Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Email programs allow you to set up what is known as an auto-signature. So, whenever you send an email, it automatically puts whatever words you have chosen on the bottom of the email to save you typing them out every time. So, all my minister emails, for example, automatically have ‘Pastor Andre Holtslag’ and my contact details at the bottom of the message. And I have seen others who have Bible verses or Kind regards and their name in a special colour as their auto-signature.

Well, when it comes to the letters of the New Testament, there is no such thing as an auto-signature. For while most of them end with what are called final greetings, they are all different, and they are always personal to the individual or congregation that was being written to. And often times they also summarize the key theme of the letter.

And that is absolutely the case with this last part of Peter’s first letter. He has made it very clear that believers can expect to suffer persecution. But we have been told that by the power of God’s grace in Christ Jesus, we can endure suffering. So, let’s bring this sermon series to a close by considering the final greeting of 1 Peter, where **We Believers are Instructed to Stand Firm in God’s True Grace**.

And these words are especially fitting in view of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ reaffirmation of faith. She wants the world to know that she is a follower of Jesus Christ. And as we have seen in this sermon series, following Jesus is not easy. So, these instructions to stand firm in God’s grace are timely and relevant.

Now, the instruction to stand firm in God’s grace is wrapped up in three things: the **Commendation of a Faithful Brother**, **Greetings from a Sister Church**, and the **Call to Kiss One Another**. So, I want us to quickly look at each of those things, so that we can end with the main part of these greetings, which is the **instruction to stand firm in God’s grace**.

