

Text: I Peter 5:1-4

Title: “Shepherds of God’s Flock”

INTRODUCTION

I invite you to open your Bibles to I Peter 5. And as you’re turning I’ll just remind you that the Thursday is the first Thursday of the month and our Church-wide Day of Prayer. Join us for one of the three prayer groups that will meet at 6:30am, 12 noon and 5:00pm in the Upper Room of the Welcome Center.

1 Peter 5:1 (NIV) - To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:

It’s inspiring to read the Spirit-inspired words of a man who was personally so close to Jesus. Peter calls himself here “a witness of Christ’s sufferings.” He was a witness *of* the sufferings of Christ. He was there so close. In fact, in a sense Peter inflicted some of those sufferings. He denied Jesus on the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion. But Peter saw all that Jesus endured in the rejection, the condemnation and the crucifixion. He was a witness *of* the sufferings of Christ. But Peter has also been a faithful witness *to* the sufferings of Christ. In his encouragement here in I Peter to stand strong in the face of suffering Peter has continually pointed to Jesus’ sufferings. Jesus’ commit his soul to His Father in the midst of sufferings, and so should we.

So the sufferings of Christ were never far from Peter’s mind, and they shouldn’t be from ours either. There’s no better way for us to keep the sufferings of Christ before us than to share together in the Lord’s Supper. So we’re going to pause right now and do that.

The word for suffering means “passion.” As we come to the Lord’s Supper we remember the passion of our Lord on the Cross of Calvary. I’ll ask our deacons to take their places, and I’ll ask you to join me as we pray.

LORDS SUPPER

1 Corinthians 11:23 (NIV) - For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

1 Corinthians 11:24 (NIV) - and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

1 Corinthians 11:25 (NIV) - In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

1 Corinthians 11:26 (NIV) - For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

(Now let’s just worship the Lord.)

Now let's go back to our text where we see that Peter has a word of encouragement and exhortation to the pastoral leadership of the churches to which he is writing. These churches are located in various regions found in present-day Turkey. We don't know how many churches there were, but we know that each of them had pastoral leadership. And Peter addresses them. Read I Peter 5:1-4 NIV.

Now you may look at this and say, "Well, nothing here for me. This part is for the preacher. Wow! The preacher has been laying it on us pretty hard, now he gets a dose of his own medicine." Yes, I receive that.

But this word is not just to pastors. The Holy Spirit is talking about the kind of pastoral leaders that the church needs. So this is about all of us. But I'm grateful that we have in our church many young men who will one day be pastors. There are many young ladies who are married to men, or who will be married to men who will be pastors. So there's something here for all of us.

1. THE ROLE OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP (vv.1-2)

1 Peter 5:1 (NIV) - To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:

1 Peter 5:2a (NIV) - Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...

I want you to take note of three words: "elders" (v.1), "shepherds" or "pastors" (v.2) and "overseers" or "bishops" (v.2). Do you see them?

Now from the earliest history of the church, the church has been concerned with how leadership in the church was to take place. I don't have time to go into a historical discussion, but I'll just say that we believe that these three words do not describe three different groups of people who lead churches ... elders, shepherds (pastors) and overseers (bishops). Rather it is clear from the context here that the Bible is talking about one office of pastoral leadership in the church.

They are called "elders," not necessarily because of their age, but because they lead by virtue of their spiritual maturity and wisdom. And these leaders "shepherd" the church. As I said earlier, the word is often translated pastor. Pastors shepherd the church. And they also serve as "overseers" ... they watch over the flock.

So this describes a single office in the church. This morning we elected a new group of deacons. That is the second office prescribed in the NT church. The Lord wants each church to have this kind of servant leadership structure to be in place in each of his churches.

Why does God want someone to shepherd His church? Because God has the heart of a shepherd. You see it running all the way through the Bible. His relationship with His people is spoken of repeatedly in the Scriptures as a shepherd leading, feeding, caring and reaching for his sheep.

Psalm 23:1 - The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

Isaiah 40:11 – (The Lord) tends his flock like a shepherd...

And Jesus, in the NT, says...

John 10:14 - “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me...

Jesus looked on the people of His day and saw that they were like sheep without a shepherd.

ILLUSTRATION – I run with a group from the Fort Worth Running Company on Saturday mornings. A couple of Saturdays ago we started our run before daylight. We were running through the cultural district, headed out to the Trinity Trail. I had never run this route before so I was following a group of runners ahead of me that seem like they knew where they were going. I assumed there was a leader in the group so I followed. But it soon became apparent that our group was going in the wrong direction, and we got way off course. As it turned out everyone thought that someone else was leading the group, and none of us really knew where we were supposed to go. We were sheep without a shepherd.

