

1 Peter: It's All About Jesus

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[0:00] Amen. So just a quick heads up for everyone.

Are you ready for this? I'm going to be talking a little bit about suffering this morning. Surprised by that at all? I'm going to be talking about suffering and humility.

It seems that Peter has a lot to say about those things, doesn't he? He would have thought that we would be hitting these very subjects again. Are you starting to get a little weary of suffering through sermons on suffering?

Yes? No? Now I would say that suffering isn't really the main point of our verses this morning, which is our last sermon in our 1 Peter series.

The central concern, I think, is the concern with humbling ourselves before God and finding our refuge in him. Now we see a couple of specific examples in our text of how that works out in our lives with specific instructions for specific categories of people.

[1:37] Now one of those examples in particular really jumps out to me, thinking of Peter's charge to elders, to those in ordained leadership, how we're supposed to conduct ourselves. Now as I was preparing for this sermon, it dawned on me that I was ordained a deacon four years ago this month.

It's been quite the journey. I went from being a 16-year-old new convert to Christ who felt the call to give my life to telling people about Jesus to where I am now.

Our passage this morning really reminds me that like everything else in the Christian life, it's not about us. It's all about Jesus, isn't it?

It's all about him, his glory, his beauty, his tender mercy, his sufficiency. And that is why we are called to humble trust in him.

It's all about Jesus. With that in mind, with the greatness of Christ in mind, with his redemptive work in mind, let's jump into our text starting with verses 1 and 2. So I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.

[2:55] Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly.

Now first, see that Peter is talking about the elders of the church in this section. What does he mean by elder? Well, I think he uses the term in a couple of different ways in our passage this morning.

The first part, the text doesn't seem to be talking about age. You can hold the office of an elder and not be very old. I can probably think of an example or two of that being the case.

Now that being said, it's talking about spiritual eldership, spiritual leadership, about elders, or as we get from the Greek, presbyters, or as we sometimes translate it into English, priests.

There's a bit of Anglican trivia for you. That's where we get the title priest from. So Peter is talking to his fellow elders in these verses.

[4:06] And notice how he addresses them. He encourages them as a fellow elder, as someone who shares the same hope of eternal life that they're sharing in. Now notice he does mention that he is a witness to the sufferings of Christ, but at the same time he actually seems to be de-emphasizing his status as an apostle.

His focus, right here in this instruction, is what he has in common with his fellow elders. He's not giving a kind of top-down approach to leadership.

He's not issuing orders. He's respectfully encouraging and leading by example as an older brother. He's modeling for us a kind of leadership that doesn't seek its own status.

It doesn't elevate its own importance. It doesn't insist on its own prestige. So he's given instruction as a brother, not as the boss, even though he could.

What does he tell his fellow elders to do? To shepherd the flock of God, to watch over the flock, to do it joyfully, not for what we can get out of it, or any other kind of ulterior motive.

[5:19] Now as I mentioned in passing a moment ago, I felt a call to ordained ministry from the time that I came to know the Lord as a teenager. Knowing even then that I had an overwhelming desire to tell people about Jesus.

To help people to come to know Jesus. Knowing then that I wanted to give my life to that work. Now since then, I've had some fancy training and now I'm decked out in these flowing robes and sometimes people call me father.

But, at the end of the day, not a whole lot has changed. It's still all about Jesus. About people coming into a saving relationship with him.

About people coming to see the beauty of the Lord. The elders, Peter is addressing, are called to shepherd by pointing people to Jesus.

And to get out of the way. Certainly, they're not called to act as if they're somehow more important than others. Or have some sort of sense of superiority as we see in verse 3.

[6:26] Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. Not domineering. Let's think for a second. What causes domineering behavior?

Doesn't it usually arise when you think that you're better than others? Or when you want to be seen as better than others, even if you don't think you're better than others? Well, here's a question. Is there any room for boasting in ourselves in the life of a Christian? Any room for boasting in ourselves at the foot of the cross?

Now, like those Peter is addressing here, I'm an elder called to exercise oversight, but make no mistake. Like the rest of you, I am a sinner saved only by the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

How about you? That's where we all are, and that's something we need to remember. We start thinking of ourselves as more than that, we're bound to run into trouble, aren't we?

[7:35] Now, those of us in ordained leadership are called to model what it looks like to trust in Jesus, to follow him, to lead lives of repentance. But the example that we set is the example of what it means to be a forgiven sinner.

It's not to strive to be thought of as more important than other people. Now, after giving his fellow elders some instruction, Peter moves on to giving them some encouragement.

In verse 4, when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Now, I've heard it said jokingly that in ministry, you're never going to get materially wealthy, but that the retirement plan really can't be beaten.

I think that's true. But in all seriousness, shepherds, elders, are called to serve humbly and joyfully under the chief shepherd, Jesus.

Serving joyfully because we know the eternal joy that God has planned for those who love him.

Now, having given the elders some instruction, Peter branches out to instruct the rest of the church.

[8:52] In verse 5, we see, likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Now, elders, as it's used in this verse, seems in context to be talking more about those who are older in age, because otherwise it wouldn't make a whole lot of sense for Peter directly instructing the young people to respect and heed their elders.

But, as we've already seen in 1 Peter, Peter has this tendency to take the opportunity to tell everyone and to respect everyone. We're all told to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another.

Now, isn't that a striking image there? All of our relationships with each other, all of our interactions with each other, clothed in humility. Now, of course, we should be doing that simply because it's good.

