

While We Wait as God's Household

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] If you could grab your Bibles and open them to 1 Peter chapter 5, if you've closed them, as we come to the last installment in this series. And can I also add my happy Father's Day wishes to all you dads out there? I saw a picture that my kids can relate to on your screens there.

It says, Dad, may your Father's Day be better than your jokes. Well, today is the day that they have to laugh at my jokes. But today is also the day when we're going to have this big announcement. I believe the Victorian Cabinet is meeting at 11 for an hour or so. And so we're told that the big announcement will come around 12 o'clock or any time from 12 p.m. And so it's meant to be one week until stage four is supposed to end. And we get to enjoy that glorious future of perhaps seeing family and friends again. Of course, compared to many other countries in the world, we are so blessed to be here in Australia. But if you're anything like me, I can't wait until it's all over. And while we wait, we need to keep doing the right thing, don't we? So that we don't miss out. And stage four has to continue forever. So yesterday's protests, I'm not sure were the wisest thing. I don't know if you heard about them. But on your screens there is a picture of people marching down Albert Street in the CBD, over 300 people. And they gathered at the Shrine of

Remembrance to protest. The police were out in their riot gear and even made some arrests. Now I sympathise with them, but I'm not sure that's the wisest way to wait for that future we all want. And certainly this is not wise either. People are apparently, according to the health minister, still gathering in numbers and creating clusters of COVID cases. Now that's certainly not the way to wait, is it? Well, today Peter addresses various groups in God's household on how we are to wait for our true glorious future. You see, at the end of stage four, well, it may not be all that glorious. And in fact, the news so far is that stage four may not even end. But our true future with Christ will be glorious.

And at the date is set. God knows the date we don't. But we do know that he's not going to move it depending on how many COVID cases there are. And we also know that when Jesus appears a second time, he will put the world right. And we will enjoy a truly glorious, eternal future in a perfect world.

And this is our hope. This is how Peter began his letter, actually. So on your screens, he began in chapter one by speaking about our living hope and our inheritance or down the bottom there, the coming of our salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. We've heard about this future throughout the letter, including last week. If you've got your Bibles there, just look up to chapter four, verse 17, where we heard last week that judgment was to begin in the form of suffering with God's household. But it was going to end with a different capital J kind of judgment for the ungodly and us. Chapter four, verse 13, will be overjoyed and share in Christ's glory.

[4 : 01] Well, Peter returns again to that day, that day of our glory. And we see it in our passage on your screens there, where the words repeated. Verse one, verse four, verse six, it talks about being exalted, which I think is still that last day glory stuff. And then verse 10, eternal glory after we have suffered a little while. And so with that future in mind, Peter now addresses various groups in God's household on how to wait wisely so we don't miss out on that glory. And he begins by saying elders, shepherd. So point one, verse one, therefore, to the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings, who also will 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. Verse one actually begins with the word, therefore, most of our English translations don't include it. But the idea is, since therefore, judgment is going to begin with God's household and end with judgment day, therefore, this is how we're to wait in the meantime. Elders shepherd God's flock. Now, in the Bible, elders can simply refer to those who are older in God's church. But verse two tells us that these particular elders watch over or literally oversee God's flock. And so these elders are God's leaders in the church.

So obviously, this applies to me and Vijay and the other ministers, but it could also actually apply to all those leaders who look after different parts of God's flock, whether Bible study leaders or youth group and children's leaders too. In fact, even parents who oversee their children and bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord could be considered as elders in that context too.

And so if that's you, then verse two, shepherd those under your care. Now, to shepherd means to pastor. In fact, the Latin word for shepherd is pastor.

That's why my business card on your screens there has pastor on it. And even though it says senior pastor, that's actually not quite right. Because if you look at verse four in your Bibles, the chief pastor, the chief shepherd, the real senior pastor is Jesus.

I'm just a little pea pastor, if you like. But we are to shepherd like chief Jesus does. How? Well, firstly, by teaching you the Bible. Now, it doesn't say teach in this verse, but that was the job of a pastor. For back in chapter one, we heard that it was the imperishable word of God that gave us new life. And it's also chapter two, the spiritual milk that helps us to grow up in our salvation. In fact, that's how Jesus shepherded his people in Jerusalem and the like.

