

Servant Soldiers - 1 Peter 5:1-14

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[0 : 00] So let us hear the word of God, starting at verse 1. To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings, who will also share in the glory to be revealed.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care watching over them, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders.

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because God opposes the proud, but shows favour to the humble.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

[1 : 29] Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him.

Standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God.

Stand fast in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings. And so does my son Mark.

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. Dan. Dan. Dan. Good morning.

[3 : 06] Good morning. Before we start, let's just go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we give you great glory and thanks for yet another day to gather in your name.

the privilege of being able to bring our concerns and our anxieties to you, regardless of where we've come from this week, whether we find ourselves doing well or doing not so well.

We give you thanks for what you've done in our life. So help us to lay our concerns at the altar of your throne, to open our hearts and minds to the truths and the realities of what your word would have us learn this morning.

As we continue in our worship through the word, may we enter into worship with you. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Really is difficult to believe this is the last Sunday.

I'll be with you in this series. And a lot of people have been asking me how I'm feeling about this being the last Sunday. And I've been responding with, it's kind of bittersweet. It'll be good to get back to my hometown, home congregation, but it's hard to leave because it's been just a great time of blessing being here and ministering to you and with you and praying for you and praying with you.

[4 : 27] And really, it's felt like our home church for the last couple of months. So it's really been our church family while we've been here. It's also been a great reminder to me that there are things going on outside of the little bubble that we can create in our own local environment, in our hometowns.

It's a great reminder to me that we're not alone in this fight. And that's just what this Christian walk is. It's a fight. It's a war. We're all soldiers in this war, in Christ's army.

And we wage war every day, not with guns, not with bombs or swords or shields or all that kind of thing, but with prayer, with fellowship, with kindness and love.

And that's what I've been reflecting on as I'm bringing you this last message this morning, the idea that we're servants and soldiers. In fact, the title of today's sermon is We Are Servant Soldiers. We serve and we fight. So we're going to look at two things in terms of being servant soldiers, what Peter has to say. We are to be humble towards one another and we are to fight against sin.

[5 : 37] Be humble towards one another and fight against sin. So let's dive in at verse one. To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and as a witness of Christ's sufferings who will also share in the glory to be revealed.

Remember that Peter is writing not to a specific church somewhere, like the church in Carrig or the church in Middleton or wherever, but he's writing to all the churches in what we now call Turkey. So it's not one particular church, one particular problem, one particular group of elders. This is a message for all churches in all contexts at all times. And he grounds his appeal in three things. Take a look at verse one. He says, I'm a fellow elder, so I understand what your calling is and I share that responsibility. He says, I'm a witness of Christ's sufferings.

I actually saw him nailed to the cross. I was there when he died and I was there when he rose. And he says, I'll also share in the glory to be revealed.

[6 : 41] I'll share in the glory to be revealed. I'm your fellow brother in Christ. Not just an elder, not just a witness of Christ's sufferings, but I will participate with you one day in the glory that will be revealed when Jesus calls us to himself.

And on the basis of that, Peter is saying, I get it. I get the responsibilities that you have, elders. I know why Christ died. And I share in this fellowship with you in Christ.

And on that basis, verse two, Peter says, be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them. Shepherd, pastor, overseer, elder, they're all words for the same thing.

They all describe the same duties and responsibilities of those who lead in the local church. And now this isn't just for elders. I'll come to you in a second.

But let's let the text speak for itself first. Still in verse two, Peter says, watch over the flock, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

[7 : 51] Have you ever thought the only reason that you're serving in a particular way is because nobody else will do it? Because there's nobody else there to fill the gap.

You might also want to do it. Maybe you do, maybe you don't. But it's still easy when we think like that to get self-important. Well, I'm filling in this gap.

I'm so important. I'm such a martyr for the cause. And it's easy to develop this complex or to be entitled about things. And Peter says, don't do that.

Don't. Just put that thing to death and serve humbly, not haughtily. And here's the thing. Because we're all people, this is news to you, right? Because we're all people, we all do this from time to time.

It's going to happen. So for example, when someone else is preaching, it's really easy for me to sit there and be thinking, oh, I wouldn't have stressed that point. I wouldn't have used that application or drawn out that illustration.

[8 : 55] And just like it's easy for others to do that when I'm standing up here. Or it's easy for us to get an attitude that, well, I'm really the only one who's capable of doing this, so I guess I'll just get on with it and do it.

No real joy, just a sense of entitlement, wanting constant pats on the back, that sort of thing. And you know, the one thing I have to pray for, the hardest, when I get up to preach, is against all those things.

Is that it wouldn't go to my head. That when I do have someone who gives me good feedback or plaudits or whatever, that I wouldn't start getting too big for my boots.

And let's be honest, Peter talks about selfish gain. I'm not exactly going to become a millionaire by being a preacher in Ireland in 2019. Not in this church, and not in Middleton anyway.

