



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Peter 5: 1-5

Fall 2024

"Shepherding Sheep"

TRANSCRIPT

Well, good morning. That was as good text of Scripture to read as an introduction to our text, which is 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 1 through 5. It's a text that deals with a narrow segment of the congregation—a text that deals with the elders of the church, those who are the under-shepherds of the church; and not, 'The' Shepherds of the Church', that's the Lord.

But I think as I contemplate this, (and I've said this before as we've come to this subject in other places), that while this deals with the responsibilities of a select group of men and gives exhortation in terms of how they should behave, it really applies broadly. So, this is what you should expect of your elders, but this is what we should see in all of ourselves—in all people in the congregation; it's this kind of attitude, this concern, for others.

Now it begins, "Therefore," and I'll probably mention this in the lesson itself, but the "Therefore" is there because of what he's said previously. And what he's been speaking of is, as you'll remember from last week, is the "fiery ordeal" that they're going through—a time of persecution, a time of hardship. And so, it's the responsibility of those who have been appointed as under-shepherds, 'shepherds of the sheep', to look after those who are suffering.

⁵ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

1 Peter 5: 1-5

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's look to the LORD.

Father, we do look to You and count it a privilege, a pleasure, to be with Your people. It is important, as Seth has reminded us, to be gathered together here—to be with one another to be ministered to, but also to minister to each other, It's difficult to do that when we're not present with Your people, and knowing Your people.

But we thank You, Father, for this time together and we thank You for the opportunity to be built up in the faith. May that be the result of our time, may we be built up in our knowledge of You and in our love for You.

Now that is really the great motivation for obedience and it is a motivation that comes as we study, and think, and reflect upon who You are and what You have done for us...the Triune God and all Your ministry to us: From Your choice of us, to the redemption of us, to the irresistible grace that brought us to You. We are debtors to mercy alone and we thank You for that. May we understand that more, and love You more, and may our time together be to that end.

We pray also for LORD, that You would bless those who are sick or those who are facing surgery; some are relatives, and others are recovering, and we pray for Your rich

blessing upon all those who are in need of that, and we thank You that You are faithful to give that recovery, and health, and blessing.

Now LORD, we pray that You would bless our time together. Bless us as we sing our next hymn and may You use that to prepare our hearts for this time of study and worship. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) I commented a week or so ago that I used to visit Romania when it was a communist country—and then for a number of years after that, after the iron curtain had fallen. And during those visits I had made a number of friends, and had lots of conversations—most all of which I don't remember. But I do remember a talk I had with a friend who brought up the subject of shepherds. I don't know why he brought it up, but I found it interesting.

He said that he had always thought shepherding was an easy job: It's 'just watching sheep'. And then he was out hiking and camping in the mountains one summer, and he noticed a shepherd on a hill near him. He was standing, watching the flock, keeping the sheep from straying. At night he heard wolves howling, and he noticed that the shepherd was awake and watching the sheep—guarding the flock. He said he realized the work of a shepherd is hard and constant; it takes perseverance.

Well, that was the life of Jacob while he was working as a shepherd for his uncle Laban. He describes it in Genesis 31: 40, "...by day the heat consumed me and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes."

So the figure of the shepherd is what Peter chose to identify the leaders of the church, the elders, the under-shepherds of Christ; and the church, (while it's not their flock, it's the flock of the Lord), nevertheless they are the 'hired shepherds', as it were, who are to look after it. So Peter wrote, "...shepherd the flock of God...", (vs2a); that's their responsibility, the responsibility of the elders.

Peter was no wordsmith; he borrowed both of these terms from the Lord and the Old Testament. The writer of Psalm 100, verse 3, confessed, 'we are His sheep',

"...and the sheep of His pasture." And then Seth read that text from Ezekiel, where the LORD says that, "...you are My sheep...", (Eze 34:31).

