

Spiritual Ballast | 1 Peter
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On August 10th, 1628, the Swedish navy launched the maiden voyage of a ship called “The Vasa.” The Vasa was an expression of Swedish naval power at the time and was built at the order of the King.

It was an amazing ship; powerfully armored, richly decorated; no expense was spared. There were numerous Roman statues on board and even one of the rooms was made to look like the royal place. It was a ship that was made to show off Swedish might and power.

So, with great anticipation and excitement, with thousands of people cheering on, the Vasa set sail on August 10th from the shores of Stockholm. And it seemed to be a perfect day for a launch – pretty calm and nice. However, as it was passing by the Royal palace with gun ports open for a Royal salute, a gust of wind – nothing really severe – filled its sails and began to tilt the Vasa over to its’ left side. A bit later, less than a mile into the voyage, a slightly stronger gust caused the ship to tilt even more.

But this time, this amazing powerful ship capsized and within 5 minutes sank to the bottom of the harbor killing about 30 people. The onlookers were horrified and it was a tragic event.

But this tragedy could have easily been avoided because it was well known by the ship builders AND the government that the Vasa was very narrow and top-heavy. Thus, they needed to pack the bottom of the ship with more weight, or what’s known as a “**ballast**” to balance the ship. At that time, it would have been tons and tons of stone that they would have had to use to pack the bottom of the ship. BUT... they chose not to add the ballast and as a result, when a gust of wind, not even a storm, hit the ship, it capsized and resulted in tragedy.

So, why do I share this story? Well, I am in NO ways an expert in ship building nor anything related to sailing – and apologies to any navy folks here if I get any of this wrong. But in many ways, our lives are like ships that constantly gets buffeted by wind, waves, and at times, fierce storms. And no matter how amazing and “put together” we may look on the outside, no matter the accomplishments, position, power, or wealth, even if we look like the Vasa on outside, unless we have ENOUGH of and the RIGHT ballast in our lives, unless we have the right stuff in our lives that will provide stability and security in the storm – we, like the Vasa, will capsize. And at times, it “may” end up in tragedy.

And by the way, NONE of us are immune from the wind, waves, and storms of life. ALL of us have, or are, or WILL be dealing with “stuff” in our lives. And I know that many of us, behind the scenes, and after we get home from church: Whether it’s relational conflict, mental health issues - depression, anxiety, deep loneliness; or physical ailments and illness; addictions, financial issues, or super practical things like not being able to find a job even though you just graduated from a great college, or being let go from a job you thought was stable. ALL of us are dealing with “stuff.”

But again, unless we have ENOUGH of and the RIGHT ballast in our lives we, like the Vasa, will be prone to capsize. So, the question is, and the question I want to explore with us this morning is: *If this is true, what sort of ballast DO we need in our lives SO THAT we don’t capsize when the storms and waves hit us?* More specifically, AS followers of Jesus: *What are the ballasts that “God” wants us to have in our lives?*

Well, this is one of the questions that God through Peter seeks to answer throughout the letter of **1st Peter**. And this will be more of a “survey” of the letter verses an exposition of just one passage. Because the audience of this letter, who were scattered Christians throughout Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), were facing tremendous persecution for their faith – they were being buffeted daily by the wind, wave, and storms of life. That’s why Peter through this letter presents several, what I call “**spiritual ballast**,” that he wants these suffering Christians to have and to lean on so that they can not only withstand the storms, but even find joy and hope IN the storms. And I believe that these are the same spiritual ballast that God desires for US to have as WE face the wind, waves, and storms in OUR lives so that we not only “survive” or “endure,” but even find joy in the MIDST of the storm.

So... *what are these “spiritual ballasts”?* Well, there are many in this letter, but for our time this morning, let me just mention a few:

- **Spiritual Ballast 1: Grounded-ness in our Gospel Identity**

First, and I would say, the most important “spiritual ballast” that I believe God wants to have is a **grounded-ness in our Gospel Identity**. *What do I mean by this and where do we see this in the letter of 1st Peter?*