Maybe there are churches out there where it might happen, but... I might be able to make a reputation for myself, though. I might be able to get people to see, oh, you know, there's this guy down in Middleton and you really want him to come to preach.

[10 : 00] That can go to my head. I might get in a position to influence other people by taking the word and not necessarily teaching what it says, but using it to manipulate people and to influence

them in a way I would like them to be.

Or I might be able to get a certain amount of public limelight on myself. Be in the spotlight. That's still gain, isn't it? That's still something I get out of doing this.

And I ought not minister for those reasons. Just as Johnny was talking about, we're saved by Jesus and therefore we ought to be humble. Because of the sacrifice that Jesus made.

You know, I'm not standing here going, oh, well, Jesus paid for my sins, so I'll just lord it over everybody. I'll just show everybody I know the best. Peter says, don't do that.

Verse 3, don't lord it over people who might be looking to you to lead or to shepherd or to disciple, but by being, and underline this word, an example to the flock.

[11:05] An example to the flock. You know those times like I have them when you're thinking about raising your kids, do as I say, not as I do. Don't copy what I'm doing, just do what I tell you to do.

And Peter says, get that out of your head. Not do as I say, not as I do. Be an example, he says. Paul, the apostle Paul, exhorted the Corinthians to follow his example just as he followed Christ's example.

Faithful. Temperate. Even-tempered. Self-controlled. Sober. Honest. Hospitable. And here's the point.

This isn't just for elders or pastors. No one's sitting here wondering, oh, well, that's okay then. I'm not a pastor, I'm not an elder, I don't need to be humble or faithful or all that kind of things.

But because Peter says, elders, be an example to the flock, this is a picture of how all believers ought to imitate the character and the deeds of Christ.

[12:13] And if that's how elders ought to behave, how pastors ought to behave as an example, then maybe think about things like this. do we want people to be saying, he's so great with the kids' ministry or she's such a wonderful addition to the whatever ministry?

It might be. But is that what we want people to say? Do we want the plaudits? Do we want the pat on the back and the recognition? Or are we happy just serving, just using our gifts as God gave them to us without wanting this public recognition?

Or how about this, kind of linking in with what I just said about preaching. Do we view our ministries as stepping stones to bigger things? So bigger churches, flashy worship music, whatever.

Are we content that God, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, has placed the members of the body just where he wants them for his glory and to serve and to give him glory?

Do we think we know better than others? Even if we do, sometimes. Are we kind and gentle and humble in our service?

[13:33] In other words, friends, do we make this all about us? All of this, the seating, the music, the preaching, the kids ministry, do we make this all about us and our gifts and our abilities and our ministry and our church?

Even verse 5, have a look at this. Even if we're not elders or officers in the church, do we puff ourselves up and act like it? Do we think we know better than the church leaders and therefore we don't submit to them?

Now that's not to say that doesn't happen sometimes, regularly, a lot of the time, whatever you want to say, but that's not the point. The point is whether or not we're willing to submit and to defer to the church leaders just as the church leaders submit and defer to Christ and offer themselves up as an example for the rest of us to follow.

Are we humble towards one another? It's not about our talents. It's not about whether we know better or we have the right ideas or plans or whatever the case.

This isn't about us. This is about Jesus. This is all for Jesus. And so much of our walk depends on humility.

[14:56] I was reflecting on this during the week and I don't think I'm going out on the limb to say this that I think the greatest part of our flesh that we have to be actively crucifying every day is all this me, me, me stuff.

It's all about me. It's all about what I can do. Because if we can do that, if we can work on those things, if we sow that seed and we water it with the word of God and with the fellowship of the local church, then we'll see it grow and we'll see it produce its fruit in its season.

Verse 4, if these attitudes are in us, if these are the fruit of our faith, then we receive the crown of glory. The crown of glory.

So what crown is this? Well, remember what Jesus said? Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

And that's exactly what Peter says in verse 6. Humble yourselves. Bring yourselves low, therefore, under God's mighty hand that he might lift you up in due time.

[16:09] Bring yourself low. Humble yourself. Empty yourself so that at the right time Christ will exalt you, will lift you up, raise you up, and seat you with himself at the right hand of God.

Because at the end of it, friends, isn't that what Jesus did? Emptied himself, made himself nothing, and humbled himself to the point of death, even on a cross, so that he might be exalted and that we might be exalted with him.

this isn't just about being nice to people for the sake of it. This is about echoing the very life of Jesus himself because that echo, while imperfect and while incomplete, that echo, that modeling out of this character of Christ is the fruit of the life of somebody whose heart says it's all for Jesus.

It's all about him. In this war, in this Christian life, we are servant soldiers and we serve by being humble towards one another.

Secondly, finally, have a look at verse 8. Since we are servant soldiers, we fight against sin. Verse 8 says, Be alert, be of sober mind.