Isaiah 53, verse 6, "All of us like sheep have gone astray." God's people are His sheep. The Lord called His followers His sheep and His flock. He called them 'His little flock' in Luke chapter 12, verse 32. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom." Why would the sheep be afraid? Because they were small in number, a small flock; and the enemy is large, and the enemy is powerful. Sheep are defenseless—they need a strong and dedicated shepherd.

David is the outstanding shepherd of the Old Testament. He told Saul, before going into the Valley of Elah to face Goliath, that as a shepherd he rescued sheep from the jaws of beasts. When a lion or bear came and took a lamb, he went after them, and he attacked them, and he killed them with his own hands. And so he was eminently qualified to defend Israel and fight the giant. "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (1Sa 17:37).

There is a rich background for the figures Peter chose for the church and its leaders. 'The flock', and 'shepherd', indicates the church's vulnerability and need of defenders and guides—and chapter 5 begins with instruction to them, (notice, not to 'the pastor of the church', as though there is one man who really is over it all, and leads the congregation), but "...I exhort the elders among you ..." (vs1). It's a plurality of leadership; and that fits with the counsel of Scripture. Proverbs 24, verse 6b, "...in abundance of counselors there is victory."

An elder can be a preacher, (though he doesn't have to be), but he must be a person who knows the Bible and meets the moral and spiritual qualifications stated in 1 Timothy chapter 3, and Titus chapter 1...and be ready to labor and to serve. That should be true of all of us.

You can make that application broadly, but certainly it applies here to that of the elder, especially in times and circumstances like those that Peter wrote of in this epistle,

during the "fiery ordeal." They needed to show leadership; they needed to show wisdom and encouragement to the suffering saints.

Chapter 5 begins, "Therefore", (because of these hard times—the persecution and the challenges they present to the churches), "I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God..." (vs1-2a).

The exhortation, in verse 2, is to "shepherd the flock of God". But Peter first gives the basis for it: And that is his authority for counseling them by giving three facts about himself.

First he said he was a "fellow elder." We might have expected him to speak to them as, 'an apostle of Jesus Christ', like he did in the first verse of this book. But this shows that in this hard situation he personally identified with them. He understood their responsibility; he was one of them; he had practiced those duties, (maybe it was in Jerusalem; we don't know where, but I assume it was there). And he understood what it was to be an elder: A shepherd during a time of persecution because that's what happened when Steven was martyred—great persecution broke out in Jerusalem.

Later they had famine, and he understood the hardships of famine. He understood what it was to be a leader, and to carry out those duties in difficult times. He was not telling them to do anything that he had not done. His counsel had the wisdom of experience

Secondly, he'd witnessed the sufferings of Christ...which is surprising. It recalls his failure when he fled in fear and denied Christ. But it showed he knew the fear the persecuted saints had; and his failure showed that there is restoration to fellowship and service for 'lapsed Christians'.

His *third* statement is proof that he is a partaker also, of the glory that is to be revealed. That's also a reminder to them, and to us, of the hope that the church has. Hope encourages perseverance in trials among the saints, and among the elders who are the shepherds over them—perseverance in trials and in long labors. And it inspires

courage in the fiery ordeals of life—and in the face of death itself. We have that hope that does that. It's difficult to persevere if you have no hope; but we have the hope that enables us to do that, (and he reminds them of that).

So having stated, in effect, that he understood their situation, that he spoke from experience as a fellow elder, and has the hope of the glory to come, (as they do), he then exhort them, exhorts the elders in verse 2, "Shepherd the flock of God among you..." Peter learned this lesson from the Lord on the shore of Galilee, recorded in the last chapter of John's Gospel; and it's when Jesus restored him to service after he had denied Him three times.

Three times, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. And each time Peter responded, "Yes, Lord. You know I love You." (Jn 21:15,16,17). Each time that he affirmed his love, the Lord said to him: "Tend My lambs." "Shepherd My sheep." "Tend My sheep." (ibid.). Peter's love for the Lord would be revealed in his care for the Lord's flock; as our love for the Lord is reflected in our care and our love for one another. He was saying to Peter, 'If you love Me, you will love My flock, My sheep for whom I died, My people...and if he loved them, he would serve them.'

