

Studies in 1 Peter-15 1 Peter 5:1-5

by Dwight Pentecost

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the elder's responsibility to feed the flock of God, providing spiritual food and oversight, and protecting the flock from false teaching and false prophets.

Duration: 39:14

Scripture: Zechariah 13:7, Acts 20:27, Acts 20:29, 1 Peter 5:1-5

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Shepherd Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the attitude and motive that should guide those who serve as shepherds or elders in the church. They emphasize the importance of viewing oneself as a servant rather than a lord over God's heritage. The speaker highlights the need for shepherds to be attentive to the needs of the flock and to provide them with the truth of God's word. They also mention the reward that God has specifically reserved for those who faithfully serve as shepherds. The sermon concludes with a reminder to be vigilant against false teachings and to constantly warn and protect the flock.

Transcript

Let's look at the first verse. 1 Peter 5, verse 1. The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being in samples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.

For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. And may God add his blessings to this portion of his scripture. We frequently see ourselves in animals.

And when we want to draw attention to some particular characteristic of an individual, we usually compare him to some member of the animal kingdom. He may be as strong as an ox, or she is as stubborn as a mule, or as wily as a serpent, or as harmless as a dove, or as commanding as a lion, or as crafty as a fox. But when the word of God compares God's children to the animal kingdom, the word of God always likens us to sheep.

Back in the Old Testament, the psalmist saw himself as a sheep in God's flock when he said, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Our Lord looked at those who had trusted him as sheep. When in the tenth chapter of John's Gospel he said, I am the good shepherd, I've come to give my life for the sheep.

When the apostle Peter looks at that suffering, persecuted group of believers to whom he is writing this epistle to sustain them in their sufferings, Peter views them as sheep. Sheep who are in need of a shepherd. Sheep are among the most helpless and defenseless of all of the creatures that God has created.

They do not have the tough hide of a pig to protect them. They do not have the strong horns for defense. They are not fleet of foot to outrun a pursuer.

They have no camouflage in their coloring so they can hide. They are utterly helpless and defenseless. While most animals, members of the animal kingdom, can fend for themselves, if left to itself, a sheep will probably die of hunger or thirst before it would find its way to a stream of water or find green pasture after it has denuded the area in which it was feeding.

The sheep of all animals are dependent on the watch care of a shepherd. And as Peter looks upon those of his day for whom he feels a spiritual responsibility who are being persecuted and scattered, he sees them as a flock of God's sheep who are without a shepherd. And yet he realizes that God has made a provision in his wisdom for the supervision, for the care, for the protection of the sheep.

God has given his sheep shepherds. And those shepherds and the relationship of the sheep to the shepherd constitute Peter's message to scattered believers in 1 Peter 5 as he gives instructions concerning the work of the elder. There are two words in the New Testament that seem to be used interchangeably.

The word elder and the word bishop. The word elder comes from the Greek word presbyteros, from which we get presbyter, that speaks of the dignity that associates itself with the office of the elder. In their day, old age or maturity spoke of wisdom.

For as a man lived, he learned. And the man who had lived long learned much. Therefore honor was given to the elder in the home.

And when in ordering the flock of God, God calls the under-shepherd elder, he is emphasizing the dignity, the respect that attaches itself to the office and to the man whom God puts in the office of elder. On the other hand, the word bishop comes from the Greek word episkopos, from which we get our English word episcopal or episcopacy. And that word means to watch over or to oversee.

And while the word elder refers to the dignity and the honor and the authority of the office, the word bishop refers to the responsibility resting upon those whom God sets apart as elders. Now Peter was set apart to be a shepherd with Jesus Christ when Jesus Christ was here on this earth. Peter was called of God.

Peter was separated by Jesus Christ to be taught by the Lord Jesus and then to serve as a shepherd under the Lord Jesus. Those men who associated with Christ during his earthly ministry and then were sent out by Christ after his ascension were called apostles. But Peter in chapter 5 does not refer to himself as an apostle.

I believe he does not call himself an apostle because the office of apostle was non-hereditary. It could not be passed on to another from one who was an apostle. And so if Peter were to write as an apostle, those to whom he was writing who were appointed as shepherds would feel no response because they had not fellowshiped with Christ and had been taught by him and sent out by him.

