

## **First Peter: Eschatological Elders**

**1 Peter 5:1-11**

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

In this session, we come to the final chapter of 1 Peter. Peter has struck the note of the eschaton, of what he calls the apocalypse, the revelation of Jesus Christ – he has struck this note early and often. So, it is not surprising that he hits it again as he closes. For him, it is axiomatic – that is, it is utterly basic, it is everywhere assumed, that the church is an exile people, strangers, sojourners, aliens. A people, thus, looking for, fixed upon, the hope of her heavenly home, her inheritance kept in heaven, imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. The apostle never loses sight of this. Even when, as here, he's giving instruction for the elders in the churches. So we will make two points: Eschatological Elders (vv. 1-4), and Concluding Exhortations (vv. 5-11)

### **I. Eschatological Elders**

First, Eschatological Elders. Addressing the elders, Peter says in v.2, be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care. This imagery, so familiar, but also beautiful, is rooted in the ministry of God himself. Yahweh is the great shepherd king of Israel. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. The metaphor speaks of God's comprehensive care, his intimacy with his people, his defense and nourishment of the flock. And, in the fulness of time, the Lord himself, Yahweh incarnate, comes as the good Shepherd in Jesus Christ. The one who knows his sheep, the one who lays his life down for the sheep, the one who does not lose one single sheep.

Yet, remarkably, shepherding the flock is a work in which God employs human instruments. Human shepherds. Undershepherds, if you will. And precisely because this is a participation in, a reflection of, God's own shepherding work, this is a calling, a vocation of great dignity. Peter himself was restored as a shepherd, by Jesus the Good Shepherd, after his denials, in that famous and tender passage at the end of John's gospel. Jesus asks him three times: Peter, do you love me? Each time, after Peter answers "yes," the charge comes back: "feed my sheep." They are, at all times, and this cannot be stressed too much, his sheep. And in our text here, Peter says: Be shepherds of GOD'S FLOCK. Shepherd the flock of God which he purchased with his own blood; Paul says in Acts 20.

So, Peter, charges the elders: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care. What is the first thing needed for this task? As it was with Peter, so it is with all elders. Love for risen X. Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Then. Only then: Feed my sheep.

Notice, the text says: shepherd God's flock that is UNDER YOUR CARE. This is literally the flock that is WITH YOU. Among you. Shepherds must spend time with the sheep. They have to smell like the sheep. It is impossible to nourish from a distance. Luther said he did only two things to make the reformation successful: he preached the Word and he drank beer with the saints. Teach and nourish. Teach and spend time with people. No substitute. No shortcuts.

Watching over them, the text continues. This word is the one we get bishop or overseer from. It carries the idea of oversight, a kind of holy superintending, aimed at the cure of souls. And again, the splendor of this calling lies in the fact that Peter has earlier, in this very letter, called Jesus the shepherd and overseer of our souls. This overseeing is now described three ways – and each way is described negatively, then positively.

First. Oversee them, not as if forced, not because you must – that's the negative – but willingly, as God wants you to be. There's the positive. No one should serve as if under compulsion or as if coerced. It must be free willing service, service rendered in good cheer.

The second description of overseeing is: not pursuing dishonest gain (negative), but eager to serve (positive). Leadership provides opportunities to mis-handle or abuse money. Rather what is needed is the eager desire to serve. Service, not gain, or leverage.

Third here, overseers should not domineer over those entrusted to them, but rather be role models for the flock. Here – again – Peter calls us to imitation of the master who said:

*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

In this, shepherds have the high calling, one which should evoke fear and trembling, of being examples, who should be able to say as Paul said: Imitate me as I imitate Christ. And let us note how Peter frames or brackets the work of shepherding. It is thoroughly eschatological. In v. 1 Peter appeals to the elders as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's suffering. *He knows firsthand the whole narrative of Christ's agony.* His apostolic ministry is a ministry of witness to

the cross. Witness to the sufferings of Christ into which, the church in her suffering, is drawn. And in this suffering we are already partakers, and we shall share fully in, the glory that is to be revealed. Peter is an elder who has witnessed the sufferings of Christ and partakes in the glory which is to be revealed.