Well, simply that the more we understand and the more we are secure in WHO we are and WHOSE we are because of what Jesus has done for us, the more we can find stability and security in life, which helps us keep steady through the storm. *For instance*, Peter reminds the persecuted Christians in **Chapter 1** that they are “elect” and “chosen”, “known by God,” “sanctified by the Holy Spirit,” “cleansed by the blood of Jesus”, “born again”, and “redeemed”. As he says in **verse 18**: *“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life*

handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

Then in **Chapter 2**, he reminds them that they are “living stones”, part of a “spiritual house”. Then in that well-known passage in **vs. 9** he reminds them that: *“they are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession,”* who have been delivered from darkness and brought into God’s glorious light; that they who were NOT a people, are now God’s people. They who had not received mercy have now received mercy. And that because of Jesus and through their faith in Him they are now part of God’s family; they have also been healed by Jesus’ wounds as **Chapter 2 vs. 24** says; and they are now sheep that now have been found.

And you see this over and over again in this letter, at least 14 times where Peter keeps reminding them the truth of the Gospel – what Jesus did for them on the cross, the mercy God has shown – but also who they are as a result of their faith in Christ – i.e. Their Gospel Identity.

As I thought about this, the question I had was: *Why does Peter keep hammering this truth throughout the letter? And how in the world does being grounded in our gospel identity ACTUALLY help us withstand the storms of life? I mean, why didn’t Peter just give some self-help tools or practical ways to cope with the difficulties they were facing?*

Well, I “think” it works like this: You see, when we realize and are deeply secure in the truth that because of God’s grace shown in Jesus – because of his life, death, and resurrection, when we place our trust in Jesus – we now are deeply loved, completely forgiven, significant in God’s eyes, seen, never alone, secure in God’s Hands, it creates a deep sense of stability in our souls – **like a heavy ballast**. SO THAT – when then the wind, waves, and storms hit our lives, we are kept stable and secure.

Now, it may not change the circumstances, but it changes US and makes US more confident and secure in Christ. It’s similar to the idea that I shared awhile ago about our Identity in Christ being our spiritual armor in **Ephesians 6**. That is, the more we are secure in who we are, but more importantly, WHOSE we are because of what Jesus did – the more we are shielded and protected by not only from the arrows of the evil one, but by the wind and waves of this life. Practically speaking, what this means is that the more we meditate upon, receive, accept, and speak God’s truth to ourselves about WHO we are in Christ, the more “ballast” we can have in our souls to withstand the storms.

Marty talked about this a few weeks ago when he mentioned the “rut of lies” that are in our minds and hearts from listening to and accepting the lies of the evil one. Whether it’s caused by experiences we’ve had or family of origin issues, these lies create instability and

insecurity, especially when we get hit by the wind and waves of difficulty and suffering. And at times, it causes us to turn to unbiblical and unhealthy “ballasts” that can eventually lead to tragedy.

BUT... when we realize that WHEN we trust in Jesus as our Savior, we are “born-again” and have become a “new creation,” that the old has gone and the new has come; and WHEN we are able to replace the rut of lies with new paths of God’s truth, the more we sense stability and security to withstand the storms.

Let me give you an idea what this may look like in daily life. In my life, one of the difficulties I face is at times overwhelming anxiety. I won’t go into the reasons for this, but a huge struggle for me is anxiety – and it can be about a lot of things – finances, health, kids, ministry, future, etc. Now, when I experience something that causes anxiety, my **natural** tendency is to follow the rut of lies of the evil one – like the lie that I have to take control of things on my own because no one else will; or that if I don’t take control, things are going to become really bad and catastrophic; that I am on my own; that God’s not really interested in these things; and the lies go on and on.

BUT.... When I remind myself of my Gospel Identity - this is when things start to change. I start creating and going down a new path – a path of God’s truth - that says that because of Jesus, I am deeply loved, completely forgiven, I am significant and seen, God does care for me; I am not alone and He will never leave me nor forsake me. And that no matter what happens in life, I am in God’s hands – so, ultimately, all will be okay. And the result is that all of a sudden I sense this “ballast” in my soul; a deep weight of security and stability. And I can then navigate THROUGH the anxiety with calm and even joy.

Now, again, it doesn’t change the circumstances that CAUSED the anxiety, but it changes ME and the way I respond to it. And so instead of being **capsized** by anxiety, I’m able to go through it and find peace and even joy in the midst of the wind and waves. Now, I may need to speak God’s truth to myself over and over again until it really sinks in, and I’m not successful ALL the time, BUT when I AM able to really accept and receive God’s truth about WHO I am in Christ, the more I can withstand the wind and waves of life.