But Peter introduces himself as an elder, one who has the youth demand down through the church age in order that the flock that is in danger of being scattered might be preserved. So Peter introduces himself in 1 Peter 5 verse 1 as an elder and he is writing to the elders whom God has raised up in the midst of that scattered flock. Peter introduces himself not only as an elder but also as a witness.

Peter could speak concerning suffering because he had witnessed the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Peter could minister to those who were suffering because he had been ministered to by Jesus Christ when Jesus Christ was ridiculed, when he was rejected, when he was persecuted, when he was taken to the cross. And Peter had witnessed not only the sufferings of Christ but also of the glory that followed.

Peter was one who stood on the mount of transfiguration and was given a vision of the glory that belonged to Jesus Christ which glory was veiled when Christ came down from the mount. Peter did not see that glory again until he came to the mount of ascension in the first chapter of the book of Acts where Christ was received up in glory. And there Peter witnessed the glory that came to Christ after his suffering.

And so Peter has fastened in his mind this concept of suffering and glory that follows. And now because he is writing to those who are suffering he wants to comfort them as they wait for the glory that should follow and to emphasize the provision that God has made for his suffering, persecuted flock. We have had occasion to examine our Lord's words in John chapter 15 and 16 on many occasions in connection with Peter's teaching on suffering to be reminded that Christ said that the world would hate believers as long as believers are here in this world.

This age is characterized by its hatred of God, by its hatred of Jesus Christ and by its hatred of those who name the name of Christ. And since the world cannot pour out its venom on Jesus Christ personally it will select those who belong to Jesus Christ and attack them because they name his name. Our Lord instructed the disciples then that this age was an age in which believers would suffer because of their faith, that they would be in threat for life and for their very security.

And yet God made a provision to nurture and sustain, to guard and protect the flock. And it is this that Peter is emphasizing when he says in chapter 5 and verse 2 the elders which are among you I exhort, feed the flock of God. The flock of God is Peter's designation for the whole body of believers.

This body of believers in the first place would include every living believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. There would be a flock composed of those not only here in Grace Bible Church but those across the city and the state and the country and even to the ends of the earth who have by faith received Jesus Christ as a personal Savior. They are members of what the Apostle Paul calls the church which is his body, that body of which Jesus Christ is the living head.

They are one in Christ, they are one with Christ and therefore believers are one in Christ. Yet the flock may refer not to the total body of believers but to a local group of believers. And it seems as though that is the emphasis here in 1 Peter 5, 2 where Peter is writing to a local situation where local believers are living, who are undergoing the persecutions and the sufferings that that godless generation has to heap upon them.

And Peter says that God's provision for them is to raise up shepherds or elders who are responsible to feed the flock of God. Back in the prophecy of Zechariah, the prophet anticipated the rejection of Jesus Christ and the consequences of that rejection for those who had trusted him. In Zechariah 13, 7 the prophet says, Awake, O sword, against my shepherd and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.

And there God through the prophet is anticipating the rejection of Jesus Christ by his own generation and nation. And yet the verse goes on and says, Smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered. Smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered.

In the book of Acts, in chapter 20, the apostle is speaking to the elders in the city of Ephesus and he is anticipating just such a scattering of God's little flock. I read in Acts chapter 20 beginning at verse 27 where Paul says to the elders, I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourself and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, bishops, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Now why are the overseers or the elders or bishops to take heed to the flock and to feed the flock? Verse 29, for this I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I cease not to warn every one night and day with fear.

I think there are three things in these verses that Paul tells the elders to do. Verse 28, take heed. Also verse 28, to feed.

And then in verse 31, to watch. You see, Paul is emphasizing the same thing that Peter is emphasizing in verse 2 of chapter 5. That God has graciously provided for the protection of the helpless, defenseless sheep by providing them shepherds. And those shepherds are called elders.

Now when Peter says to the elders, you are to feed the flock, it certainly includes the spiritual food that is provided for the sheep and for the lamb. The sheep, according to the 23rd Psalm, must be led to green pastures and to the still water. You would think that a man who has sense enough to go to the dinner table when he is hungry and go to the refrigerator to get a glass of cold water when he is thirsty would have enough sense to see that he is fed and nourished spiritually when he is hungry and thirsty.