We should be clothed in humility because it's the right thing to do. But Peter reminds us we need some incentive that God opposes those who are prideful but gives his grace to the humble.

[10:20] So, if we don't remember to clothe ourselves with humility in the way that we treat each other, we're probably going to learn.

God has a way of teaching us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. You've been there?

I've been there. It hurts, doesn't it? So, as believers, we are called to clothe ourselves in humility, to humble ourselves, because even if we're tempted to think otherwise, it is not all about us.

See in verses 6 and 7, humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. We are called to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God so that he may exalt us. Now, what happens in our Christian lives if we don't humble ourselves, we rely on our own strength and we think too highly of ourselves?

[11:34] Doesn't work out that well, does it? So, why would we do it? Now, here's a question. Are we able to save ourselves from our sins?

No. It took the shedding of the precious blood of the Lamb of God to save us, didn't it? We were helpless. So, why do we still try to rely on our own strength?

Why not rely fully and completely on the God who loves us and can do all things? Because the reality is this. We are sinners, but there is a Savior.

We are unworthy, but he is worthy. We are weak, but he is strong. We change more often than the weather, even in central New York. But he never changes.

So, why would we trust in ourselves? Why wouldn't we get out of the way? Why wouldn't we humble ourselves, place no confidence in ourselves, and entrust ourselves completely to the one who loved us and gave himself for us?

[12:43] If he can put away our sins forever, is there any problem or any anxiety that's too big for him to handle? When we humble ourselves, when we put no confidence in ourselves, we see again and again his unfailing love and faithfulness, don't we?

We see that all that we have is a gift of grace. We see the incomparable majesty of Christ, that he is all-sufficient, that we have all that we need, more than we can even imagine.

When we turn from ourselves, from our problems, our egos, our concerns, to look upon Christ, to look upon his glory, to look upon his splendor, our anxieties fall by the wayside, don't they?

Is your heart troubled this morning? Then look to Jesus and find your peace there. We humble ourselves by looking to the cross of Christ. We cast our anxieties upon him and we resist the devil, clinging to Christ as our sure defense through faith.

We see Peter write in verses 8 and 9, be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

[14:11] Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. Now, verse 8 is absolutely terrifying when you think about it.

If we take it seriously, it should cause us to tremble. The devil, this image of the devil is this hungry, roving, dangerous, malicious beast who wants to eat us alive.

We forget the reality of the influence of the evil one in this world at our own peril. And Peter reminds us. We do have an adversary, we have an accuser, we have one who seeks to tempt us, one who seeks to blind us to the truth, one who seeks to rob us of our joy, one who would love our destruction.

The devil is real. He is active. Be aware of that and be watchful. So with that in mind, what do we do?

Well, we do what Peter has been telling us to do. We humble ourselves. We keep seeking God as our certain refuge. He will be our refuge from the schemes of the evil one.

[15:33] Now, here's the deal. It's true that the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, but we have the lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lord Jesus Christ, on our side, and his revelation tells us he has conquered.

The devil is no match for him. He might try to claim us, he might try to devour us like a lion, but here's the deal, we don't belong to him. We belong to the lion of the tribe of Judah who has purchased us with his blood and claimed us as his own forever.

If we cling to him, it's our defense. If he is fighting for us, if our trust is in him and him alone, he will hold us firm.

And even if we have to undergo suffering, our suffering and the plot of the devil will never have the last word. As Martin Luther wrote in that great hymn, A Mighty Fortress is Our God.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing. We're not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing.

[16:44] Christ Jesus, the man of God's own choosing, is on our side and he will not lose. As Luther puts it, he must win the battle. So even if we find ourselves suffering in the midst of the fight,

that's not the end of the story.

As Peter writes in verse 10, And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. Now as a believer, you may suffer. You will suffer. But you've already been called to eternal glory in Christ. Eternal life has already been purchased for you by the blood of Christ.

The sufferance of this life, even at their worst, pale in comparison to the power of the God of all grace to restore, to confirm, to strengthen, to establish.

establish. And we're called simply to humble ourselves, to cling to Jesus, to stand firm in our faith, understanding that the victory is already a done deal.

[17:59] As Peter says, to him indeed, be the dominion forever and ever. Now having assured his hearers of God's grace and might, of God's power over all adversaries, Peter advises his hearers to heed his instruction.

He instructs him once again to stand firm, and he gives his final greetings. We'll look at that briefly. By Silvanus, a faithful brother, as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.

Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings. So does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love.

Now notice how Peter's epistle ends. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. Now at the beginning of this morning's sermon in mind, think about how it ends.

It's all about Jesus. Even when we come up, we're mentioned in relationship to him, aren't we?

We're mentioned as being in Christ.

[19:14] Now back at the beginning, the opening of the epistle, we read, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his great mercy. He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

who by God's power are being guarded through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Begins the epistle, reminding them of who they are in Christ, what Christ has done.

He closes the epistle, reminding them of who they are in Christ and what Christ has done for them.

And what is that? If we look over the span of the letter, here's what we see.

Because of what Jesus has done, we have been born again. Because of what Jesus has done, we have an inheritance kept in heaven for us that will never fade away. Because of what Jesus has done, we are being guarded by God's power through faith.

Because of what Jesus has done, we can endure the sufferings and persecutions of this present age. Because of what Jesus has done, we who are God's enemies, now have the incredible calling to live as God's holy, humble people in the world in this life and to serve him forevermore in perfect peace in the life to come.

[20:54] Thanks be to God. To him indeed be dominion forever and ever. Amen.