And so it is for all of us. No matter what wind, wave, or storm that we may face, and some of us are facing some really fierce storms right now, IF we are NOT grounded and secure in WHO we are and WHOSE we are because of what Jesus did, the less “ballast” we will have to steady the ship, and the more we will be prone to turn to unhealthy, unbiblical, and unhelpful “ballasts” of this world.

And so, as we think about this, a few questions for us to ask ourselves: What are the current ballasts in our lives that we turn to when we face the wind and waves of difficulty in

life? Is our Gospel Identity the primary one, or is it something else? And to get even more practical, what lies about ourselves, or about God, or about life do we need to replace with God's truth?

Now, before moving onto the second spiritual ballast, let me just read over you and remind you of some truths found in Scripture about WHO you are because of what Jesus did. Let these truths sink deep inside and feel it becoming a "ballast," to your soul. Be reminded that, even though we are broken and messed up sinners, when we trust in Jesus and because of Jesus:

- You are now a child of God (John 1:12)
- You are God's friend (John 15:15)
- You are no longer a slave, but you are a son and a daughter of God (Galatians 4; Romans 8, and Ephesians 1).
- You are an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ (Galatians 4 and Romans 8)
- You are united with Christ (1 Corinthians 6:17)
- You are saved by grace and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- You have peace with God and reconciled to Him (2 Cor. 5:18-19)
- You are loved by God and freed from sins by the blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5)
- You have been forgiven of ALL your sins (Colossians 2:13)
- You have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11)
- You are now a citizen of a Heavenly Kingdom and part of God's family (Ephesians 2:19)
- You are dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:11)
- You are a new creation – the old is gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- You are a saint through the righteousness of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2).
- You are righteous and holy because of Jesus (Eph. 4:24)
- You have direct access to God (Eph. 2:18)
- You are complete in Christ and have all you need (Col. 2:10)
- You are free from condemnation (Rom. 8:1-2), never alone or forsaken (Heb. 13:5)
- You have been delivered from darkness and brought into the light (Col. 1:13)
- You have been given God's divine power and have everything you need for a godly life (2 Peter 1:3)
- You are more than a conqueror (Rom. 8:37)
- You have been given a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline and not a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7)

- You cannot be separated from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39)
- You are now salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13)
- Seated in the heavenly places with Jesus (Eph. 2:6)
- Purchased by the precious blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:19)
- God's workmanship, created to do good works (Eph. 2:10)

These are just "some" of the truths of who you are in Christ; Let them replace the lies that are in your minds and hearts so that it can be a ballast to your soul.

- **Spiritual Ballast 2: A Focus on our Future Hope**

The second spiritual ballast that Peter presents in this letter is a ***focus on our future hope***. Peter reminds us through the letter that one of the key "ballast" in life, one of the things that will keep us stable and steady through the storm is an understanding ***of*** and our focus ***on*** the future hope that we have in Christ – namely, that because we are saved, we have a heavenly inheritance waiting for us. That no matter what happens in this life, we have an eternal security that no one and nothing can take away from us. As he says in **Chapter 1 vs. 3**, because of Jesus we now have a "*living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you*". This is in contrast to the earthly physical inheritance that is perishable and unstable. This is very similar to what Jesus says in **Matthew 6** where Jesus talks about having treasures in Heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

And this was important for the Christians back in Peter's time because for many of them, they were displaced from their homes and lost their physical wealth; And literally lost the inheritance that would be passed down to their families. But Peter by reminding them that there is an eternal inheritance waiting for them because of what Jesus did on the cross and the resurrection, they can have a "living hope", a hope that is alive and vibrant.

That's why all throughout the letter Peter tells them to keep the "end in mind"; that there is a coming salvation" (**Chapter 1 vs. 5**) when Jesus Christ will be revealed. As Peter says in **vs. 13 of Chapter 1**: "*set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.*" And then in **Chapter 4 vs. 13**, "*But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*" And there are at least 10 times throughout the letter when Peter points us to our Future Hope in Christ.