Not all do that. Here in verse 2,(b), Peter warns against taking advantage of the office of elder, "for sordid gain". Well obviously, some did that, enriched themselves at the expense of the church. A position of authority has its temptations that can appeal to the flesh. Not just avarice, greed—but power.

In his third epistle, 3 John, the apostle dealt with a man named Diotrephes. He had a position of authority in the church and likely he was an elder. Evidently he had placed himself over all of them. He was ambitious. John wrote that he "loves to be first." (3 John 1:9).

Well who doesn't? We want to be first; it is the primal desire for worship that Adam craved when he disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit to, "be like God", (Gen 3:5). That was the serpent's promise. But there's no place for that anywhere in the world; certainly not in the church.

The Lord's instruction was, "shepherd," which is 'serve', not, 'be served'. *Ministry* is described in verbs—not nouns. It is not about 'holding office'. It's not about 'having authority'. It is about *acting*, and 'acting as a servant'. It's about *doing* and *sacrificing*. And Peter did it well. You see that in the Book of Acts and here in this epistle, where Peter wrote to the elders to "shepherd the flock of God among you." (vs2).

The best example of shepherding in the Old Testament is Psalm 23 where David, reflecting on his own experience as a shepherd, saw how the LORD had guided and protected him all through his life. As a shepherd leads his sheep to green pastures, and beside quiet water, so too the LORD has provided what was best and what was needful for David, giving him spiritual rest, giving him peace, giving him nourishment. He was there with him when David went through dark valleys, "the valley of the shadow of death", to protect him with His "rod and staff", (vs4), a 'club and a shepherd's crook' for protection and guidance.

And He never stopped guiding, and providing, and protecting. He would do that until the very end ... and this was David's hope, (just as Peter has expressed hope here) ... to do that to the very end when David would finally enter into the house of LORD, where he would "dwell forever". (vs6). He had that hope before him, as we do. Now that's the Lord God, always with us, never forsaking us; who is faithful to the end when He finally brings us into our heavenly rest in His Father's house.

In the meantime, when we stray, as sheep always do, the Lord finds us and retrieves us, like a shepherd. Christ revealed that about Himself in the parable of the lost sheep in Luke chapter 15, (verses3&4). He leaves the 99 in the pasture to go after the one lost sheep. An amazing thing—amazing picture...he, (*the shepherd*), has all these sheep, 99 sheep, (a large flock), but he leaves it all for that one sheep. When he finds it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing...in fact, throws a party after finding that lost sheep. That's the Lord!!

That's His care for each and every one of us, individually. And as we stray, in various ways, it maybe not noticeable to others, but our mind wanders. We stray in a

variety of ways, and He is always working to bring us back to Himself...bring us back from error. That's shepherding—and it's demanding. But in the case of our Lord, it is born out of love for the sheep. That's the model for us; that's the standard for us.

That's what Peter was instructing elders to do. They are to provide spiritual nourishment to the flock of God. That means instruction from the Bible, the Word of God, His revelation; that's what feeds and nourishes the soul. It's only through an understanding of Scripture that we, as God's sheep, will have rest—like that of lying down in green pastures. Only as we know God and His plan, and His promises, do we have peace.

So elders, officers of the church, leaders, are to insure that is provided for the assembly. The truth of God is essential for our spiritual growth and protection; if that were to disappear from this place, the elders have not been shepherding. The focus of it all is the Word of God; that gives peace, that gives spiritual growth and protection, as I said. Peter indicates that function in the statement, "exercising oversight." (vs2).

