

Living as elders

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Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0:00] So, a common picture in the Bible, as we kind of thought in that psalm, Psalm 23, is of God being a shepherd and his people being sheep.

There's other verses in the Bible we know. We all like sheep have gone astray in Isaiah 53. John 10, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And of course, Peter himself was commissioned by Jesus to feed my sheep, feed my lambs.

And Peter writes here as a fellow elder to those who lead God's church. But it's great, I think, that he's writing to a whole church, all believers.

It's not that elders have some secret manual that's filed away in a locked drawer that only Phil and I can read when we become elders. We all get to know what leaders of God's people should be like, what they should do, what their role is.

[1:14] And the picture that Peter gives us of an elder, of a leader of God's people, is shepherds. He says in verse 1, Be shepherds of God's flock.

Be shepherds of God's flock. And that's the first thing that we see in this passage. Be shepherds. Be shepherds who are under the chief shepherd, who is Jesus.

Verse 4 says that. And when the chief shepherd appears, Phil and I aren't just some supreme shepherd. We're under Jesus.

He is the chief shepherd. He's the one who's got to get all the glory and the honor. He's the one whose church it is. Peter's talked about that earlier in the letter.

That we are living stones built around Jesus, the cornerstone. Jesus is central. To the church. But the church does have these elders, these shepherds, appointed to look after them.

[2:32] And that's what a shepherd should do. They should care. That's what Peter says in verse 2. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care. Now at the moment, there's a lot of sheep scattered around Brighton and Hove.

I don't know if you've noticed. The shorn, the sheeps. They're scattered everywhere in Brighton Hove. I'm enjoying looking at them and ticking them off in the app that there is.

And one day in November, they'll all be gathered together in one place. They will then be sold off.

But they will all be gathered together. It's a bit of a picture, isn't it? Of what church is like.

We gather together as people here and then we're scattered across Brighton Hove and beyond. But there's been reports of shorns being vandalized, graffitied, being sprayed over them.

Some of them being taken off their stands, even thrown into the street or into the road. Sean had to be put in a safe place down London Road in the Martlett charity shop.

[3:44] And for us, as God's people, Peter's been writing to us to expect suffering. Maybe we won't have graffiti sprayed all over us.

But he says expect suffering. We thought about that again last week. We may experience a fiery ordeal. We live in a world that is suffering.

But God places shepherds, human shepherds, who are to look after, to care for his sheep, who may be suffering in a world that is hostile to us.

But graciously, God gives us shepherds to look after us. Shepherds who should be feeding as we've thought of. Feeding the sheep with the word of God.

Protecting the sheep from wolves, from false teaching. Protecting them when they're struggling.

Leading his sheep. I'm reading at the moment a biography of a pastor called Robert Murray McShane.

[4:54] He was a pastor up in Scotland, in a place called Dundee, St. Peter's Church. And he, seeing his care for his sheep throughout the book so far, has been wonderful, the care for his church.

And he said this. So I'll come back to the quote in a minute. But he had to take a leave of absence due to ill health. But he was concerned for the flock that was under his care.

Even though he had to be absent from it because of illness. And so he asked Mr. William C. Burns, who was the son of a minister in Kilcyrthe.

And he wrote to him and said, I hope you may be a thousand times more blessed among them than I ever was.

Perhaps there are many souls that would never have been saved under my ministry. You may be touched under yours. And God has taken this method of bringing you into my place.

[6:01] His name is wonderful. He had a real care for his flock that he wanted this pastor to go and look after them. And such a care that he said, I pray that your ministry may be even more blessed than mine has.

That more sheep may be gathered in. He wanted his flock cared for so well. Even in his absence. May I say of Phil, without hopefully embarrassing him, I've been having the privilege over this last year or so, working with someone who's been shepherding here for many years.

Who loves the flock. Who wants to see the sheep here to be with a shepherd. Not to leave them without one. Who's been seeking to feed the sheep so faithfully with the word of God.

And that's what the Bible calls elders, shepherds of his people to do. In Ezekiel 34, we read more about shepherds and sheep.

[7:18] So there's been some bad shepherds, bad leaders among God's people. And Ezekiel 34, it says this, I will tend them in a good pasture and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land.

There they will lie down in good grazing land. There they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself, the Lord, will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the sovereign Lord.

I will search for the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the injured, strengthen the weak. But the sleek and the strong I will destroy.

