



Faithful Shepherding of a Faithful Church

Series: Pursuing Christ in a Pagan World

1 Peter 5:1-4

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Introduction: I want to encourage you to focus attentively this morning for several reasons: first – this is the Word of God and so is worthy of our mind’s attention; second – you need to know what God expects and what you should expect of the elders in this body, third – if you know what to expect from the elders in this body, you will know what to pray for as you should; fourth – pray for other churches, for our brothers overseas and fifth – since elders are to serve as an example to the flock, the expectations upon the elders should serve as instruction for your own souls.

Now as we look at these words from Peter to elders regarding faithfulness, I want us to remember the context of these words. They come on the heels of Peter’s certain warning of persecution for the sake of the gospel of Christ. He has reminded his readers in bold terms of the suffering and the trials that would be theirs as a result of being faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Faithful followers of Christ, the faithful church, is a church that will experience testing and trial so that the glory of God and of His Son might be more fully put on display and so that the people of God may be readied for the glories of heaven. Peter wants us to see that the faithful church, the beloved of God – the objects of God’s deep, faithful, steadfast, electing, covenant love – His people needs and deserves faithful shepherds and God’s holiness demands it. See with me first how:

1) Peter establishes solidarity with the elders to whom He is writing. (v.1)

Peter is saying, “In light of the times, in light of the suffering that is coming upon the faithful church and in some cases is already here, in light of that, I exhort, encourage you, I am calling on you to be faithful – but not as one who is talking down to you, but as one of you.” He is not just throwing out commands and demands upon these men. Peter does not emphasize his position or authority as an apostle here, but instead identifies with these brothers to whom he is writing and calls himself a fellow elder. Peter, too, has been charged with the care of God’s flock, a humbling and difficult calling.

He says that he is a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. What is Peter trying to say here? Some have said that Peter is speaking of witnessing Christ's crucifixion firsthand though far off, that Peter is speaking of the sufferings of Christ's earthly ministry, his agony in the garden, his arrest and trial, or the scars in Christ's hands and feet. They say that He is speaking of seeing Christ transfigured on the mountainside, His resurrection appearances, etc. But they miss the point. When Peter says that he is a witness of the sufferings of Christ, he is saying that he is among the number of the faithful elders who proclaim the true gospel of Christ's suffering for sinners to save His people. He is calling himself a witness, not in the sense that He is an observer, but in the sense that he is a proclaimer, a preacher of the one true way of life through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and his substitutionary death on the cross by which He has paid the penalty of sin and destroyed the power of sin, and made righteous all who call upon Him in faith as Savior and Lord. (1Pe 2:24-25; 3:18)

He is among those faithful elders who proclaim the true gospel of Christ's sufferings for sinners and who endure the result of that witness. Because Peter faithfully witnessed to the gospel of Christ's sufferings, he shared in the sufferings and trials that are a part of faithfully proclaiming Christ and the gospel. And because he has shared in the sufferings of Christ for preaching the gospel, Peter is convinced that will share in the glory and rejoicing when Christ returns in triumph. He speaks to these elders as one who knows the cost and the joy of preaching and shepherding the people of God. And so, in that light, he gives to them:

2) A clear calling (v. 2a)

Look at what Peter writes in the first half of verse 2: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (1Pe 5:2) He exhorts the elders in these faithful church to shepherd the flock, to be a caretaker of the flock of God, to oversee their souls, to oversee the church as a whole. Peter is invoking one of the tenderest of images in all of Scripture -- It is the picture of the people of God as His sheep, as His flock, and God as the great shepherd and caretaker of His people. The Psalmist is filled with joy as he pictures the people of God in this way, writing: (Psa 100:1-5) That is the promise of God to His covenant people – steadfast, enduring love, faithfulness to the generations, to the sheep of His pasture. Peter is calling these elders to remember that they are the under-shepherds of God's sheep. It is no small calling, no small thing, but weighty and vitally important. What does it encompass?

Well, this calling to shepherd the flock of God is a calling with which Peter Himself was familiar. Christ's words to Peter when He re-commissioned him are helpful in understanding the calling to shepherd the flock of God. (Joh 21:15-17)

I want you to note three phrases that stick out in that text that give insight into the calling to shepherd the flock of God. Let's look first at these two: Feed my lambs, tend my sheep. Shepherding the flock of God has to do with feeding and tending. Faithful elders must feed the flock the Word of God. They must ensure that the sheep of God's pasture are well-fed sheep. They must ensure that Word of God is faithfully taught in the church, that it is faithful teaching which builds up the individual and the body in the faith. The faithful shepherd will faithfully proclaim and instruct in the Word of God, with patience. He will edify and strengthen the flock of God with solid, spiritual food that will produce in the sheep discernment, conviction, consistency, spiritual strength, and effective testimony to the greatness of Christ and of His saving work. He will guard the purity of the gospel entrusted to him and will labor to magnify and exalt Christ before the people of God, teaching the flock of God the Word of God, nourishing their souls, calling them to life, calling them to obey and submit to the Word of God knowing that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4) and fully believing that all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2Ti 3:16-17)