Another word for elder is *'overseer'*—like a shepherd who stands looking over the sheep, (or the flock), to see if a sheep is leaving, or a predator entering. The elder, *'watches over the church'*; that is the instruction that Paul gave in Acts chapter 20, verse 28, to the elders of the church of Ephesus. He met with them at Miletus on the coast, just south of Ephesus. He was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem, but he had time for them and it was urgent that he speak to them. It's his farewell address to them; it would be their last visit for they wouldn't see the apostle again.

He told them he was going to Jerusalem where he knew, *'bonds and afflictions awaited him.'* (Acts 20:23). But nothing was more important to him than finishing the ministry Christ gave him to preach, *'The Gospel of Grace.'* (Acts 20:24). He reminded them of his ministry among them, and how, *'He did not shrink...'*, he said, *'...from declaring to them the whole purpose of God.'* (Acts 29:27). He taught them the whole Word of God, and all of its doctrines.

People, the saints, don't always want to hear, "the whole purpose of God." (ibid.) They want to hear the parts that they like; they want to hear the parts that they agree with, so ministers are tempted to declare only the popular things. 'I didn't do that', Paul said, 'I preached it all!' And as a result, the church of Ephesus was mature and stable ...and that prepares the church for persecution—all kinds of hardships.

Nevertheless, he told them with urgency, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28). He was urging that, 'they stay on guard!', because he said, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." (Acts 20:29).

That's just the reality, that's just the nature of things. When a church is growing, (and I don't mean necessarily in size, but certainly in maturity in the knowledge of God and love for the LORD), Satan will invade and cause confusion. It maybe with a scandal; (that's the reason Paul told the elders, "Be on guard for yourselves.."); or he may introduce false teaching; or Satan lulls us to sleep with materialism...ease and comfort, (and that's one of the great challenges we have today). We all need to be 'on guard for ourselves'.

But elders have the added responsibility of insuring that the flock, the congregation, is healthy and safe, 'in green pastures of biblical instruction'; and always be alert to the danger of error that creeps in...and be ready to expose and correct it, which requires knowledge and discernment. It requires careful attention to the congregation.

Elders are like that Romanian shepherd, standing all day, watching all night, leading the flock to mountain pastures, and guarding them from wolves. All of that is demanding; and requires study in order to have a thorough knowledge of the Bible, which, (as I said, and it should be repeated continually), is our authority—our sole authority. Scripture alone is our standard of truth.

Well, it takes sacrifice of time and energy to know it, and study it, and learn it. That's challenging, and it presents temptations for an elder, which Peter calls their attention to in the remainder of verse 2, and then in verse 3.

John Calvin identified the dangers that the elder faces as; *sloth, desire for gain, and lust for power*. I think he analyzed the text correctly. Peter had the antidote for all three. He told them not to do this, 'not to take on the responsibility of an elder under compulsion'—not to feel as he exercised that authority and carried out that ministry to do it under compulsion, but "voluntarily". (vs2b). In other words, 'Do it freely and willingly.'

It's a valuable work, it's an essential work and should be done with the attitude, and sense of, privilege because it is that. Do it from conviction that guards against laziness. After all, if it's true, as Paul said in Acts chapter 20, verse 28, that 'The Holy Spirit is the one who makes men overseers', then they should eagerly, but seriously and earnestly, accept the responsibility and carry out those responsibilities of the office.

We are in a spiritual battle, always, (and we'll come to that next week), so the saints need elders who are happy warriors, glad to be of service to use their knowledge of Scripture in applying solutions to the needs of the congregation.

It is a service—so it is not for the greedy, but the selfless. Peter adds, it is to be done, "...according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness." (vs2c). It's not wrong to be paid in that service. In 1 Timothy 5, verses 17 and 18, Paul makes that clear, that some elders should be supported financially in the ministry.

But even there, the elder should be free of greed. Paul also warned against that in 1 Timothy 3, verse 3; a qualification of an elder is that he is, "free from the love of money." Greed is a condition of the heart, a spiritual condition that disqualifies. Financial support is legitimate, but it should not be the motivation for ministry. 'The LORD will provide!' We need to learn that lesson, that great truth. 'The LORD will provide.' The motivation is serving with eagerness, with joy from a love for the LORD, and a love for His people. That's what inspires eagerness to serve Him, and to serve them.