I will shepherd the flock with justice. He's saying those sheep who are struggling, who are bruised and battered.

I'm going to care for them. I'm going to look after them. I'm going to search for the lost sheep. I'm going to bring them in.

[8:18] This is God working. But human shepherds, human leaders of God's people, we can read those words. Read of God's care for his sheep and think, yeah, I'm to care for God's flock.

They're precious to God. So, Phil and I want to care for you by feeding you with the words.

We often chat in our meetings about preaching, Rita. Who's going to be on it? What are we going to preach on? How are we going to feed you as a church? When I go and visit someone, I want to make sure I open the Bible and pray with them at some point in the visit as a way to care for you.

And he also says, watch over them. Watch over them. Take watch. So, it's similar to caring.

We want to watch over your spiritual lives. So, if Bob hasn't been at church for three weeks, we need to phone him up and say, Bob, are you okay?

[9:28] How can we help you? Are you struggling? How can we pray for you? Not as a way to be nosy, but because we care for him and we want him to keep following the Lord and keep going in his Christian walk.

Say, can I come over and pray with you? What's up? Or maybe he's just been on holiday for three weeks and we just didn't know. We want to look after the sheep.

And just as an aside, if we're meant to be caring and watching over sheep, sheep know who their, shepherds know who their sheep are.

And maybe you might go and for a walk on the downs and see sheep with different colored markings. Often, that's so that a shepherd knows which sheep are theirs, which sheep are part of which flock.

So, the red sheep belong to the red shepherd. The blue sheep belong to the blue shepherd. And just a thought. That kind of seems to me that church membership is quite an important thing.

[10:38] You can be in this church, be part of this church, by saying, this is my flock. This is where I want to be. I want Phil and Daniel to be the pastors, the shepherds of me.

And just saying, so Phil and I know, yes, that person, they're committed to this church. It's a helpful thing. It really is. You're welcome, whether you're in church membership or not.

But I think that's one way I see church membership as an important thing. And that's just an aside.

That's not really in the passage. But it's helpful for shepherds to know who their flock are.

Secondly, shepherds are to seek the right glory. This passage begins and ends in glory. So, have a look at verse 1.

I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who will also share in the glory to be revealed. And then in verse 4.

[11:47] And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. Peter writes this.

As a fellow elder, as someone who's witnessed Christ's sufferings, who knows where the glory is.

He knows that Christ has been on that pathway of suffering and he's now seated in glory. He's

spoken of that in this letter. And that's the pathway we're all going on as Christians.

We may suffer in this world, but we know we're heading for glory. And so he says to elders, don't seek the glory in the wrong place. You will receive the crown of glory, eternal life that will never fade away.

So, don't try looking for a crown now because that's just going to be a fading crown. See, there's some dangers, I think, for elders, for shepherds.

[12:50] And it's good for us all to be aware of them. And pray for us that we don't fall into these things. One of those dangers is doing it begrudgingly.

Verse 2. Not because you must, but because you are willing as God wants you to be. An elder is not like working in Primark.

I worked in Primark for two and a half years. I loved it. I wanted to work there. But I remember training up a 16-year-old boy. It was his first weekend there.

And he said to me, I'm only here because my mom wants me to get a job and earn some money. He clearly didn't want to be there at all. He only lasted two weeks. It's not fun to work with people just because they feel they must.

And for leaders of God's people, it's not going to be healthy for a church if Phil and I are just doing it because we feel we must. We're doing it begrudgingly.

[13:55] Oh, I must do this. I'd have no desire to do it. So an elder shouldn't be an elder if a church says, well, you must do it.

You're the only one who can do it. No, do it because you love God's people. You love to serve. You have a desire to serve in this way.

It could be dangerous if somebody's doing it just because they feel they must and not because they're willing. They may prepare a sermon and say to people, well, there's nobody else to do this.

I must do it. So you better be thankful you have a sermon this morning. Or full of complaint. Oh, not another church member sending me another message. That wouldn't be good.

Another danger is that elders may do it for gain. So verse two continues. Not because you must, but because you're willing as God wants you to be.

[14:59] Not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve. Now Jesus said a worker deserves their wages.

Paul says an elder is worthy of double honor, particularly those whose work is preaching, teaching the words. So a church can set aside elders and pay them.