A shepherd who desires to shepherd the flock of God faithfully must be a student of the Word of God. He needs to know God and know His word. He must preach the cross, He must preach Christ and His glories, He must preach the majesty of God and His holiness, and he must preach the calling of the church to be holy. He must preach the whole counsel of God. People are starving for the greatness of God and the faithful shepherd must see to it that the flock of God is fed. People need to hear God-entranced preaching. They need a shepherd to lift up his voice and magnify the supremacy of God. They need to behold the whole panorama of His excellencies! It is the job of the shepherd of God to tell flock, week in and week out, about the supreme beauty and majesty of their Great Shepherd. (2Tim 4:2; 1Cor 1:17, 23-24; Eph 3:8) That is the chief calling of the faithful preaching/teaching elder. Twice, Jesus told Peter to feed His lambs, to feed His sheep. To do that, the shepherd needs to abide by the cross continually and teach others to do the same. He needs to walk closely with the crucified, risen and coming Savior and encourage the flock to do the same, to love Christ, live in grace, walk by faith, hate sin and seek holiness, to love God's Word and to seek for His glory.

The faithful shepherd must care for and tend the flock of God by seeing that God's sheep feed in a rich pasture that is filled with prayer, fellowship, and worship. The faithful shepherd will

bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, care for the sick and hurting. He faithful shepherd will intercede in prayer for the flock, earnestly and faithfully. The faithful elder will provide godly counsel. The faithful shepherd will encourage the fellowship of the sheep and work for the unity of the body rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The faithful shepherd will encourage the flock to worship and magnify Christ, to exalt God in the power of the Holy Spirit in times of corporate worship, yes, but in the whole of their lives. The faithful shepherd will lead the sheep of God to call lost sheep into the fold, to encourage evangelism and to do the work of an evangelist. The faithful shepherd will admonish, encourage, correct, and discipline the straying, lovingly and courageously confronting those with a spirit of divisiveness, those continuing in patterns of sinful behavior, and closing potential entrances for the enemy's foothold in the congregation. The faithful shepherd must be fierce to protect the flock from the savage wolves, from false teachers and false doctrine and from the divisive and destructive who seek to destroy the flock of God. He will have a passion to defend and protect the flock from all manner of danger in whatever form. The faithful shepherd will guide the flock, leading them to follow the Great Shepherd. The faithful shepherd will strive to keep his doctrine and life pure lest he lead the sheep astray. They will heed the words of Paul: (Acts 20:28) The faithful shepherd understands that it is a work that involves personal sacrifice but the faithful shepherd will have as his example Jesus, who laid down His life for His sheep. This is what it means to shepherd the flock of God, to feed the lambs, to tend the sheep. But remember I told you there was a third phrase of importance, really it is a question – Do you love me? And that question is a revealing one.

Only as Peter confessed his love for Christ, was he charged to shepherd the sheep of God. What underlies an elder's faithfulness to shepherd the sheep of God? It is love for the Great Shepherd Himself; it is love for Christ. Love for Christ drives loves for His sheep, love for the flock of God. Beloved, the role of the elder is a weighty one. It is no easy calling, no simple task. It is a serious, vital, crucial responsibility one that Peter magnifies through:

3) A study in contrasts between the faithful and the unfaithful (v. 2b-3)

Peter sets up a series of contrasts between the faithful and the unfaithful. Let's just look at these phrases. Peter says shepherd the flock of God:

...not under compulsion, but willingly – Now certainly, there is a sense in which every elder serves under compulsion. Paul, you remember, speaking of his own calling said: (1Co 9:16) Now that is compulsion, right? Paul said that there was a necessity laid upon him do so. Peter is not contradicting Paul, rather what he means for us to understand is that an elder should find the calling of God to be sufficient and not have to be forced to shepherd the flock.

What is it that could make the calling of an elder feel like an obligation and not a honor and a stewardship from God? What could make for an elder that does not want to be an elder? Persecution, loss of popularity, blame, bearing burdens, rejection of the gospel or of messenger. It is a hard thing to pour into someone's life and have them depart from the truth or reject God's messenger. The calling of eldership can be a strain on the family. All these things can combine to make the eldership more of a burden than a blessing.

What is the remedy? Notice the phrase as God would have you. Again, the difference lies in a sense of call. The elder who can joyfully, willingly continue in the work is the elder that is driven by the call of God – a man who sees the honor and privilege in it – to serve Christ and labor in His kingdom; a man who sees the magnitude of it – the salvation of souls; and for the awe of it – the work of God's grace and the giving of life to the souls of men, women, and children. Peter is saying, don't serve as an elder because you must...do it out of a sense of God's calling. Do it out of love for Christ and love for His church. A reluctant leader in time of crisis is worthless. A reluctant warrior in time of battle is of no value.