[Now, just a word to the young men: Cultivate that love for the Lord in your hearts now. He told the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:20, 'I stand at the door and knock; if anyone opens, I will enter and sup with him, and he with Me.' The Lord stands at the door of our heart, seeking that fellowship; so open to Him. That's what all of us should do, but I give this exhortation to young men because now is the time to develop one's love for Him and His people, so that in time to come, you will be prepared, ready to take on that great responsibility with a pure heart.]

In verse 3, Peter gave the third antidote to sin: 'Not yet as holding it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.' So, 'not like Diotrephes, having a lust for power.' Be an example to the flock.

The example one should follow is the example Christ gave us....Christ Himself. Peter surely had Him in mind in this statement. The author of Hebrews calls Him, "a merciful and faithful high priest". (Heb 2:17). He sympathizes with us in our weakness, so that we can, 'draw near to the throne of grace in prayer with the confidence that we will find help there in time of need'. (Heb 4:18). And that time of need is always...always we're in need.

Peter knew this well from his experience on the shore of Galilee when the Lord reinstated him in the ministry. He didn't scold Peter for abandoning Him in His darkest hour, or denying Him three times—just the opposite. He came to Peter as his loving Lord, showing mercy to a broken disciple:

"For He Himself knows our frame.

He is mindful that we are *but* dust."

Ps 103:11

"A bruised reed He will not break off,

And a smoldering wick He will not quench."

Mat 12:20

His aim is to heal, not crush. That's the example we're to prove to be to the flock: Like that shepherd who left the flock, found the stray lamb, put it on his shoulders and returned rejoicing. The elders, Peter instructed, would need to correct and comfort many of the saints who went through that fiery ordeal, that time of persecution. Some would not prove themselves to be faithful; they would fold and fall under pressure. The elders were to be Christ to them.

And it's just as true today in this age of peace and prosperity; just as true for us in this time in which we are living. The world, the flesh, and the devil, all exert terrific pressure on Christians, on all of us, seeking to conform us to its standard.

There's never an excuse for sin, but it happens—even to an apostle. We are dust; sometimes discipline is required. That's hard to do, hard to experience, but it's necessary—not to exclude a sinner, but to include him or her. That's the goal—not to punish, but restore. Just as Jesus did Peter on the shore of Galilee, and, as Bernard wrote in his ancient hymn;

"O hope of every contrite heart,
O joy of all the meek, to those who fall,
How kind Thou art!
How good to those who seek."

And so elders need to have the same understanding, grace, and compassion the Lord always showed to sinners, in order to help restore the lapsed, to a vital walk with the Lord. It is challenging; not easy when the responsibility is taken seriously. It is to be accepted with *disinterest*, (meaning, without selfish motive), not for power or financial gain. And so there will be few, if any, earthly rewards for that office; in fact, it maybe criticism that one receives.

But Peter assured a better reward in verse 4—a far better reward; "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." "The Chief Shepherd", of course, is Christ—who called Himself, "the good shepherd." He, "lays

down His life for the sheep." (Jn 10:11). So "the sheep" are His sheep; the flock is His flock—not 'the elder's flock', not 'the pastor's flock'. They are just His under-shepherds, under His authority with responsibility to Him to care for His flock. Not our flock, His flock. And He will reward faithful service with a "crown." (vs4b).

The word, *crown*, is used of a victor's 'crown', or 'wreath', in athletic contests. Crowns of gold were given by Roman generals to brave soldiers. Crowns were given as special honors; they were not given to all—not everyone got a trophy. They were given to those who had distinguished themselves on the battlefield or on the playing field.