[17:38] Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. I read a lot about strange things in the lead up to sermons.

This week isn't too bad. It was lions. So, you know, pretty easy. If you don't know anything about lions, then you at least know that they're pretty fearsome hunters. And some of you have cats, like I do.

And now, my cat, you know, she wouldn't exactly win the cat version of Mastermind or whatever. You know, you could take her, stick her in front of an open door with a bit of cheese. She'd miss the cheese and still bang her head against the door.

But despite all those things, she's still one heck of a hunter because she's a cat. Quiet, stealthy, quick, lethal.

And she's only a house cat. She's only the size of, I don't know, half his laptop. If you take a lion, just like smaller cats, the thing about them is that they stalk their prey.

[18:40] They slowly and they patiently walk around in the long grass, hidden, not letting themselves get given away until they absolutely have to.

And I was reading that lions generally won't charge at their prey until they're basically right up on top of them. Satan does the same thing. It's not like the movies or whatever where Satan has bright red skin and horns on his head and a pitchfork and a tail and hooves and he's not going to come up to you wearing a sign that says, hi, I'm Satan, I'm here to tempt you today.

You're not going to have a personal encounter with the devil himself. Not because he's not real, he's very real, but because the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, Paul tells us.

John tells us, excuse me. World. Kosmos is the Greek word. The orderly arrangement of the whole world system is fundamentally influenced by Satan and by sin himself.

So be alert, Peter says. Just be awake. Just be realistic. Know that this is the devil's playground. It's where he's at work.

[19:59] And not just that, but be sober, he says. It's actually the third time Peter has used that word in this letter. Be sober. Clear-headed. Free from anything intoxicating.

Go out of your way to avoid intoxication because the things that cause them, maybe they're not bad in and of themselves, but the things that cause them are ways Satan uses to tempt you into sin.

Things like this. Since he said sober, let's start with alcohol. There's nothing wrong with it in and of itself. You can have a drink if you like. Jesus himself was pretty familiar with the wine production process.

But if you can't have just one drink, or if when you drink you get gossipy, angry, lustful, whatever, simply put, don't drink.

Be sober. How about career? As a civil servant, I think about this often. Again, not bad by itself. Good to have goals. Good to have aspirations.

[21:01] But when we covet a career, and we esteem it higher than how we treat other people, then we're going to start to think a little bit less about what that ladder climbing means when we hurt people, or we cheat people, or we step on people.

Here's a topical one. Being involved in politics. We live in a democracy. It's good to be civically aware, informed, active, all that kind of thing.

But be careful how you do this. This is a double-edged sword. Don't just read things by people you already agree with, and reinforce your own ideas about things.

Because the next step is don't demonize people that you disagree with. Don't act like the person who disagrees with you on any particular subject, even if they agree with you on everything else, is somehow a fascist or a communist or whatever the case might be, whatever names you might call them.

Don't become one of the hysterical voices, and there are many of them out there, the hysterical voices that get outraged by everything and anything.

[22 : 17] I've said it before, the most common word in Ireland is disgraceful. The health service is disgraceful, or bus fare went up by five cents. It's disgraceful. Don't be one of those people.

Be mindful about how people can hear and interpret your words and your actions, whether in person, social media, whatever the case might be.

In other words, Peter says, be alert. Wake up. Just actively be on the lookout for all of these things that can sneak up on you like a predator and devour you.

Usually not all at once. I don't know about you, but I know from my own experience that those times in my life where I've sinned in a very visible kind of way, it's never been in isolation.

If I'm honest, and I think if you're honest when we look at those things, we look back and we'll see this trail of seemingly little insignificant things that lead up to them.

[23 : 19] the little white lie or, well, it's only five euro, I'll put that in the expense account or just little things like that add up because James says each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed and then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin and sin, when it grows up, gives birth to death.

This isn't a game. This is serious stuff. Jesus said, if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. If your right arm causes you to sin, cut it off.

If there is something in your life that is fundamentally getting in the way of you glorifying God by the way you live your life, get rid of that thing. I don't know what it is.

You know what it is. And the Lord knows what it is. The Puritan John Owen said it this way, be killing sin or sin will be killing you.

Be killing sin or sin will be killing you. So verse 9, we need to resist the works of Satan in our lives.

[24 : 39] We need to recognize what we are tempted by. We need to limit our exposure to those things. And then we need to do what we often do last after everything else.

Pray against those things. Pray against whatever it is that you are struggling with. Pray by yourself. Involve your spouse, your best friend, an elder in this church, whoever.

Pray against those things. Resist the devil, James says, and he will flee from you. Prayer is more powerful than psychology or philosophy or anything like that.

It's a weapon in the believer's armor. And remember, we're not alone. Jesus brought us from death to life not to be by ourselves, as I've said so often through this series, but to be born again into a family of believers.