...not for shameful gain, but eagerly – What is the heart of what Peter is saying here? Is it wrong to pay vocational elders? Is it wrong to pay the pastor? No. (1Co 9:14; Mat 10:10; 1Ti 5:17-18) The pay an elder receives is not shameful. Shame enters when money becomes the motive. The point Peter is making is that the motivation of a faithful shepherd cannot be money, cannot be the financial advantage he can gain over the people, cannot be the opportunity to fleece the flock. Greed and selfish gain is the mark of a false shepherd. Peter will speak of those false shepherds in his second letter saying in chapter 2 and verse 3: in their greed they will exploit you with false words. The focus of the faithful elder cannot be godliness as a means of gain – thinking continually about his retirement portfolio, obsessed with days off and vacation and investments. His heart must be for souls, for the gospel and the proclamation of the truth, for the glory of God and the good of the flock.

Nor can the goal of eldership cannot be an easy buck. Can I tell you the truth? The ministry is a great place to find lazy men, especially in our culture. It is amazing the number of men and women that find some thing they like doing, slap the name of ministry on it, panhandle and do nothing. By contrast, Peter says, he should shepherd eagerly – that is the idea of serving with a sacrificial zeal, thankful for God's provision whatever it may be, without any thought or calculation of how he can gain. The focus of the faithful shepherd cannot be "What can I gain, but rather what can I give, how can I serve God and His flock."

... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock – Peter is exhorting the faithful elders not to abuse their authority, not to use their position to exalt themselves to a place of imagined self-importance, not to rule as if they were indispensable to the work of God, not to use the flock to accomplish their own purposes, to see the flock as

something to be used for elevating himself rather than sheep to be served and protected and fed and cared for. Shepherds are not to be driven by a love for power, not for the sake of their egos, not craving praise, nor titles, nor the dependence of men and women on him and not for personal prestige. A man who wears the mantle of elder because he wants power or applause of men is not qualified to serve in the sheepfold of God.

Now don't misunderstand beloved. The elder does have authority. He is called to exercise a shepherd's oversight. There are times when he must take a stand and lead firmly. But he does it under the authority of Christ, rooted in the Word of God, rooted in humble submission to Christ. He is to present the Word of God, not his own decree. He is to insist on the revealed will of God, but not his own agenda.

What Peter is saying is this: the faithful elder must lead the flock of God by commending their words and their decisions to the flock by the character of their lives, and serving as an example of faithfulness to Christ, of humility, of wisdom, of goodness, in speech, in life, in love, in faith, in purity, in true obedience to the gospel, in marriage, and in leading his home.

4) A fully sufficient reward (v.4)

Peter words here serve as reminder, an encouragement and a great promise. First the reminder: to speak of the Chief Shepherd is to remind the elders that they are only undershepherds; the flock does not belong to them; they are caring for the sheep of God and so they will be held greatly accountable. It is a great motivator for humility to recognize as an elder, as an undershepherd, that we hold a stewardship, we hold the flock of God in trust, awaiting the return of Christ for His sheep and we will an account for our faithfulness. It should drive any thinking elder to ask: Who is sufficient for these things? (2Co 2:16)

The great encouragement is that Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. Ultimately Jesus is the Shepherd who feeds and tends the flock and its shepherds not under compulsion, but willingly. He said, I lay down my life for the sheep... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (John 10:15, 18). Jesus is the Shepherd who not for shameful gain, but eagerly. He said: The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Joh 10:10-11) He is the Chief Shepherd who does not abuse His authority but rather leads his flock and calls them to follow Him and walk as He walks and feeds them in good pasture: The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (Joh 10:3-4) Indeed, Jesus tends and cares for His sheep: My sheep hear my voice, and I know

them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (Joh 10:27-28)

And then the great promise, at that time when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4). The faithful elder will receive the everlasting reward – the unfading crown of glory -- the eternal glory and joy, as a gift of grace when they have finished their work faithfully. Thus our motivation for serving as elders must ever be the desire to hear on that great day, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” Then we will share in His glory! Unlike earthly rewards which fade, that crown will last forever. And that -- that is enough, it is more than enough.

Please pray for your elders, beloved, that we may be faithful men, that we may honor God and serve Him with willingness, with eagerness and joy, and that we may serve you, not domineering in our leadership but be faithful examples of Christ before you.

And pray, too, that you would imitate Christ in all things and that we would be a faithful church. In a faithful church, the elders will shepherd and the flock will follow, both in a spirit of humility and submission to Christ. That is why the writer of Hebrews can say: (Heb 13:17)

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