1. So, first of all, in the first half of verse 12, we see the **Commendation of a Faithful Brother**: “*By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you*.”
	1. One of the people we come across in the Book of Acts is a man named **Silas**. He accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys, he was part of the first church synod that met in Jerusalem, and he was the one singing hymns with Paul in the jail in Philippi. Well, Bible scholars believe that Silas and Silvanus are the same person. Silvanus is just the Roman or Latin form of the Greek, Silas. And Paul’s missionary journeys had finished a few years before Peter wrote this letter, and Silvanus was now a friend and helper of Peter.
		1. And what verse 12 explains is that when Peter finished writing the letter, it was Silvanus who was charged to **deliver** it to the churches in Asia-minor that are mentioned back in 1:1.
			1. And this makes practical sense, because Silas had been with Paul when the churches in these regions were planted. So, he would have been well known to the believers there.
		2. But not only was Silvanus Peter’s postman, he was also his **representative**. So, when he arrived, it would have been his job to read the letter out to the congregations. And if questions arose in response to the letter, it would have been up to him to try and answer them *as Peter would have answered them*. So, this was a very important responsibility.
	2. And of course, here we are, 2000 years later, still reading from and being blessed by 1 Peter.
		1. **2 Timothy 3:16** tells us that “*All Scripture is breathed out (or inspired) by God*.” So, the Holy Spirit guided Peter’s thoughts, as he wrote every word in this letter, because it was destined to be part of Holy Scripture.
		2. And then Peter gave the letter to Silvanus. And he travelled 100s of kms to the churches in Asia Minor. And then, having read the letter to the congregations there, it would have then been carefully copied, many times, and sent from church to church.
		3. And we don’t have time today to go into all the details, but a couple of hundred years later, when representatives of all of the churches that existed then got together and discussed the books of the Bible, it was discovered that all the churches were using 1 Peter as a part of the Holy Scriptures. And it is the same with the other 65 books of the Bible – all the churches were using those 66 books as Holy Scripture. So, the language we use is that the church **recognized** that 1 Peter is Scripture; they didn’t *make it* part of the Scriptures or *decide* *to include it* in the Scriptures, they recognized that it was and is Holy Scripture.
		4. So, the Lord supervised every word that Peter wrote and every footstep of Silvanus and every copy made thereafter and the church councils that discussed the Bible, so that we would have this letter today and still able to be blessed by what the Spirit says to the church!
	3. So, let us thank the Lord for His unique care and providence in preserving the Scriptures as the living word of truth! And let us also support the continued work of Bible translation and distribution with our offerings.
2. But the second thing that we see in these final greetings are **Greetings from a Sister Church**. Verse 13 says, “*She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son*.”
	1. We have already noted that there was severe persecution of Christians going on at the time that Peter wrote his letter. And the centre of persecution was Rome, under the Emperor Nero. And so, if Peter or other New Testament authors had referred to the church in Rome in their letters, and those letters were somehow intercepted, it would have been dangerous for himself, for Silvanus, for the congregation in Rome, and for the congregations he wrote to. And so, code-names were used, so that you could refer to Rome without mentioning Rome. And **Babylon was a code-name for Rome**. It is also used in Revelation. Another example is in 2 John where John refers to the church in Rome as “*the elect lady and her children.*” These were both code-names for the church in Rome.
		1. And there is a lesson here in wisdom, isn’t there. Sometimes, like the prophets of old, you have to call a spade a spade, come what may. So, you might have to mention a person or a country by name, in order to be a faithful witness of Christ. But at other times, code-names can help with protecting believers.
		2. So, boys and girls, how could we refer to Avondale Reformed Church if we ever needed a code-name? Maybe as Spidertown, perhaps :-) ?
	2. But note also that in referring to the church in Rome, Peter says, “*who is likewise* ***chosen***.” And the word “*chosen*” brings us all the way back to **1:1**. For Peter began this letter with: “*To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion*…”
		1. And we saw then that elect and chosen mean the same thing – chosen by God to salvation. So, the term was meant as an encouragement.
		2. And it may well be that the believers that Peter wrote to had originally come from Rome. But they had been forced to flee and were now exiles in a strange land. And that would make the reference to Babylon doubly fitting. For it was in Babylon that God’s Old Testament people had lived as exiles.
		3. But the key point here is that those Peter wrote to and those in the church in Rome were chosen of God. And there is no more wonderfully encouraging truth than to know that the reason you exist as a church is God’s eternal choice!
	3. But Peter also includes greetings here from **Mark**, whom he describes as “*my son*.” And this Mark is the same Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark. And Bible scholars agree that Mark got much of his Gospel material directly from Peter. And the reference to Mark suggests that he was also well-known to the believers whom Peter originally wrote to.
		1. But the reference also makes the letter very warm and personal and ordinary, doesn’t it. Peter knew and loved his original audience and they both loved Mark.
		2. And the Lord worked in and through these very ordinary relationships to give us the Scriptures – the story of Jesus Christ!
3. Well, that brings us, thirdly, to verse 14, where we see a **Call to Kiss One Another**: “*Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ*.”
	1. Non-Bible documents from around this time explain that Christians would greet one another with a kiss when they met as well as in the worship services. Paul calls it a holy kiss, Peter the kiss of love. And typically, it seems that this was men kissing men and women kissing women, just to make sure it was entirely pure and free of any sexual connotations.
		1. And you will know that in Old Testament times, Jews wouldn’t dare touch Gentiles, or non-Jews, lest they become unclean. So, for Jews and Gentiles to greet each other in this way was a recognition of a new relationship in Christ.