But like the first ballast, the question I had is: *How does focusing on our Future Hope "actually" help us endure and find joy in the storms of life?* Well, I think it's pretty simple: the more remember that this world is not it; that this is not our final destination and home; that one day Jesus will return; that God WILL close history one day; that there will be

a final judgment when God will make all things right; and will give to those who believe an eternal inheritance that will never fade and never perish. The more we remember that there will come a day when all will be made right and there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, no more sin, and no more suffering. The more we will see our suffering from an “eternal perspective”; that though our trials may be difficult, they are “momentary” as Paul talks about in **2 Cor. 4:17**. And by seeing the “finish line” and by taking our eyes off of the temporary to the eternal, it provides a deep hope that enables us to endure.

It's like a runner in a marathon who is experiencing the hardest part of the race; and that person hits the proverbial “wall.” And one of the mental strategies that runners will use is to visualize the end; to visualize crossing the finish line, experiencing the cheers of the crowd, experiencing the relief of crossing the line and ultimately, receiving the medal. And by shifting their focus away from the temporary pain to the elation of the finish line, they are able to endure the pain to get to the finish line.

For us this morning, I think one of the simple but important applications of this letter is to simply REMEMBER the Finish Line; WHEN you and I experience the wind, waves, and storms of life, WHEN we hit a “wall” in life, to take a moment, a very LONG moment to take our eyes off of the temporary and remember the eternal; To think about the Future Hope that we have because of Jesus; that He WILL return; there WILL be a Final Judgment when all the wrongs will be made right; there WILL be a time when there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more sorrow; that we have a Heavenly Home waiting for us. And the more we do this, the more “spiritual ballast” we will have.

I had shared before about that “Job” like year in my past when I lost three generations of family members – my grandfather, mother, and my child. And one of the ways God got me and my wife through that time was his constant reminder that this world wasn't “it.”; that we're just passing through; that there's a heaven waiting for us; that we will see my believing grandfather, mother, and child. And the more I kept my focus on Heaven, the more “ballast” I felt in my soul to steady the ship and get me through that rough time.

Now, I know that there's a saying that “we can be too heavenly minded to be of earthly good.” But I think the opposite is true: That more than not, we are too “earthly” minded to be of heavenly use; that we don't think about heaven ENOUGH; that our focus is SO MUCH on the temporary, SO MUCH on earthly things that we forget that we ARE just passing through; that there is such a thing that Christ's return, a Final Judgment, and an Eternal inheritance.

As Paul reminds us in **2 Cor. 4:16**: *“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction*

is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” So, focus on your Future Hope. That’s the second spiritual ballast.

- **Spiritual Ballast 3:** **Deep Connection with Jesus and His People**

The third spiritual ballast is a **deep connection with Jesus and His people**. This is another very simple but powerful principle to help us through the difficulties of life. And I think we all know this, but this is a reminder that the deeper and more intimate our relationship is with Jesus AND His people, the more “ballast” we will have to withstand the storms of this life. And we see this principle at least 7 times throughout the letter.

For instance, Peter tells us in **Chapter 1 vs. 8**: *“Though you have not seen him (that is Jesus), you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”* Then in **Chapter 2 vs. 5**, he reminds them that they are deeply connected to Jesus like “living stones” that are connected to the “chief cornerstone” This is similar to the body metaphor that Paul uses to describe our relationship with Christ – with Christ being the head and we being His body. Or the Vine and branches metaphor in **John 15** where we are reminded that Christ is the VINE and we are the BRANCHES and that apart from Jesus, we can do nothing.

Again, I think most of us know this to be the case: The deeper our relationship is with Jesus, the more we will experience His grace, peace, joy, and strength to handle the difficulties of life. We know, like Paul, that we can do all things ONLY through Christ who strengthens us.

However, I think that some of us forget the second part of this spiritual ballast which is our deep connection with Jesus’ people – i.e. The community of faith – His church. Because at times maybe some of us feel like Christian life is just about “me” and Jesus; and that we really don’t need to be deeply connected to the community of faith. But when you look throughout the letter of **1st Peter**, you see how important it is not only to Peter but to God that we are deeply supported by and committed to other believers in Christ.

For instance, in **Chapter 1 vs. 22** God through Peter commands them to *“have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”* Then again in **Chapter 2 vs. 17**, he tells them to *“love the family of believers.”* In **Chapter 3 vs. 8**, *“be like-minded, sympathetic, and love one another, be compassionate and humble.”* **Chapter 4 vs. 7** tells us: *“above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”* He reminds them that they are the COMMUNITY of faith, a “chosen PEOPLE,” not just person; a holy priesthood, a holy nation, the family of believers in **Chapter 2**.