A church should provide well for their leaders to free them from the worry of where the next meal may come from. But an elder shouldn't be in it for money so that they can live some luxurious lifestyle.

Some do go into leading God's people and think that it's a way for financial gain. Pray on the old, vulnerable, generous lady that comes to the church.

That's not what an elder should be doing. Not seeking financial gain, but willing to serve.

[16:12] And another danger is lording your position over others. Thinking of ourselves as the one with the crown now.

Leaders of God's people must not be saying anything like, I'm in charge here, not you. You must listen to me. Don't you know who I am?

I'm one of the elders. No, don't lord it over others. That's not the example Jesus gave, is it, of leadership? No, Jesus knelt down and washed his disciples' feet.

He went even lower. The good shepherd gave his life for the sheep. That's not lording his position. That's being a humble, servant-hearted leader. And that's the example that shepherds of God's flock should be.

So those who are in it just because they think they have to be, those who are in it for financial gain, those who are in it for the power and prestige, they may well receive the crown they want now, the honor, the glory they want now.

[17:28] Being well thought of because they're doing it even though they don't want to. The crown of gaining lots of money, the gain of being on a pedestal, the praise of human beings.

But that kind of crown won't last forever. Peter will have had in mind, I guess, crowns that athletes would have worn, of leaves. They're fine in the moment, but they'll quickly fade.

Peter is saying shepherds don't seek that crown. Our reward is a crown of glory that will never fade away. That's what he says in verse five. When the chief shepherd appears.

Be shepherds who seek the glory to come, the crown of eternal life, not the crown of empty praise, here and now. And thirdly and finally, sheep and the shepherds.

Peter's addressed the elders, and now he dresses other people. Verse five, in the same way you who are younger submit yourselves to your elders and all of you clothe yourselves with humility towards one another because God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.

[18:50] Peter addresses those who are younger. There's some kind of debate about what exactly he means by the younger. Maybe younger men. Maybe younger men who aspire to be elders in the future.

Maybe just simply those who are spiritually younger. If elders are meant to be spiritually mature, not that Phil and I are the most mature people in any way.

So he may be talking to everybody or may just be talking to younger men. But whatever, he very much moves on to speaking to everybody when he says, all of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another.

So he says, first of all, submit yourselves to your elders. Respect those who are in authority over you in the church.

And the big thing, really, that Peter wants to say is this requires humility. And maybe we look at leaders in the church and say, why don't they do it this way?

[19:59] Why can't they be more like that leader in that church? Maybe even in pride, we think, I don't need to be part of a church. I don't need pastors over me.

I can live the Christian life on my own. That's pride. And that's not really how the Bible sees it. The Bible sees that the normal thing for the Christian life is that people will gather in local church congregations with elders over them.

Surely it's a good thing that God gives us his people, people, shepherds, who will seek to care for us, feed us, protect us, lead us.

And so he says, submit to your leaders, respect them, even though you might not agree with everything they may say or do. And whatever Peter is saying in those first few words in verse five, he is saying, all of you, elders and non-elders alike, be humble.

Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another because God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Don't turn in on yourselves and fight one another.

[21:20] Don't say, I'm my way's best. No, my way's best. Humble yourselves. Love one another. There's much suffering in a hostile world.

Make sure there's not that in a church family. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. And I think that quote that we had from Robert Murray and Shane is an example of humility, actually.

Someone who's been a pastor of people and is laid aside in illness and says, I hope you may be a thousand times more blessed among them than ever I was.

Thinking perhaps there are many souls that would never have been saved under my ministry who may be touched under yours. That's humility. Not thinking, I'm not able to do this so you'll do a pretty good job for a time.

No thinking, may you do even better than I am. May God bless you even more abundantly in this work than he ever has for me. That's this passage.

[22:43] Talking to elders, first of all, Peter is. Talking to the elders, be shepherds that care, seek the right glory. and for all of us, clothe ourselves with humility as we seek to submit to those who are elders among us.

there's time in a moment to discuss and a couple of questions and to pray in our groups. We need to pray for elders.

It's in our interest that you pray for Phil and I. But we also need to pray for one another, don't we? As we seek to be sheep in God's flock here at Calvary.

But before we do any of that, we also need to turn our eyes upon Jesus. And this chorus, we've just been learning this this couple of weeks, it talks about where our glory and our prize is.

Jesus, to you we lift our eyes. Jesus is our glory and our prize.