

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the great Lion Tamer,  
Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, amen.

Have you ever had a song get stuck in your head and couldn't stop singing it? This week after studying this final chapter of First Peter I couldn't get rid of the song "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" (SLIDE) You remember... "In the jungle, the mighty jungle the lion sleeps tonight. In the jungle, the mighty jungle the lion sleeps tonight..." While it's true most lions sleep from time to time, in our sermon text the Apostle Peter speaks of a lion that never snoozes. He says this lion has been devouring unsuspecting prey from the beginning of time and remains on the prowl. That lion of course is the Devil, and his aim is to take as many of us to h-e-double hockey sticks with him as he can. If Peter had written that popular song his opening lyrics might have gone something like this. "In the jungle, the mighty jungle the lion prowls tonight." Since the Devil is out to get us, it would be good to know what makes us lion alert and not lion dessert. The Apostle Peter will show us there are three things that keep us lion alert: humility, self-control, and grace.

(SLIDE)

Peter begins his lion taming advice in verse 6 of our text. There he tells us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. How does humbling yourself before God make you lion alert? Doesn't it just mean that you have to give up "fun" things and do what God wants you to do?

I imagine that's what most people think and they're partially right. God is telling us to give up something. In the very next verse Peter said, "Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you." To humble yourself before God means to surrender all your cares and concerns to him. That makes us lion alert because the Devil likes to use our cares and concerns to get us to second-guess and doubt God. Peter is concerned about the people's anxiety because excessive worrying can cause us to miss out on the real things we should be avoiding. Here's what I mean. Take the familiar story of Mary and Martha. As Mary sat at Jesus' feet, Martha fussed about the kitchen worrying about whether or not there would be enough food to eat. Her cares and concerns so diverted her attention from the one thing we all need to do more, listening to Jesus. The Devil continues to plant seeds of doubt, leading to worry, ending in anxiety that paralyzes us from action. What worries and anxieties are distracting you from hearing Jesus? Satan will stop at nothing to get us to rely on ourselves instead of God so that we end up worrying and breaking the first commandment. Don't become lion dessert! Instead, remain alert by humbling yourself under God's mighty hand. I've come to know there's no better place to take your concerns than to God. God loves you and has promised to care for you. Sometimes when I think I know something I have to be reminded I don't know it at all... That happened to me with this chapter from Peter. I assumed when Peter says we should "cast" all our anxiety on God that it

was the Greek verb “*ekballa*” which is the usual word for toss or throw. When I looked at the Greek this week I found an interesting Greek word that we have translated as “cast.” It’s the verb *Ταπεινώ-θητε*. This is interesting because it has nothing to do with tossing or throwing. It literally means to humble yourself to put yourself under or at a lower esteem. Many times in my life I’ve given over my cares and troubles to God, but I never realized what I was doing was humbling myself under Gods loving care. When we turn over our anxieties to God we’re saying I can’t handle this, but you can O God. I give up my pride and ask you to take over my worries and my fears. God will take care of our problems better than we ever could so what’s the use worrying about them if we’ve handed them over to God? We are free to now be alert for that prowling lion who wants us for lunch...

That sounds so easy to do but you all know what often happens? We carefully pack our concerns into a bag and give them to God, but we don’t let go of the pack. We think that if we don’t at least keep an eye on our problems they will never get solved. Instead of letting God carry our problems and lead where we should go, we try to lead God instead and end up treating God like a dumb pack animal. Friends, that’s not the way to remain lion alert. Let the Lord bear your burdens and when you do, God will lead you to still waters and green pastures!

As we humble ourselves and rely on God it is important we don’t become lulled into a false sense of security thinking the danger of attack has passed. The

Devil won't give up so easily so Peter tells us how to stay alert and not become Devil dessert... He says be self-controlled because the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. We can resist him by standing firm in the faith. To be "self-controlled" means to have a clear head. We remain lion alert when we remove anything that hampers good judgment. For example, if our mind is cluttered with lustful thoughts we won't be prepared to flee from temptation as Joseph did when Potiphar's wife asked him to sleep with her. If our mind is muddled with materialism it will be hard to offer our first fruits to God. If our mind is packed with pride it will be hard to keep from putting other people down so we look good. To name just a few... We also exercise self-control when we don't leave our weaknesses exposed to the Devil's temptations. It was Luther who said the Devil climbs over the fence where it is the lowest. If alcohol is a weakness don't go to bars or be with people who are always drinking. If gossiping is a weakness stop hanging out with those friends who are quick to spread the latest rumors or at least let them you don't want to talk about the latest gossip. If you continue to let yourself be influenced by these temptations you only put yourself in the lion's den and it'll only be a matter of time before you are devoured.

Humbling ourselves and exercising Self-Control helps us shore up our weaknesses and to stand firm in the faith. Only then can we be sure we stand safely outside the lion's den. How does that one verse of A Mighty Fortress go?

“Though hordes of devils fill the land, all threat'ning to devour us. We tremble not, unmoved we stand; they cannot overpow'r us. Let this world's tyrant rage; in battle we'll engage! His might is doomed to fail; God's judgment must prevail! One little word subdues him.” Jesus proved God’s Word could topple the Devil when He was tempted out in the wilderness. We can arm ourselves with the same powerful weapon of God’s Word. It’s more than just memorizing Bible verses so you can make quick use of it like a gunslinger when Satan makes his attacks. We believe the Word of God is first and foremost Jesus Christ our Lord. He’s the one who binds up the devil and all the little devils in this world.

Which brings us to God’s Grace... While humility and self-control will prepare us against attacks by the Devil it’s only God’s grace that will bring us through these attacks. We need God’s grace because we often forget and fall back into the I’ve got this mode of thinking... Although we know we should stay out of the lion’s cage, time and again we put ourselves in harm’s way. Thank God he is a God of undeserved love who picks us up when we fall. Listen to the promise Peter extends to us. “And the God of 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.”

When you fall, turn to Jesus for forgiveness because he has defeated the Devil by refusing to fall for any of his tricks and he undid the Devil’s handiwork

by taking the punishment we deserved. Since the Devil could not defeat Jesus he has gone to plan “B” - attacking us, the crown of God’s creation. Luther said where God builds a cathedral there Satan builds a chapel. Be ready for those attacks, as the Devil doesn’t want you to believe Jesus won forgiveness for you. He’ll bring up past sins and shake them in your face asking how a just God could love anyone so filthy... The answer is that one word that can topple Satan, Jesus. Through Christ the victory is ours. Through Christ, God will restore us to the glory God intended people to have before sin entered the world. Through Christ God has made us strong so we can carry out works that please God. Yes, how could God love us? God loves us because of Jesus. If we remain in Christ then the lion’s roar will sound more like an annoying yelp from a little dog.

It’s true that “In the jungle, the mighty jungle the lion prowls tonight...” so stay alert lest you become lion desert. (SLIDE) Don’t be afraid because after all it’s God’s jungle and Jesus is the King of the Jungle! As you walk through this life, humble yourself under God’s mighty hand by giving up your ownership of your problems and your sin. Go ahead, you can trust God is still in control no matter what quicksand you run into. Remain watchful standing firm in the faith, armed with the Word of God. And the God of grace who has called us to eternal glory will keep you safe. Thanks be to God! Amen.