But God's sheep don't seem to have that much sense. And therefore Peter says that God has raised up shepherds to see that the flock is fed. And it rests upon the elders to see that that which is taught is the truth of God and to see that those who should be taught are there to be taught the truths of the word of God.

One of the requirements that Paul lays down in 1 Timothy 3 for elders or bishops is that they must be apt to teach. Or if I could paraphrase that, skilled in teaching. That does not mean that every elder must have the ability to stand in the pulpit and preach and declare the truth of the word of God.

But an elder must be skilled in the teaching so that he can discern the difference between truth and error no matter how scuffle it may be. And to make sure that that which is being presented before the flock for their food is the truth of the word of God. This means supervision not only over what is taught from the pulpit but what is taught in the Sunday school class, what is taught in young people's organizations,

Pioneer Girls and Boys Brigade, the entire church program.

It becomes a responsibility of the elders to tend to feed the flock of God. But this feeding the flock has to do more than just providing the spiritual food to see that there is a teacher or a preacher at the right place at the right hour if the people decide they want to come to the feeding trough. Feeding includes much more.

It includes total oversight for the life of the sheep. This has to do with an exercise, a care and a concern for the total welfare of the total flock over which these elders have been placed as shepherds by God. One thing that a flock needs is protection.

They need protection against wild animals. They need protection against fiends in their natural state. And this imagery certainly applies when Peter tells the elders to feed the flock of God because as John tells us, who was an elder, many false prophets are gone out into the world.

And the elders would have a responsibility to declare what is truth and what is error. And if we could be very practical, if I knew that you were spending your time before the radio listening to a false prophet and if I knew that it came to my attention or the attention of elders, I think it would be the responsibility of elders to point out the error and the danger of submitting to false teaching and false preaching. A part of protection because many lambs may not know the difference.

The sheep may be able to tell the difference, but the lambs can't. And that is part of the exercise of the office of elder feeding the flock. Often the flock needs discipline, and that is a responsibility of the elder.

It is well put, as sometimes we sing, if we don't skip that verse, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. What did the hymn writer have in mind? The propensity of sheep to leave the flock and to stray away.

They need to be disciplined. They need to be corrected. Where there is some conduct contrary to the word of God, it is the responsibility of the elders to discipline according to the word of God.

Not with a view to punishing, but with a view of teaching and restoring the sheep that has wandered astray. There were two things that a shepherd took with him, a rod and a staff, and the psalmist makes mention of these. The rod was a short cudgel that was used as a measuring, lest we also be tested.

Now when Peter gives this command and this exhortation to the elders, concerning the total work of overseeing the flock, he deals with the motives that must characterize these who become shepherds under God. He says three things about their motives in verse 2 and 3. First of all, their oversight must not be by constraint, but willingly. The willingness comes not because one is ignorant of the enormity of the obligation.

After all, it's one thing to carry along some sweet little lamb. Quite another thing to deal with some stubborn old goat. And Peter, writing to the elders, says that these elders are to assume this responsibility willingly.

Not because they're ignorant of what's involved in the discharge of their responsibilities, but because they counted it a high and a holy privilege to be set apart by the Spirit of God to do what Jesus Christ would do if he, the Good Shepherd, were here. And if Jesus Christ were personally present as a shepherd in Grace Bible Church, he would feed, he would guard, he would protect, he would discipline, he would restore, he

would keep from straying the sheep and the lambs and even those that might be classified as goats in the flock. And Peter says that you have the privilege of doing for the flock what Jesus Christ would do.

Therefore, do not take it because it is an obligation to be discharged, but take it willingly. The second attitude at the conclusion of verse 2 is that this responsibility is to be assumed unselfishly. They are not to take this for filthy lucre.

That is the support that might come to them, the material sustenance that might be given to them to free them from other labor so that they can give themselves faithfully to the work of a shepherd. But they are to do it instead of a ready mind. This has to do again with a willingness to assume the burdens, the heartaches, the responsibilities that go with shepherding sheep.