Then, in v.4, he makes clear that all the reference to glory is speaking of that which is unveiled at Christ's coming. And when the Chief Shepherd appears. So, Christ is the Chief shepherd. He uses men, but he has not delegated the task and gone on Sabbatical. He remains the Chief Shepherd of every, last sheep. This appearing is THE revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of the age. When the chief shepherd appears, he tells the elders, you will receive the crown of glory. Again, all the references to glory in the book are about this glory. And "crown of glory" is a metaphor. It means a crown which consists of eschatological glory. A crown which simply IS creaturely participation in the glory of God.

This crown is what all the promises of God, to the overcomers in the Book of Revelation, are referring to. Namely, uninterrupted, undefiled, joyous, consummated, face-to-face communion, with the Triune God, in everlasting glory. In Paul's language, you are now raised with Christ, your life is hidden with him in God. And when Christ – who is our life – is REVEALED – you too will be revealed with him in GLORY. And this crown of glory, Peter says, will NEVER fade away. Again, this is the full possession, the full enjoyment of the unfading inheritance – kept in heaven for you – of which Peter spoke at the opening of the book.

Now, this expectation – the appearance of the Chief Shepherd is not something merely future for Peter. He tastes it, he is gripped by it, it pervades his consciousness, and it fundamentally shapes his ministry and teaching. It brackets here his teaching on being a shepherd. Paul teaches the same thing in his bracing charge in 2 Tim 4: I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word. All true ministry – whether of leaders or not - lives in the presence of the one who is to judge the living and the dead, it lives and breathes by his appearing, by his coming kingdom. It is because of the eschaton – not any this- worldly goals – it is because of the appearing of Christ, that the Word of Christ is to sound forth. This then, is the question this exhortation pointedly asks (esp. but not exclusively of leaders): Does my life have the fragrance, the fire, the fundamental orientation of the eschaton, the appearing of Christ in glory, stamped upon it?

## **II. Concluding Exhortations**

Finally, the concluding exhortations. Verse 5: Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one

another. This is a kind of free mutual subjection. Everyone is to be clothed in humility toward everyone else. Humility doesn't just happen; you have to have to put it on – repeatedly. No one is going to clothe you – dress yourself in it. There is, one scholar said, a global need for humility. So, clothe yourself with humility toward one another. Why? Because: God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. It's a citation from Proverbs chapter 3.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand – verse 6 continues. Here it's even stronger than clothe yourself. Its humble yourself. Under the mighty hand – the saving, powerful, Exodus-making hand – of God. And he will lift you up in due time. The same God who humbles, is the God who exalts. This is just another way of saying suffering then glory. Humility, then exaltation.

Notice that at the proper time (or in due time) he will exalt you. "Due time" is ultimately the End – that is when the church is fully and finally, openly, and by sight, lifted up into the glory of Christ. Many, many, saints – surely the great majority – are not openly exalted in this life. Humility waits for the Lord's act of exaltation. And a key part of what those who humble themselves do is: "cast their anxieties upon him, because he cares for you." Here Peter is echoing Psalm 55. This requires humility because we love to worry, to carry our anxieties around. We think it shows how much we care. And these believers had reasons for anxiety we can't imagine. Hostility, betrayal, persecution. But anxiety is a sickness, it's a kind of deep kind of forgetfulness (dark underside of our capacity to hope). And what it forgets is simply this: he cares for you. And he never forgets or mishandles his beloved sheep. Anxiety, then, seeks nothing less than to detach us from God in Christ. From Jesus *who said*:

*<sup>5</sup> "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"*

So, even as we actively clothe ourselves with humility, we actively cast our anxiety away – hurl it on to God himself for, as Jesus said, your heavenly Father cares, and cares well for you – body and soul. In verse 8 he says: Be alert and of sober mind. Peter has already told us this. Like a good teacher he repeats the key points. From chapter 1: Gird your minds for action, be sober minded, set your hope on the revelation of Christ. From chapter 4: the end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be sober-minded. Vigilance, realism and sober watchfulness are necessary. Why? Because your enemy, your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion. It's a fierce, frightening image, and it intends to infuse the sobriety into us that Peter commands. It evokes the lions of the Roman Amphitheater, devouring their victims. Though defeated, the principalities and powers remain dangerous. And Satan is still designated as the god of this world. Resist him. Peter says. Standing firm in the faith.