		2. Now, the kiss of love has been replaced in many cultures with a hug or a handshake. But it is still the custom of some cultures to practice the kiss of love. It is something, for example, that I have learned to do with \_\_\_\_\_. Before Covid, of course, when he arrived at my study or house, we would embrace and kiss on the shoulder. And it is actually very special.
		3. So, should the elders, perhaps, consider bringing this custom back? Yes? No? The key point is that whether it the kiss of love or a handshake or a hug, this is one way we can demonstrate our relationship as brothers and sisters in Christ.
	2. And then we get the **benediction**: “*Peace to all of you who are in Christ*.” And boys and girls, benediction means ‘good word.’ And just as many of the New Testament letters end with a benediction, so our worship services end with a benediction; I will say something like grace and peace be to you all.
		1. And peace is basically shorthand for ‘may you know all God’s blessings.’
			1. **Romans 5:1** says, “*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*.” And peace with God is the greatest blessing! To know Him as our heavenly Father is amazing!
			2. But by peace is also meant good health and prosperity and joy in your work and relationships.
		2. And we know that these things are not guaranteed, and that we can actually expect hardships and trials and sufferings. But we can be at peace in times like that also, if we are in Christ.
	3. And that leads into the most important question of them all, doesn’t it: **Are you in Christ?** And I don’t mean, do you go to church, or are your parents Christians? I mean: Are YOU in Christ? Have you come under a deep conviction over your utter sinfulness and misery and put your faith in Jesus as the Son of God who died and rose again for the forgiveness of your sins? Do you strive to keep the commandments of Christ, and when you fail, which may be many times a day, do you turn to Him in confession and rest in His forgiveness and rededicate yourself to His service? Is this you, my friend? I pray that it is.
4. Well, they are ‘extra bits’ in this passage. And by ‘extra bits, ‘ I do not mean that they are in any way unimportant. But now we are ready to end with the heart of the passage, from the last part of verse 12, which is the **Instruction to Stand firm in God’s Grace**.
	1. Peter says that in his letter he exhorted and declared that “*this is the true grace of God*.” And we have seen this throughout the letter: It includes our election. For no one deserves to be chosen of God; it is entirely of grace! It includes the work of the Holy Spirit to cause us to be born again. It includes the power of Jesus’ blood to wash away our sins. It includes the inward and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. So, our *entire* salvation is the true grace of God. We cannot earn it and we contribute nothing to it; it is all of Jesus and it is secure in Jesus!
	2. But the true grace of God also includes His **promise** that we have an inheritance in heaven that is kept there, by God, for us. And it includes the promise of God to guard us in faith even through various trials. And it includes His promise to raise us from death and to glorify us, when Christ comes again.
		1. And these promises are very important because the reason Peter wrote this letter was **persecution**. He wanted believers to know that they are called to suffer, even as Christ suffered for them. But God will keep us in faith, and He will guard us in trials, and He will bring us to glory. So, we must stand firm in the true grace of God; we must believe that what He has promised, He will do.
		2. And this is why we read **Exodus 14** earlier. Just imagine how terrified the Israelites were as they saw Pharoah approaching with his massive army. But God had promised to deliver Israel. And so, Moses said, “*Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again*.” And that is exactly what happened as the people passed through the sea on dry land and the sea crashed down on Pharoah and his army and they were drowned.
		3. So, when persecution comes, we too must stand firm; we must believe that God will do all that He has promised.
	3. But to stand firm in God’s true grace is not just about what we believe during a future time of persecution. It is also about how we live today. In this letter we have been told to “*be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be the emperor or to governors … Servants, be subject to your masters … wives, be subject to your husbands … husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way … all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love … do not repay evil for evil … but on the contrary bless … do not live for the rest of the time in the flesh … for human passions but for the will of God … be self-controlled and sober-minded … keep loving one another earnestly … show hospitality … do not be surprised at the fiery trial [of persecution] when it comes … but rejoice that you share in the sufferings of Christ … Elders, shepherd the flock of God [the right way] … [and members] be subject to the elders … clothe yourselves … with humility … be watchful for [the devil] … And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you*.” So, because of who we are in Christ, this is how we must live; this is how we stand firm, every day, in the true grace of God.
		1. Congregation, too often I have had conversations with Christians who give the impression that they would like to cut the Bible in half. They love the first half of 1 Peter – God’s grace in Christ. They love the first half of Ephesians and Romans – God’s grace in Christ. They love sermons that celebrate God’s grace in Christ, as we all should! But they are not so in love with the second half of 1 Peter or Romans or Ephesians – the ‘in view of God’s grace to you in Christ, this is how you must strive to live…’ part. But Scripture always gives us both – believer, here is God’s amazing grace to you in Christ! You are a beloved child of God whose sins are forgiven. So now, *you* must stand firm in God’s grace. God wants to *establish* you in His grace. God wants to *fill* you with more and more of His grace. God wants to *reinforce* your experience of His grace. And He does this as you apply yourself to the commands of Christ, such as the ones we have in 1 Peter.
		2. We simply cannot walk away from 1 Peter, celebrating all that it says about the true grace of God, without being resolved to do all that we have been commanded to do in this letter. For it is in the doing of His will that He supplies us with and fills us with grace upon grace upon grace.

I hope our journey through 1 Peter has been a blessing to you. It has been my privilege to prepare and preach these sermons. So, by way of conclusion, Beloved children of God, Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in His footsteps. May the Spirit of the Lord help you to do that and also bring you to glory. Amen.