In other words, God through Peter wants them AND us today to know that IF we want to endure and find peace and joy through the difficulties of life, it's not about "ME" and "Jesus", but "US" and "Jesus." It's a simple and powerful reminder that we NEED one another if we're going to make it; we NEED to be deeply connected to other believers in Christ. Why? ***Because we simply CAN'T go it alone because we were never MEANT to go it alone.***

One of the best illustrations of the importance of community was in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey in Houston. Not sure how many of you remember this or even heard about this since it was in Texas. But it was a devastating storm that impacted thousands of lives, flooded hundreds of homes and churches.

But what was amazing was how AFTER the storm, neighbors who didn't know each other came out to help other neighbors; churches started to work together. There was a saying "Houston Strong" and it was printed on shirts and in ads all around the city. And you could FEEL the city coming together. It was pretty amazing. And it was this sense of community that got Houston through this rough time.

Even on a personal basis, we saw this sense of community show up when our house got flooded a few years after Hurricane Harvey from a freak Ice Storm. Since we had recently moved to our house, we didn't really know our neighbors. But when our neighbors found out about the flooding, they all came to our house with buckets and towels and everyone pitched in to help including little kids. It was pretty overwhelming and powerful; and we couldn't have gone through it without the support of others.

*But how much MORE should Christ's church be like this? Where **everyone** feels deeply supported and deeply connected to other believers in Christ SO THAT when the wind, waves, and at times the Hurricane Harvey's hit our lives we can withstand the storm together.*

And many of you know how true this is: Whether it's been through your small group, women's ministry, men's ministry, or discipleship groups – these have been essential in weathering through the storms of life. This is why we encourage anyone who comes to this church to get connected. Because again, we can't "go it alone" because we were never "meant" to go it alone.

God first taught me this lesson when I was in seminary and I was about to quit because to be honest, seminary was NOT what I was expecting; I thought it would be like a super long retreat where I learned more about Jesus – grew in prayer and would be mentored by my professors. Now, "some" of that was true, but for me, it was more of a

super long academic class that I wanted to get done with. As well, trying to balance that with being a full-time youth pastor at that time, I got burnt out and was ready to quit.

But thankfully, I had two amazing roommates, Greg and Jay, who asked how I was doing and asked if I would be willing to share and pray with them once a week. Reluctantly, I did, and so I began to share all of my struggles and burn out, and then we prayed together. And slowly God started to heal my heart; and slowly he started to restore my love for Him and desire to serve Him in ministry; and got me back on track. And I share this all the time, but if it weren't for those weekly times of deep sharing and prayer and these two Christian roommates, I wouldn't have continued in ministry and I wouldn't be here today.

The result of that season was that I realized how important it was for me to be in deep, intimate, accountable relationships. And so, when I planted my first church as the lead pastor in 2001, I got together with 2 other pastors every week to share deeply and pray for one another. And we've been sharing and praying every single week since 2001.

And we get REALLY honest in our times of sharing; they know every struggle, every sin, and every issue in my life, and I know theirs. But we accept one another and encourage one another to keep loving God and others. And there have been a LOT of wind, waves, and storms since we began meeting, but it has been this deep connection with the community of faith that has helped me endure through the trials and pains of life; they have been one of the key "spiritual ballast" in my life.

That's why when I've trained church planters and pastors over the years, the #1 thing I would tell them is to BE connected in accountable friendships with other believers. Because THAT will be one of your main anchors in the storm.

So, for us this morning, a pretty simple application: *Do WE have this sort of accountable friendship with other believers in Christ? Do we have a place and a community where we can be completely honest about our struggles and sins, where we will be accepted, but also encouraged to walk in the ways of Jesus?* If not, I would strongly encourage you to get connected. Join a small group; join the women's ministry, men's ministry, other smaller groups. Because we can't go it alone because we were never meant to go it alone.

So, these are the some of the "spiritual ballasts" that God through Peter presents to us: 1) Be grounded in your Gospel Identity; 2) Keep thinking about your future hope so you can have an eternal perspective; and 3) stay deeply connected to Jesus and His people. This is what will keep you steady through the storm.

This is a preaching dra..

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