[7 : 47] So on your next screen, on the next slide there in Mark chapter six, Jesus saw a large crowd. They were like sheep without a shepherd. And what does he immediately do? He begins teaching them.

You see, to pastor, to shepherd means to teach. And in fact, on the next slide in Ephesians chapter four, it's why pastor and teacher goes together there. In fact, it's most likely one job, pastor, teacher, because pastoring involves teaching. So thank you for those who pray for us.

Do keep praying, not just for the pastors at St. John's or Holy Trinity, but for all those who lead parts of God's flock at both locations. Pray that we would keep faithfully teaching you God's word.

And if we don't, then you have permission to pull us up. In fact, I remember a Bible study when we could gather at one time. I remember being in our place and we're all chatting away and we were chatting for some time. And one of the group members actually said, right, that's enough.

Let's get into the Bible. And I thought that's terrific because he's realized that pastoring involves teaching. But then Peter adds three other ways we are to shepherd using three not but statements. Verse two, not because you must, but because you are willing. You see, we could always do with more Bible study leaders. We'd love some more, but you're never to offer out of guilt or begrudgingly, but willingly as God wants you to be. Because if you do it begrudgingly, then we can grow to resent the job, can't we? And God doesn't want resentment in his household.

[9 : 42] Not because you must, but because you're willing. And also verse two, not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve others. I remember at a church in Sydney, I was talking with a man who owned his own building company and the senior minister walked across, interrupted our conversation. He ignored me, which was fine, but he started asking this man if he could do some work at his own house. And when the senior minister left, the man turned to me and said, he only ever talks to me when he wants me to do something for him. And I remember that vividly because I never want to be like that. Rather, we had to be eager to serve. Even by doing those thankless jobs like vacuuming and washing the dishes, not to hide from parishioners. I know another minister who did that, but because we're eager to serve.

And verse three, not lording it over others, not abusing our authority, as we heard the shepherds of Israel do in our first reading, but being examples to the flock. Sadly, we have people in our own church who have come from other churches where they were hurt by leaders who lorded it over them. One person I know started a ministry at this church and without explanation was told they could no longer do it. They were just being removed. That's it. Another person was bullied by a church leader who took credit for their work.

It's horrible and completely unlike Christ, the chief shepherd, isn't it? And I take it that's therefore the example we are to set for the flock, a Christ-like example who humbly came not to be served, but to serve. In fact, Christ-like humility probably summarizes these three not-but statements.

And it's the thing that I look for when people want to do ministry at church. And so if you're an elder, this is how we're to shepherd your flock while we wait for that day, teaching, willing, serving, and setting a Christ-like example. Now, sometimes it will be hard work, but remember verse 4, our glorious future. When the chief shepherd appears, we will receive along with all God's people a crown of glory that never fades away. So while we wait for that glory, elders are to shepherd and youngers are to submit. So point to verse 5, in the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. And here, if elders refer to the leaders of God's church or God's household, then the youngers refer to those who are led. Even I have leaders whom I am to submit to.

But like we saw with those other submission passages in chapter 2 and 3, there are limits to this. You don't obviously submit to the leader if they're telling you to do something contrary to Christ, because Christ is the chief leader. We submit ultimately to him, don't we?

[13 : 11] And submitting doesn't mean we are less intelligent or have less worth than the leaders, because let's face it, many of you are quite simply smarter than I am. And as we saw with husbands and wives, we have equal worth in God's eyes. We just have different roles in this context.

And so in the church context, we're to submit to our leaders because they're trying to serve us for our good. And so we're to let them serve us for our good. In fact, on your screens from Hebrews chapter 13, it talks about submitting as well and not making the job a burden. And notice at the end, because if you make it a burden, that would be no benefit to you.

Now, of course, submitting to leaders is easier said than done, especially when we think we can do a better job than they can. And so I think even being younger means practicing that Christ-like humility.