Notice, as in the great passage in Ephesians 6, we are not called to defeat the adversary. Jesus has already done that. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, John tells, us that he might destroy the works of the devil. Christ has plundered the strong man and bound him through his life and death. In his cross the prince of the world is cast out. And Christ will finally destroy him at his appearing. For now, we can think of him as a mortally wounded, tethered lion. Yet, for all that, he remains dangerous. And the great task of the church is to resist the spiritual forces of wickedness, in the heavenly places with which we wrestle.

*Resist, then, the text continues: standing firm in the faith. Standing in the victory over the roaring lion, by X the lion of Judah. Standing on ground which has already been cleared, cleansed and secured for you to stand on by the blood of the lamb.*

And we stand knowing that the family of believers, the whole church throughout the world is undergoing the same kinds of suffering. Peter, like the NT everywhere, simply assumes suffering is the norm. It is – generally speaking – the experience of the church. And these Christians are to know that they are not alone. They have a bond of solidarity, solidarity in suffering, with the international church.

The letter comes to a fitting close (leaving the concluding greeting aside) with what is a prayer, essentially a benediction. And the God of all grace. All the realities of this book flow from the abundant grace of God. It was of God's grace that we were ELECT exiles, chosen in God the Father, it was grace that caused us to be born again into a living hope, it was grace that caused us to embrace the gospel and become living stones... members of the house of God, and it is grace that is the source of the beautiful, Christ-imitating life to which Peter has called us. And the God of all grace is the One, Peter says, who called us to his eternal glory in Christ. This is an immensely important word right here.

What, precisely, is it that God – the God of all grace – has called the church to? You would think it's this or that kind of cultural or political engagement, this or that kind of social project. But what God has summoned the church to is his own ETERNAL glory in Christ. In short, God summons us – exiles here – to our heavenly inheritance. That is, he calls us to himself. To face-to-face communion with the Holy Trinity, in and through Christ, in GLORY.

This is not merely a temporal, historical summons. It is a heavenly calling. It is what Paul calls the UPWARD call of God in Jesus Christ. Peter himself here, speaks just as Paul does in 2 Timothy 2: Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Repeatedly Peter speaks of glory as the future eschatological splendor that attends Christ's appearing. And thus, fittingly, he concludes with

the same summons, the same riveting of our eyes on the prize – namely, God himself.

That glory just IS what the church is called to. That glory is THE church's one hope. Her blessed hope is, Paul says, the appearing of the GLORY of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. And this comes, the text says, after you have suffered a little while. A little while here means the whole age. Right at the opening of the book – which he is reprising here – he told us: You will suffer for a little while, SO THAT the genuineness of your faith will result in glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Again, suffering now – for a little while – glory later. *Momentary* light affliction now, an eternal weight of glory when Christ is revealed in glory. After, then, the suffering, at the END of suffering and warfare, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ... will himself – restore you – bring about full and complete wholeness, put things right. He will make you strong. Christ was crucified in weakness, raised in glory. So, it shall be for us. He will make you firm (confirm), that is utterly, immutably fixed in the good. And finally, he will establish you, steadfast, secure, immovable.

In short, the God of all grace, will soon crush Satan under your feet. You resist him and stand firm now, and at the coming glory, when suffering is over, you will be restored and established. With this, Peter has come full circle. With this, the elect exiles, having suffered, have obtained their living hope, their imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance. Where, in eternal glory, they shall declare as Peter goes here: To him be the dominion, the power, forever and ever. Amen.

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