The third attitude or motive is given in the third verse. They are to serve as servants, not as lords. Not as lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

We perhaps would think of the work of a shepherd as a lordly work, but that completely inverts that which is God's divine perspective. For the shepherd is not the lord of the flock, he is the servant of the flock. And when the little lamb bleats, the shepherd is ordered by the bleat of that lamb.

You don't tell lambs, I, your shepherd, will be on duty from eight to five with time for lunch and coffee break, several weeks vacation and sick leave. No, lambs don't operate that way, neither do sheep. And so Peter's concept is that when one is put as a shepherd over the flock, he thus becomes the servant of the flock.

And unless one put in that position recognizes that he is God's servant and the servant of the flock, he will not be able to discharge the office of shepherd or elder in a manner that satisfies God and meets the need of the sheep. And then this portion concludes in the fourth verse with the reward for the elder. The scripture tells us that God graciously gives each believer the privilege of serving him with a view to obtaining a reward.

Rewards are a gracious bestowal which God makes for those who have been faithful in the administration and execution of God's will for them. And this reward mentioned here in verse four is unique. It is special.

It's a reward that God has designed that is reserved exclusively for those who serve faithfully as shepherds of the flock. This isn't a reward open to all believers, as all other rewards are open to them. This is a special reward.

Maybe God was conscious that one who becomes the servant of the entire flock and serves so many masters deserves a special reward for faithfulness to so many. But he does tell the elders that when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. This unfading, glorious crown is given to the shepherd as a reward for faithfulness in that which may have been a faithless ministry when they served the flock.

You know, the first shepherd has yet to hear the sheep come and say to him, Thank you for your ministry. That hasn't happened yet. No shepherd in the natural realm has ever had a manifestation of affection by the sheep.

The sheep are simply not affectionate beings. The shepherd who ministers with the hope of thanks or the hope of love or affection is doomed to disappointment and ultimately discouragement. But you know, if a

shepherd faithfully tended his flock, he can expect to receive thanks from the owner of the flock.

And how prone we are to look to the sheep for our rewards. And we forget that in the divine economy it is not the sheep who thanks the shepherd, but it is the owner who rewards the shepherd for his faithfulness to his sheep. And our Lord has promised through Peter that for those who are privileged to be set apart as under-shepherds, to supervise the work of the flock, the owner of the flock will reward that shepherd for his faithfulness commensurate with the responsibilities that were placed upon him.

When the scripture speaks to us of sheep, it speaks to us in our weakness, in our ignorance, in our immaturity. It recognizes the dangers in doctrine, the dangers in practice, the defections that may entice us. It doesn't castigate us because we are sheep.

It recognizes us for what we are. But God, knowing exactly what we were and what we are as sheep, has in his economy met our need by giving us shepherds to whom we are asked to be in subjection. Peter will proceed, as we, Lord willing, next week shall see, to speak of the responsibilities resting upon the sheep and their relationship to the shepherd.

But as he looks at us as sheep, I'm reminded of what Horatius Bonar wrote a number of years ago and says, I was a wandering sheep. I did not love the fold. I did not love my shepherd's voice.

I would not be controlled. I was a wayward child. I did not love my home.

I did not love my father's voice. I loved afar to roam. The shepherd sought his sheep.

The father sought his child. He followed me o'er vale and hill, o'er deserts, waste and wild. He found me nigh to death, famished and faint and lone.

He bound me with the bands of love. He saved the wandering one. Jesus my shepherd is.

T'was he that loved my soul. T'was he that washed me in his blood. T'was he that made me whole.

T'was he that sought the lost, that found the wandering sheep. T'was he that brought me to the fold. T'is he that still doth keep.

No more a wandering sheep. I love to be controlled. I love my tender shepherd's voice.

I love the peaceful fold. No more a wayward child. I seek no more to roam.

I love my heavenly father's voice. I love, I love his home. Is that your testimony this morning? Lost like a sheep, but sought by THE shepherd and found of him.

We pray our father that the spirit of God who has revealed the plan of God to preserve and protect and guard the flock of God may bring these truths home to our hearts. That we might realize that God's gift of elders is not simply to administer a church but to give total oversight to the needs of the people of God. We pray that we who have been set apart by the spirit of God to this high calling may be faithful and diligent lest some of God's sheep should not be tended.

Let the riches of thy grace and mercy and peace rest and abide upon each one. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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