And I think that's why verse five begins with the words in the same way, just as elders are the shepherd with Christ-like humility. Well, in the same way, youngers are to submit with Christ-like humility. And so while we wait for glory, elders shepherd, youngers submit and all years, point three, humbly stand firm. Have a look at the rest of verse five. He then turns to the whole church and says, all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud, but shows grace or favor to the humble. You see, we're all to show that Christ-like humility towards one another. Oscar Levant was an American pianist and comedian. And on his, on your screens, he said, what the world needs is more geniuses with humility. There are just so few of us left.

Of course, the point of the joke is that's not humility. That's pride. Pride puts us first. Humility puts others first. Which, of course, is easier said than done, isn't it? Especially when you're tired and want to relax. And so you don't really want to answer that phone call or talk to that person. Or especially when you're doing it tough yourself. Or like Peter's readers, you're suffering.

[15 : 42] And that's why Peter reminds us that God will provide. So we can keep being humble to others. He says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble, those who put others first.

How does God give us this grace? Well, providing care for us in this life and exalting us in the next. Have a look at verse 6 to 7. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you or exalt you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

You see, it's not easy to put others before ourselves, especially when we're doing it tough. We might be tempted to say, well, what about me? Well, Peter says, don't worry about you. Instead, cast your worry upon God. For God cares for you. And not just intellectually, but practically, by providing for your needs and working for your spiritual good. I love that word, cast, in verse 7 there. It means to hurl, throw, chuck. One of the things people have been doing during this stage four lockdown has been sorting through all their things and chucking things out. I've been told that it's quite therapeutic. Unless, of course, someone throws something out you wanted to keep.

But even more therapeutic is throwing out our worry to God, rather than storing it up inside. For he hears our prayers and cares for you. He's already proved it by giving his son to die for us.

And so if he's done the hardest thing already, will he not then do the easier thing of answering our prayers, providing for our needs and working for our spiritual good, even if we can't see it at the time?

[17 : 54] And so is there something you're anxious about or perhaps someone you're worried for? If so, then hurl, throw, cast that worry out upon God. Don't store it up in you.

For God cares for us lovingly and practically. And what's more, will exalt us in due time. I think this means on the last day when Jesus appears, for that's when we'll all be exalted.

And so, you see, we can be humble. We can put others first, even when we're doing it tough, because we can also come humbly before God and cast our worry about ourselves upon him.

Knowing he cares for us in the meantime and will exalt us at the end of time. And so while we wait or use in God's household, be humble and stand firm.

Have a look at verse 8. You see, here we are to not just be humble, but also to stand firm in the faith.

[19 : 25] By being alert and resisting the devil. I may have told you this before, but there's a movie that I watched some years ago. It's on your screen. It's called The Usual Suspects.

And it stars Kevin Spacey, among others. And it ends with this line down the bottom there. The greatest trick the devil ever pulled is convincing the world he doesn't exist. You see, even some Christians can forget that he's real, that he exists.

And so we can forget to be alert to temptation. And yet, on the other hand, some Christians go the other way and get too preoccupied with the devil.

Yet only Peter mentions him once here in these couple of verses out of the whole letter, even though he's talked about battling with sin throughout. And so we need to listen to what C.S. Lewis said, I think, on your screens.

He said there are two equal and opposite errors into which our human race can fall about the devil. One is to disbelieve his existence, like the usual suspects.

[20 : 33] But the other is to believe and feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in him. And so we're not to do either. And so verse 8, yes, he does exist.

Yes, he is prowling around looking for ways to lead us away from Christ. But he works by telling us lies. Lies like, if God really exists and loves you, then he wouldn't let all this suffering happen.

Or, if God is really in control, then he'd answer your prayer the way you want. Or, look, it doesn't matter if we miss online church a couple of Sundays in a row, because look at the beautiful sun outside, even though that often is a slippery slope.

When we believe those lies, that's when this lion grows teeth. And the more we believe his lies, then the deeper he sinks his teeth into us, and the further he drags us away from Christ.

That's how it works. But verse 9, we can resist him by standing firm in the faith, by believing God's truth, not his lies.

[21 : 48] Just like Jesus did when he was tempted in the wilderness, you might remember. And if we do, then he becomes, well, he becomes more like a toothless tiger who flees from us for a while.