In the Isthmian Games, (and others), the crown was something that was greatly desired. And Peter was stating that those who are faithful, diligent, obedient, who serve the Lord with a pure heart, with right motives, earnestly—will be blessed with a crown. (It's not like the highly praised crowns, as I mentioned in those games that were given to the Greek athletes, for those crowns were made of parsley, and things like that, dried up and withered quickly. Greatly desired—but they don't last.) These crowns are unfading. I'm sure Peter had those crowns of the athletes in mind, how they turn to dust rather quickly. These don't; "unfading crowns of glory"(vs4).

There are other crowns in the New Testament that seem to be for all believers: "a crown of righteousness" in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 8, that Paul said was, "laid up" for him: and 'for all who love the Lord's appearing'...so it's a general crown. The "crown of righteousness" may be the righteousness that we will receive when we enter into glory...the *purity* that we will have. In James chapter 1, verse 12, he speaks of "the crown of life", the promise to those who love Christ. Those seem to be general crowns.

But this is a reward for elders. It's not for all believers...and not all elders. Only those who work diligently and faithfully, those who have persevered in their responsibilities and done it with eagerness, and with joy. That should give motivation to serve selflessly; not anything in this life, no temporal possession or honor—but only the blessing that will be received when Christ returns. So these crowns are not for today; they are for the age to come.

Now in verse 5, Peter turns from the shepherds to the sheep, from elders to young men, and then to all of the congregation. But still, instruction is regarding the office of the elders. "You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders;..." (vs5). Young men are to willingly support the elders in the direction that they give to the church. The reason young men seem to be singled out here for specific instruction is probably because they are more independent minded, and need reminding to be submissive to authority.

The author of Hebrews ended his letter with a general exhortation similar to this, but it's to the entire congregation. He says, "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls...Let them do this with joy and not with grief." (Heb 13:17). It's not always easy to do that. It takes humility to be in submission or to agree with and comply with the authority that is over a person.—It takes humility.

And Peter urged that on the whole congregation with an unusual phrase. He concludes by saying, "...clothe yourself with humility toward one another..." (vs5b). That word, "*clothe*", is a rare word and is used here to describe *humility* in terms of 'putting on a garment.' The word was used of a slave putting on an apron for work...and that recalls John 13, doesn't it? When, at the 'Last Supper', Christ girded Himself, like a slave, knelt down and washed the disciples dusty feet. An amazing picture: Son of God, the Creator of all; Creator of those disciples, (and the dust on their feet), bent down and served them.

Christians are to have that attitude—we are to serve. No one is exempt from that. It should characterize the ministry of elders: Humility and service to the sheep. The reason given next, in verse 5c, is, "for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Pride is a danger for the elders, it's a danger for the congregation; they '*proud trust*' in themselves; they seek glory for themselves; and God is opposed to that. He gives grace, unmerited favor, to those who have humility of mind.

The verb, *gives*, is a present tense, and that is what He does daily for the humble. And so humility is to be a daily way of life. It should characterize all of us—then we will be an example to the world, the example of Christ, (who Paul wrote to the Philippians),

"...humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
(Phl 2:8). Of all things, the most shameful form of death, with that humility, resulted in the sacrifice that saved the world—the elect.

Is there anything more difficult than humility? I don't think so, but it's necessary if we're to please God, and be blessed by Him, and used by Him. And it's necessary for the unbeliever, (if he or she is to be saved and have eternal life), to recognize that he is spiritually dead and lost, without any good thing to boast about...at least to boast about before God Himself.

If you're here without Christ, recognize that. Repent from self-satisfaction and pride, and cast yourself on the mercy of the Lord God. Believe in Christ and His sacrifice for sin—and rest only in that for forgiveness, and righteousness, and acceptance by the Lord God.

(Closing prayer) Father, we look forward to that day when we will see Him, and then be like Him. What a glorious day that will be!

In the meantime we're here in this world with all of its challenges...and they are great challenges. The pressures are on us continually—and often we don't even realize it, but they are. Deliver us from that; give us all humility, and perseverance, and a desire to serve You faithfully—and to serve one another.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)