So God shepherds His people, and He does so through servants whom he calls. Go back to I Peter 5:2.

1 Peter 5:2a (NIV) - Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...

Notice the flock “is under your care.”

Hebrews 13:17 (NASB95) - Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

God has purposed that some should be responsible for the leadership for others, and those who lead and those who follow are under the authority of Jesus and His Word. That’s the role of pastoral leadership in the church. The next thing I want you to see is...

2. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP (vv.2-3)

Now Peter gives guidance to the elders/pastors/overseers. He has three challenges to these leaders. There’s a pattern in vv.2-3: *not* this way, *but* that way ... repeated three times.

1 Peter 5:2a (NIV) - Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be;

THEIR LEADERSHIP IS TO BE GLAD, NOT GRUDGING

Pastoral leadership is hard work, and it involves suffering. It might easily get to a point where they feel forced to do it when they would rather be doing something else.

ILLUSTRATION – I read the results of a survey recently where it was revealed that a high percentage of pastors would do something else if they could find a job that they could support their families.

In other words their hearts are not in it. They are not glad to do it. I will say to you that pastoral ministry is hard. But I love what I do. And I really think that those who work with me love what they do. We are blessed to shepherd this flock.

Now there's another responsibility.

1 Peter 5:2 (NIV) - not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

THEIR LEADERSHIP IS TO BE SACRIFICIAL, NOT SELFISH

Now the Bible teaches that the church is to take care of the financial needs of their pastoral leaders. And I am so grateful that our church takes that seriously. Thank you! If we had to work at another job to support our families, we wouldn't be able to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

So pastors are not to do their work to become a wealthy person; they are to do it to become a serving person.

They are to be men of integrity. One of my guiding verses in ministry is found in ...

Psalms 78:72 (NIV) - And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.

Now I Peter 5:3 gives another responsibility for pastoral leaders.

THEIR LEADERSHIP SHOULD BE EXEMPLARY, NOT EGOTISTICAL.

1 Peter 5:3 (NIV) - not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

In some places pastors have been elevated to celebrity status, rock stars of the religious world. Their methods come out of the world of entertainment. In some places pastors model themselves after CEOs of massive corporations. And their methods come of the corporate world. In some places pastors are viewed as kings of the congregation. And their methods are just sheer overpowering people ... "lording it over" ... literally "overpowering" people.

I can't say what God thinks about that, and I must not judge a man's motives. But the Word of God teaches that our leadership is to be different. We are not to see ourselves as rock stars, or CEOs, or kings ... and we are not to be measured in those terms, either.

We are not measured by how many people serve us, but how many people we serve.

Pastoral leaders are to be examples to the flock. We're all flawed men, but our leadership approach should be to live out the character of a Christ-follower and call others to follow us in that.

So we've talked about the role of pastoral leaders, the responsibilities of pastoral leaders, and ...

3. THE REWARDS OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP (v.4)

I think there are many earthly "rewards" to what pastoral leaders do. I'm blessed in so many ways. But those are not the rewards that should motivate me. Here is the reward that motivates pastoral leaders:

1 Peter 5:4 (NIV) - And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

ILLUSTRATION – Yesterday my granddaughter Caroline played in her last soccer game of the season. And after the game was over Drew Erickson, her coach, gave her and all the other children a trophy. They didn't get those trophies because they were the best team or the best players. No one kept score (or at least they weren't supposed to). Those kids got their trophies because they showed up and played to the best of their abilities.

Now in NT times athletes didn't get trophies, they got wreaths. The word "crown" means literally "surround." So it was something that went around their heads. Generally it was a wreath made of branches from a tree or a vine. And obviously it wouldn't last long. It would fade like last week's homecoming mum.

But the Bible tells us that one day the Chief Shepherd Jesus will return, and one of the things that we can look forward to as His people is our rewards for faithfulness to Jesus. It says we'll receive a "crown of glory," or literally "the crown that is glory." We get to share in the glory that comes to our Savior Jesus in that day, and in the glory that surrounds us in heaven.

CONCLUSION

QUESTION – Why does the church need these kinds of leaders?

- **We need to be led.**
- **We need to be fed.**
- **We need to be cared for.**
- **We need to be found.**

One of the most familiar stories Jesus told revolves around this very thing. Remember the trilogy of parables that Jesus told, the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost sons.

The Scripture says that we all like sheep have gone astray. We have each one turned to our own ways. But God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.