And so while he is real and we need to be alert, yes, on the other hand, we don't need to fear him, for we can resist him, even when we're suffering.

And to help us, Peter reminds us we're not alone in this suffering. Christians throughout the world undergo the same kind of sufferings, he says. And what kind is this?

Well, suffering for being a Christian and facing those temptations to walk away. And knowing that we're not in this alone helps us, doesn't it?

That others understand, get it? I was speaking with someone outside of Victoria recently and saying how these stage four restrictions are becoming a bit depressing. And their response was this.

[22 : 46] Ah, they're not that bad. I can tell you what, the conversation didn't last much longer after that. But when you talk to people who are in the situation, they can empathize and lament with you, can't they?

They get it, they understand. Or so too when we suffer as a Christian. What's more, Peter says it will be worth it in the end. So look at verse 10 and 11.

And the God of all grace who called you into 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 for ever and ever. Amen. Verse 10, somewhat incredibly, Peter says, after you have suffered a little while.

Hasn't he ever suffered himself? I mean, whenever we suffer, it feels like it takes forever, doesn't it? Well, Peter knows this. It's just compared to eternal glory, it is actually only a little while.

[23 : 56] At these six weeks of stage four restrictions, compared to our whole lifespan, are actually a little while. How much more so eternal glory.

And on that day, verse 10, God will restore us, strengthen us, establish us forever. In other words, he will make us whole again. Restore whatever we have suffered, loss.

Such that it will be worth it. Now, this is not just, you know, pie in the sky when you die, just wishful thinking. No, no, this is certain.

We saw at the beginning, it's a living hope, based on Jesus's historically reliable resurrection. And here in verse 11, based on God's power to make it happen.

Do you see verse 11? To God belongs the power to do it. So while we wait for our future glory, or use in God's household, be humble, casting your concerns on God, stand firm in the faith, resisting the devil, and finally, stand firm in God's grace.

[25 : 06] Have a look at verses 12 to 14. Peter writes, 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 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 Jesus.

Now, Babylon was the name given to all empires who opposed God. And in Peter's day, that was Rome. So it's the church in Rome who sends the greetings.

But in verse 12, that's the one I want you to particularly notice. Peter says he's written his letter, and in it describes the true grace of God.

Grace refers to God's generous gift to us. And in the letter, we're seeing that God has graciously given us his son, whose precious blood has redeemed us from the empty way of life.

[26 : 10] Chapter one. And made us his precious people, his A-listers. Chapter two. Who are to reclaim his greatness and do good. Chapters two, three, and four.

We've even seen God's grace has given us a living hope as exiles and tourists in this world. And even how he uses our suffering to purify us.

Chapters one and four. God's grace has and will give us all this. And so we're to stand fast in it. How?

Well, by remembering it, that we might realize it is worth being God's people, even when it's hard. And by relying on it.

Relying on God's grace to keep providing the care we need in this life. And to bring us home in the next. In a moment, we're going to sing a famous hymn.

[27 : 12] And the third verse of the hymn, I think it's the third verse, says this on your screens. Through every danger, trial, and snare, I have already come. His grace has brought me safe thus far.

And grace will lead me home. You see, God's grace will lead us home as we remember all he has and will give us.

And as we rely on him to keep caring and keeping us. And if we do, not only will we make it home to our future glory, but we will know peace in this present life.

That's how Peter ends. Peace to you all. Do you see that last line? Peace we can know by standing fast in God's grace.

I don't know what today's announcement will mean in half an hour's time or whatever it is. What our future will look like. Whether stage four will end or not.

[28 : 15] But I do know we have a definite and more glorious future to look forward to when Christ appears. One we really don't want to miss out on.

And so while we wait, let's wait wisely as God's household. Elders shepherd. Youngers submit. And all years humbly stand firm.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for the letter of Peter. We thank you that it reminds us what you have given us by your grace, who you have made us to be and our living hope to look forward to.

And so while we wait, help us to wait wisely as your household, humbly standing firm in the faith and in your grace. We ask it in Jesus name.

Amen.