A family that transcends nationality and language birthplace, whatever. And just like the world, the church and the world over suffers, no matter where they are, we all sin.

[25 : 52] No matter where we are. We're all tempted. We all stumble. And even though we seek to glorify God in our lives, as Paul says, who will rid me from this body of sin?

We're still here. We're still in the reality of living here. In a fallen world in Ireland in the 21st century. And so we need to pray against these things.

And to remember this, this world can be hard. Cruel. Bleak. So when our relationships fail and break up, or when our kids get sick, or our loved ones die, or our workplaces are full of gossip and strife and bitterness and unpleasantness, when the depression overcomes you, when the eviction notice comes through the door, back in verse 7, cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Friends, in this world, Jesus said, we will have suffering. It will happen. But fear not, Jesus said, I have overcome the world.

Jesus has destroyed death and sin itself so that regardless of what happens in this life, regardless of what Satan throws at us, if we hold fast to Christ, then we get this crown of glory.

[27 : 25] We go to be with him forever. Verse 10, fight against sin, resist the devil, and the God of grace who has called us to eternal glory with Christ.

will, after the suffering, restore us to strength and firmness and steadfastness, even when it's hard, even when we have setbacks, even when we think we're not being the best Christian in the world, and we never will be, by the way.

In all of these things, we still look forward to that day when Jesus calls us to himself and there's no more death and every tear will be wiped away and there'll be no more suffering and no more pain and you get a nice new body.

Some of us are looking forward to that. Fear not, Jesus said, I have overcome the world. I'm just about done.

I've taken you through this letter which is just loaded with these deep, great truths about God, his love and his plan for redeeming us, what that ought to look like in our lives.

[28 : 41] And I sincerely hope it's impacted you. I sincerely hope that you get a sense of just what great mercy God bestowed on us when he sent his son to die so that he would save us out of the world.

As Peter says, verse 12, and this is what I've tried to do over the last couple of months, I have written to you briefly, verse 12, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. This is the grace of God. It is the unmerited favor, the undeserved favor that he bestows on those who come in faith to Jesus.

Nothing you have to do. You don't sign anything. There's no secret handshake. None of that kind of stuff. Just come in faith. So be a servant soldier.

Be humble in your dealings with your fellow man and woman inside the church and outside the church. Fight against sin.

[29 : 53] Be killing sin day by day. Watch out for the lion that's prowling around looking for ways to devour you. Remember that God chose you.

That he called you out of darkness into the glorious light. That Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God, having himself being made alive in the spirit, the same spirit that now lives in you if you profess Christ.

If you didn't know it before, you certainly know it now, two months later. I'm not one for mincing words. If it's true, it's true. If you don't follow Jesus, here's my final plea.

Follow him. God became man and suffered death that you might have life. Jesus is not one way to God out of many ways.

In the words of Jesus himself, he said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.

[31 : 09] There is no other name here on earth or anywhere in the universe on which you can call and have any hope of anything after this brief life here on earth.

It's Jesus or it's nothing. So as we close, if there's only one thing you take away from my time with you, that'd be this.

This is not about us. This is about Jesus. It's all about Jesus. it's all his. As verse 11 says, to him be the power or the glory or the dominion.

To him be the power forever and ever. And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that your word is like a double-edged sword and it pierces to the division of bone and marrow and soul and spirit.

We thank you for the reminders that you have given us through your word that we are chosen, that we are kept, that we are shielded. We also thank you that you're honest enough to tell us the truth, that we must fight against sin, that we must be humble.

[32 : 35] humble us Lord, in the ways where we glorify ourselves and exalt ourselves. We ask you for your mercy. We ask for your grace once more to pour over us and to make us realize that this is not about us.

This is about you. Wherever we serve, whatever we say, whatever we do, help us to do it for your glory, not for our own. Be with us Lord, as we live out our lives here in this fallen world as new creations, help us to be salt and light to the world around us, a beacon of hope in a world of darkness.

Help us to say the right words with the right attitude and give us ears to listen when we simply need to listen. For those who don't know you, for those who don't call on your name, maybe even sitting

here or listening right now, be drawing them to you, Father.

Give them the realization that they have been drawn to where they can hear your word, where they can hear the good news that you sent your son who died so that we might have life.

Be working in them, Holy Spirit, convicting them and breaking down their barriers and drawing them to you so that they would declare that Jesus his Lord.

[34 : 04] Be with us as we go to the Lord's table and remind ourselves of these great truths that you sent your son as the suffering servant, as the humble sacrifice who didn't open his mouth but who went willingly like a lamb to the slaughter.

Help us to remember that we are part of one body with many members others and that together we seek to glorify you. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. We're going to sing together in response the song Jesus all for Jesus.

Do we have that the that the only place that we should run to, the only one who we should commit our life to is him.

So let's stand together. Amen.