The devil doesn't just roll over and sunbathe when he discovers you are a believer. He pushes temptation on you like new, in order to swallow you.

Do you remember a time when you suffered for being Christian? Maybe you received verbal abuse. Maybe that's happening now, whether your friends or family, a boss or coworkers, your students or your teacher. Maybe someone asked you why you'd even care to risk going to church in the middle of a pandemic and a dangerous virus. Of all places, is church really so essential? Shouldn't a virus keep you from getting together in a group, like at church? Sufferings, because of Jesus, are designed to drag us away from Him.

But instead, our suffering can draw us to Him. God is using our suffering for good. This was true in the time of Peter. In the grand scheme of things, the high view of history, says that suffering GREW the Church. When people watched the Christians be accused, attacked, tortured, burned, and put to death, guess how they responded? They figured the Christians had figured something out about

this world they didn't know. People were attracted to Christianity. People wanted to know this Jesus. One church father said that the blood of the martyrs was like seed. He meant that the death of Christians planted the seed for others to believe. And the Christian church grew like wildfire.

You see, the plans and prowlings of the devil are no match for Someone else in the Bible. There's an even bigger cat in the Bible than the devil. If you know of the devil as a lion, you should also know about the Lion of Judah. We find out about Him twice in the Bible. *"You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion He crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse Him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to Whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His. He will tether His donkey to a vine, His colt to the choicest branch; He will wash His garments in wine, His robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, His teeth whiter than milk"* (Gen. 49:9-12). This isn't a normal human being who wears the crown of Judah. Jesus Christ is the Lion of Judah who came to fulfill the words of Genesis. Revelation 5:5 makes that clear, *"Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'"* Until that point in Revelation, Jesus Christ is called a Lamb, for He was sacrificed as a Substitute for our sins. But the picture changes, and the ascended Lord is the Lion. From the first book to the last, we can be confident that Jesus, not the devil, is **The Biggest Cat In The Bible**.

How can we resist the prowling lion? We go to the biggest Lion. We seek to firm up our faith in Him. We seek to be more grounded on Him than ever. We find firmness of faith in the Word and sacraments. We find the weapons of faith in the Law and the Gospel. Peter shows us an arsenal to battle the devil.

First, we are told to pray. Cast all our anxiety on the biggest Lion, Jesus Christ. He is the biggest cat. Martin Luther once said, "Pray and let God worry." He didn't mean to suggest that God worries. He simply meant what Peter says. Load Jesus up with your anxieties. Prayer is humbling, but more powerful than anything in the world. It looks to God's mighty 'paw' to *"lift us up in due time."*

Second, Peter warns to *"have sound judgment. Be alert."* Don't be surprised if this world gives you problems. Who suffered first? Jesus did. Our Lion was put to death first. You love Jesus Christ, and that means you love His cross. Jesus and you walk the same way. You Christians share in the suffering of Jesus.

When you presume to think that you are too important to face suffering, you forget who really saved whom. Your Lord and your God, Jesus Christ, has done it all, taking away your sins and defeating the devil's plans. Don't grumble! Don't be surprised!

Suffer well for Jesus. Do not be ashamed of Jesus. Being associated with Jesus is not an insult. It's a badge of honor. Suffering sobers you up and focuses our minds on Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ can limit your sufferings. He has marked their end with an ultimate limit by promising to take you out of them one day. Suffering is temporary. For now, when you suffer, others will see the cross through you. They may see Jesus Christ in your suffering.

Psalm 91:13 says, "*You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*" This passage comes just after "*he will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.*" In your frail humanity, the Holy Spirit has placed new life. In this new life, you are connected to the power. In your suffering, you are not powerless. You have been given weapons. You are part of the victorious army, a brotherhood suffering the same things.

It's hard. It's painful. It lasts long. It may even cost your life. Sources outside the Bible tell us that both Peter and Paul were put to death under the reign of the same emperor, Nero, by 68. Yet Paul could say in the last letter that he wrote, "*I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom.*" (2 Tim. 4:17-18). Why was that? It is because Paul had kept the faith and had run the race and had fought the good fight. He had battled and overcome the devil by the power of the biggest cat in the Bible, his Savior Jesus Christ.

It's hard. It's painful. It lasts long. Yet it will result in everlasting life. By faith alone in Jesus, the Lion of Judah, will be your strength. Amen.

"After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you. To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen."