

Elders

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[0:00] Well, it's a real pleasure to be with you today. Thank you so much for inviting me. Thank! you for your patience in starting a little bit late with my hopelessness in finding! somewhere to park and being here. But it is great to be with you as a church, and especially on a day that's so exciting as Daniel becomes new kind of elder of the church.

Let's pray as we come to God's Word. Early in his letter, Peter writes these words or reminds God's people of these words. All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. Father, we want to thank you and praise you for your Word. Thank you that your Word is true, and thank you that your Word is enduring. Thank you that these words that you caused the Apostle Peter to write, inspired by your Spirit, almost 2,000 years ago, have endured, and they are still your Word to us today. Please would you help us by your Spirit to hear what you are saying to us, and might we respond with faith and obedience. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, we're going to be looking at 1 Peter chapter 5 verses 1 to 11, which I think are appropriate on this day as you appoint a new elder. With the resignation of Boris Johnson as an MP on Friday, the question has been raised yet again, and it's been a question that's dominated really for the last year, of what kind of leadership does the nation need given the challenges that it faces? There's no doubt is there that as a nation we face massive challenges at the moment. The cost of living crisis, the kind of huge backlog within the NHS, a series of kind of public sector strikes that are not coming to an end. Some of the ongoing kind of consequences of big decisions in Brexit and the COVID crisis. And on top of all that, an awareness that we find ourselves in an increasingly hostile world. We see that, for example, with the war in Ukraine, the rising kind of influence of China and other powers around the world. The way that we've taken the world to be for the last 25 years is being radically challenged. What kind of leadership will enable us to face those challenges? What kind of leadership will enable the nation to survive and thrive? Well, you'll be very glad that I'm not going to answer those questions for you this morning. But they do put the issue of leadership front and centre.

We know that we cannot meet those challenges without the right leadership. And of course, it's exactly the same in the church, the nation or the people of God. The church as God's people finds itself in an increasingly hostile world facing numerous challenges. We're aware of that, I think, increasingly in our own country. As we see that the decline of Christianity, the marginalisation of Christianity and a growing hostility towards Christianity across our culture. We feel increasingly under threat, fearful in some ways of low-level persecution. That, of course, is nothing compared to what many of our brothers and sisters around the world have to face. What kind of leadership does the church need in order to be able to survive and to thrive in this hostile environment? And that is exactly the question that Peter is addressing here in this chapter of his letter. Peter is writing to a church in the kind of first century that is facing the possibility of ever-increasing persecution. He's writing to a predominantly Gentile church.

[4:11] And in the early stages of the life of the church, the church really enjoyed the favour of the society in which it found itself. We read the book of the New Testament, the unfolding story of the book of Acts. There's persecution from the Jews, but generally in the early stages, toleration from the kind of the Roman secular authorities. But as people became more and more aware of what the church believed, that the church believed that Jesus was the one true king, there was growing hostility and persecution. The church that Peter was writing to, the

experience of hostility and suffering they faced was largely at an individual level, particularly Christian slaves who were in danger of being persecuted by their slave masters because of their faith, or Christian wives being treated badly by their non-Christian husbands. It wasn't yet state persecution, but that was on the horizon. It was very obvious that that was coming. So Peter writes to this church, and his purpose is to encourage them, as we read in those very last verses, to stand firm in the true grace of God. Not to be surprised by this suffering and hostility that they will face, to recognise that that's the normal Christian situation, and to ensure that they stand firm in the face of it.

And one of the things that's absolutely crucial to enabling them to stand firm is that the church has the right leadership. That's really the focus at the end of the letter here in chapter 5.

The letter Peter has explained the situation, encouraged the Christians to stand firm, but now he focuses on the church's own leadership, its internal life, because that is crucial to surviving and to thriving.

And it's not just about leaders. It's actually also about how the people respond to those leaders, because there's a mutual dynamic here. It's not just that the church needs the right leaders, but it also needs to be a people who rightly respond to the right leaders. So that's what Peter is teaching the church right at the end of this letter here in chapter 5. What kind of leaders are needed to help the church to endure and thrive in a hostile world, where the church finds itself exiles who are suffering, mockery, persecution, maybe even in the future, death? Well, four things I want to highlight that the church needs from these verses, if it is to be able to survive and thrive. The first of those is really verses 1 to 4. What we see there is that the church needs servant shepherds. The church needs servant shepherds. And Peter begins by speaking about the leadership that the church needs. He speaks about the elders kind of in the church. And the word elder is the key New Testament word to describe the leaders of the local church. It's a word that basically means the senior men who lead the community. The elders are expected to be those who are older in age and experience. They have respect, and they are the leaders of the community. It's the equivalent of what you might call the tribal elders or the city elders.

They're the kind of the group that exercise leadership in the community of the church. And really in these verses, what Peter is doing, he's saying he's telling the church what their elders need to be like. And he's writing to them as a fellow elder. He knows from personal experience, because even though he's an apostle, he's also a local church elder. And the key thing is that these elders, and eldership is a position that involves seniority and authority. He says that that eldership is to be exercised in the way of being servant shepherds. That's the task that the elders have to perform. [8:35] So the command is there in verse 2. Be shepherds of God's flock. The elders are to be shepherds. I don't know whether you know this, but the word pastor comes from the word for shepherd. It simply means be a shepherd. An elder is kind of a description of the authority that the leaders of the local church have.

Shepherd is the job description of what they do. So elders are to be shepherds. In a sense, in the Bible, every elder is to be a pastor. And really, Peter sets out for the church here what these servant shepherds are to be like, what their elders are to be like. And he tells them, first of all, what they're to do.

What they're to do. And that's there in verse 2. They are to be shepherds of God's flock.

Shepherding is the kind of description of their work. And that's because that, through the Bible, that is the paradigm of the leadership of God's people. That is the pattern of how God's people are to be led. In the Old Testament, the kings, the prophets, were described as the shepherds of Israel. It's not surprising, is it, that quite a lot of the kind of key biblical leaders were literally shepherds.

Abraham was a shepherd. Moses was a shepherd. David was a shepherd.

That's where they learned their kind of leadership in shepherding sheep. And when we look at the Old Testament, what this kind of picture of being a shepherd means, there are really four key elements to being a shepherd. Four aspects to their role.

The job of the shepherd was to firstly lead the sheep. In the Bible, the shepherd kind of walked out ahead of the flock and the flock followed the shepherd. The shepherd was the leader, taking the

sheep to where they needed to go.

[10:33] Second role of the shepherd was to feed the sheep, was to make sure that they got good food and good water, or else otherwise they'd die. Feeding, leading to good pasture, taking to where there is kind of good water, is the crucial task of the shepherd. That's how the sheep are built up.

That's how the flock kind of grows. So leading, feeding. Third task of the shepherd is to protect the flock. The flock is vulnerable. Remember, in the ancient world, the flock weren't in kind of fields with kind of nice walls and electric fences or in barns. They were in open country. And they were vulnerable to attack from wild animals, wolves, lions, who wanted to kind of predate on the flock. It was the job of the shepherd to protect the flock against the wild animals, which in the Bible is a picture of the false teachers who will lead them astray. The shepherd is there to protect the flock. And then lastly, the task of the shepherd is to care for the flock. And the picture there, again, picked up particularly in Ezekiel, other Old Testament passages, is to tend to the flock who are injured and weak. There will be sheep who, in the course of life, are injured and weak. And they need their wounds binding so that they are able to be restored. That's the job of the shepherd, to care for the weak.

And again, I think in church life, one of the problems is that sometimes kind of church members can sort of want all the attention of the shepherd, even though they're perfectly healthy. Whereas in actual fact, the task of the shepherd is to particularly care for those amongst the flock who are weak, who need their help. So that's the job description. Elders are to be shepherds.

[12:22] They are to lead, to feed, to protect, and to care. Well, secondly, in verse 2, Peter also explains why they're to do it. What's to be their motivation? What's the motivation for being a leader? The answer here is that they are to do it because they're willing. They're to be willing servants, eager to serve. In other words, people are not to lead in the life of the church. They're not to desire to be kind of elders because it gives them power. They're not to be desiring to be elders because it gets them wealth. Those are not the right motives for being a servant shepherd of God's people.

They're instead to be willing to serve the people of God. So not pursuing dishonest gain. Power always brings the opportunity to be self-serving and dishonest. We're all familiar with leaders who are corrupt, who abuse their position for their own personal advantage. That is not the way that elders are to lead in the local church.

I was reading last week about a sort of a seminary in America which has managed to run up over the last 10 years a debt of 140 million pounds.

Seems extraordinary, doesn't it? Any seminary could have that amount of money. 140 million. But their kind of last kind of president was essentially let go. It turns out that in the course of his tenure, he spent a million pounds on improving his own house.

He spent a huge amount of money of the seminary's kind of funds on flying his family first class to various things. That is dishonest gain.

[14:05] Misusing power and position for self. And that can happen in much smaller ways, even in our church contexts. Actually, generally in the UK, in FIEC churches, pastors aren't in it for the money.

I know what they get paid. Nobody would choose it for that. But what we need is leaders who are willing to serve, to give themselves.

But please don't forget that many of those who are in pastoral ministry have given up a considerable amount to be able to serve in roles that are long hours, low pay. And we should be grateful and thankful that we very often have leaders who are like that.

So how are they to do it? They're to be willing, not reluctant. I'm hoping that Daniel hasn't been kind of cajoled into becoming pastor of the church, but has willingly accepted your call.

Thirdly, how are they to do it? How are they to do this work as servant shepherds? Well, that really comes in verse 3. They are to do it by being examples to the flock.

[15:14] And again, Peter contrasts on the one hand, lording it over others. In other words, constantly asserting their authority and telling everybody that they're superior to them, as against being an example to

them, to kind of sort of show them how they should be living.

And of course, that is following in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus himself, who led by example. If we went back to chapter 2 of 1 Peter, Peter reminds them, particularly slaves who are suffering, of the example of the Lord Jesus.

That he is the one who was willing to go to the cross in our place to take the penalty for our sins that we deserve. He did that willingly. And in doing that, he set us an example. He was silent in the face of those who were kind of abusing him.

He was willing to suffer. He didn't seek revenge on those who were mistreating him. He, in his death on the cross, was not just the sacrifice for sins, but he's also the example of how we are to live.

He set his people an example. I think here, the point is, that's how servant shepherds are to lead the flock. You should be able to look at their lives and think, that is what I ought to be.

[16:37] As Paul says in his letters, follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. I was reading, again, just yesterday, the obituary of the chief chaplain to the Navy.

I don't know him, never heard of him. I would imagine I'd theologically wildly disagree with him, given what was written there about him. But something really struck me. It basically said that, as this chaplain to the Navy, in the Royal Navy, chaplains aren't given a rank.

So in the Army and the Air Force, they're given a rank, usually officers. But in the Navy, they're not given a rank. It's said of this man that he would kind of draw alongside people, no matter what their kind of status in the Navy.

He'd work alongside them. He'd chat to them. And he said he'd basically greet people and meet people, engage with people, as if he was the same rank as them. In other words, he never looked down on anybody.

He was always willing to draw alongside them. And I think that's a model of what it means to be a pastor. The captain of the ship he served on said that he was an outstanding pastor because of the way that he did this.

[17:52] And that setting of an example, drawing alongside others, showing them how to live is key. And then, fourthly, given the sort of burdens of this task, you might wonder, when on earth are they going to be rewarded?

What do they get out of that? And you have to remember that here in this situation, being a church leader was putting yourself in the front line. When persecution comes, they want to take out the leaders first because they think that will kill the church.

Why would anybody do it and expose themselves? Well, it's not for the money, but verse four, it's because of the ultimate hope of reward. The ultimate hope that when Jesus returns, they will receive the crown of glory for their service, a crown that will never fade.

In this life, they will often simply get mockery, suffering, and persecution. But there is an eternal glory to come. And leaders, in the midst of all of the pressures that they face, the problems of the church, the challenges of the world, need to keep their eyes focused on that ultimate promise of the crown of glory that will last forever.

It's worth saying that that's not exclusively for leaders. In fact, actually, Peter and Paul and others would say that for every Christian who remains faithful, there is a crown of glory that is available.

[19:16] This is not saying they're going to be in some elite status in heaven because they've been pastors. But in their faithful service, in the place that God has called them to, they will be rewarded in an eternal way.

So what does the church need? Servant shepherds who are like this. Well, secondly, in verses 5 to 7, it's not enough for the church simply to have servant shepherds.

If the church is to thrive and survive in this hostile environment, then secondly, the church also needs submissive sheep. It needs submissive sheep. In verse 5, Peter turns to those who are in the congregation.

In the same way, you who are younger. Now, what he actually means by that, when he says you who are younger, he means those of you who are elders. On the one hand, there's the elders, the olders is literally the word, and then there's the youngers, everybody else.

It's not really about age, it's about being not an elder. This is talking to those who are the church congregation. And in effect, they are the sheep.

[20:28] Verse 2, Peter says to the elders, be shepherds of God's flock. That's how the people are seen, they're God's sheep. So in verse 5, what Peter is doing is he's talking about the sheep.

What he says here is that the sheep, the flock, the congregation are to be submissive sheep. And the point here is that they are to submit to the authority of the elders.

Verse 5, submit yourselves to your elders. Now, that idea of submit means respecting their authority, their position, the office that they have.

It means being willing to take their advice. It means having an attitude of willing obedience. Now, this is not absolute.

The leaders of local churches do not have absolute authority. Of course, we all have to supremely live under the authority of the Lord Jesus. If our elders and local church leaders are telling us to do something contrary to the will of Christ, it's absolutely right to serve and obey Christ instead.

[21:40] But there ought to be a default submission to those that God has raised up to have authority in the life of the local church. In fact, the book of Hebrews says that that's what you need to do in order to make the work easy for them.

They shouldn't have to be battling against a permanent, unsubmitive attitude that's not prepared to kind of go with the way that they are leading the church.

Submit yourself to your elders. And actually, that's part of a bigger pattern in 1 Peter of having to submit to God-established authority. That's, in a sense, what chapter 2 and chapter 3 is about.

As we live in this world, there are various ways in which we are under authority. We are under the authority of the state, the governing authorities that God has established.

Slaves are under the authority of their masters. The closest parallel for us might be we're under the authority of our employers. Husbands, wives are under the authority of their husbands within a kind of marriage.

[22:42] In all of those relationships, there's to be appropriate submission, which is not absolute. And then Peter says here in chapter 5, that's true in the church as well. The sheep are to be submissive to their servant shepherds.

And what that requires, what brings about this submissiveness, is humility. See, what causes the opposite of kind of submission is actually pride.

Pride, pride the confidence that I know best, my way is best, and I won't submit to and listen to others. Peter basically says that's not the attitude that we're to have.

We are not to be proud, but we are to be kind of humble. So in order to be submissive sheep, we need to clothe ourselves with humility towards one another.

A willingness to listen to what others have to say. A willingness to follow the lead of others. And the reason for that is because God hates pride.

[23:42] God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble. So if we want to be the kind of submissive sheep that will help the church to survive and thrive, we need to humble ourselves.

And the way that we do that is not by looking to our leaders and humbling ourselves in comparison to them. No, the answer is to look to God. Verse 6. Humble yourself, therefore, under God's mighty hand.

We need to look to how great God is and realize that in comparison to him, we are small. We need to humble ourselves before God. And that is what will help us to rightly relate to the servant shepherds that God has given us.

And actually, this sort of humbling ourselves under God is actually the way that we cope with all of the stresses and pressures of life and the hostility we find.

Because verse 7, we are humbling ourselves and submitting ourselves to the God who is good and who cares for us. The God on whom we can cast all of our anxiety because he's big enough to deal with it.

[24:51] And he can take it. We hand it over to him. Very often, the reason that we find it difficult to submit to others is we don't think

they can actually help with the anxiety and the stress that we feel.

No, instead we need to realize that God is able to carry that weight. And he is given us leaders to help that to be worked out. So we submit to them.

So submissive sheep who are humble, who trust God because he cares. And know that that care is brought about through the shepherds that he provides.

So servant shepherds, submissive sheep. Well, thirdly, the third thing that we need, and that's verses 8 to 9, is that we need to be sober standards.

We need to be sober standards. Because the great threat to the church is actually not the world around us. It's not even the divisions and problems that we have within the church.

[26:01] But we have an enemy who is desperately trying to destroy us. And that is the devil, Satan. So Peter says, be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking to devour someone.

Do you see there, he's the wild animal who's wanting to kind of, as it were, devour the flock. He's the one who's behind false teaching. He's the one who's behind division. He's the one who wants to damage and destroy the life of the church.

One of the reasons, as we said, you need servant shepherds is to protect the flock from the wild animals. Well, here's the uber wild animal that you need protecting from, the devil, who is out to get the church.

Life in the church is a spiritual battle. That is reality. And we mustn't be surprised by that. So how do we deal with the problem of the devil and the way that he wants to attack and damage the church? Well, we need to be sober standards. So verse 8, we need to be alert and of sober mind. Now, the idea of being of sober mind here is of being kind of self-controlled and mentally aware.

[27:18] You know, somebody who is drunk is basically out of control. They're not rational. They're not thinking. Basically, they're not able to face kind of the challenges that come against them.

We're, in contrast, to be those who are sober, clear-minded, self-controlled. Ready for the challenge of the attacks of the devil.

Only if we are sober and alert are we going to be able to, verse 9, resist the devil. The way that we do that is by standing firm in the faith.

So we are to be sober standards. People who are self-controlled and stand firm in the faith. And I think the implication there that we're to stand firm in the faith is a reminder to us that the way Satan attacks the church is very often by seeking to undermine the truth of the faith.

That's his major attack is to undermine the truth of the faith, to deny the gospel, to question its ethical implications. You can't believe the Bible.

[28:25] You can't possibly believe that that's how people should live today. A subtle, constant undermining of what the Bible and God says.

It's right back to the Garden of Eden, isn't it? Where kind of Satan says to Eve, did God really say? That's the voice of the devil devouring the sheep in every generation.

That's why we need to be sober standards who stand firm in the faith and resist his lies. And Peter encourages the church here that what they're having to face is actually normal for Christians around the world.

It's not something unique. But he writes at the end of verse 9, you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. I think sometimes we can fall into thinking that if we are God's people, basically God owes us an easy life.

And that's exactly the opposite of the way that the Bible sort of teaches. As God's people, we find ourselves in a hostile world. We're going to be spiritually attacked more than others. We're seen as the enemy.

[29:35] And that's the normal situation for God's people. Don't be surprised that this is the battle you find yourselves in. That you have to be sober and stand firm in the faith.

That is normal Christian kind of living. One of the things in my little church back in Market Harbour that we found helpful is in our prayer meeting on a Sunday morning, we pray through the watch list of open doors.

The 50 most persecuted countries. It's just really helpful to gain perspective on what our brothers and sisters are facing in numerous situations around the world.

The normal situation for most Christians around the world today is to be poor, marginalized, and in some way or other suffering for their faith. That's who we're called to be.

That's why we need to be sober standards. And then lastly, in verses 10 to 11, we need to be steadfast sufferers.

[30:37] We need to be steadfast sufferers. So Peter reminds the Christians here that they will suffer in this present kind of age.

He says, after you have suffered a little while. I think that's a description of the current experience of Christians in this world. You will suffer.

That is kind of inevitable. We don't suffer to the same degree and we don't suffer in the same ways. But both living in a fallen world and because we are Christians, we experience suffering.

It's normal. It goes with the territory of what it means to be one of God's people. And what Peter is urging these Christians to do is not to give in and cave in under that suffering, but instead to be steadfast.

So verse 10, he wants them to be strong, firm, and steadfast. He says, you are going to be sufferers, but I want you to be steadfast sufferers. Who don't give up under the pressure of that suffering.

[31:46] And the encouragement that he gives them is they don't have to do that in their own strength. It might seem a huge ask. But actually what he encourages them is it's God himself who will enable them to be sort of a steadfast sufferers.

Who will endure and remain firm. And he highlights three things about God. He highlights firstly God's grace. God is the God of all grace.

The idea of his grace here is his undeserved, generous blessing. God is a God of undeserved, generous blessing. He will supply everything that you need in order to be able to stand firm.

He reminds them of God's kind of glory. God has eternal glory, which means that suffering is only ever temporary. But actually what awaits in eternity is glory.

And he reminds them last of all in verse 11 of God's power. To him be the power forever and ever. So a God who is gracious. Who is generous in undeserved blessing.

[32:53] A God who is eternally glorious. And that's the destiny that we will share. And a God who is powerful. A God like that is able to enable us to endure suffering.

To be steadfast sufferers. So here is what the church needs. If it's to survive and thrive in a hostile environment.

In the face of increasing marginalization and suffering and possible persecution. The church needs servant shepherds who will lead it. The church needs submissive sheep who will humble themselves under their leadership.

The church needs sober standards who will resist Satan. And the church needs steadfast sufferers who will not give up.

That's what you need to be. If you're going to be a church that survives and thrives. In this culture. And at this moment.

[34:02] And if you're going to do that. Let me suggest three things. You need to do that run through this passage. Firstly you need to trust God.

You need to trust God. Trust in who he is and what he's like. Because you can't do this yourself. It is God who will enable you to live in this way.

Trust at God. Remember who he is. Look to him. Secondly. Live in hope. Keep your eyes fixed on the eternal glory to come.

Now that's actually where 1 Peter begins. 1 Peter begins in chapter 1. By reminding the Christians here. Of the living hope they have. Because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The way that they're able to live in this hostile world. Is by knowing that they have a living hope. An eternal inheritance. That is prepared and kept safe for them. And can never be taken away. It's having that secure confidence.

[35:07] That enables them to do all of these things. And again Peter in these verses. Takes them back to that eternal glorious hope. Reminds the

shepherds that they'll receive a crown of glory.

He reminds the kind of members of the church. That they've been called to eternal glory in Christ. Trust in God. Live in hope.

Of the glorious inheritance you have. And then thirdly and particularly because of this passage. And because of this day. Value your shepherds. They are there to enable you.

To stand firm. To encourage you to keep going. Value those that the Lord has raised up. To be the elders. To lead your expression.

Of the community of God's people. They are there to feed. Lead. Protect. And care.

[36:09] Be thankful to God for them. And help them. To do their job. In the best possible way. Because actually it's through them.

And the way that God ministers through them. That you will be helped. To be a body of his people. Who stand firm. Let's pray. Father we want to thank you and praise you for this word.

Thank you for its realism. About the nature of the Christian life. Thank you that it's Jesus. Who is the chief shepherd. Who cares for his people. But we thank you and praise you.

That you have provided shepherds for local churches. Pray for my brothers here. Who you've raised up to be elders of this church. Might they be those who are servant shepherds.

Of the flock that you have here. Pray Father for the people of this church. That they might be submissive sheep. Helping those who are leading them.

[37:08] Humbled under your mighty hand. Father I pray for this congregation. Here that you would help them. To be sober standers. Who resist Satan. And all of his lies.

And I pray that in your strength. And by your power. You might make them those who are. Steadfast sufferers. Who no matter what suffering they experience. Because of their faith in the Lord Jesus.

Remain firm. Until they enter into that eternal glory. Please would you do this by your spirit. We would ask and pray. For Jesus sake. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.