

Living Humbly

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Date: 30 October 2005

Preacher: Rod McArdle

[0 : 0 0] In this congregation and throughout the parish, I love travelling and seeing new places. But I must confess that Turkmenistan is not high on my list.

Turkmenistan. I mean, perhaps you're thinking, where on earth is this place? I mean, literally, where is it? Well, up on the overhead there you'll see tucked in between, a bit hard to read probably on the wall, but tucked in between Afghanistan and the Kaspan Sea.

To the north is Kazakhstan and to the south is Iran. Turkmenistan. Well, if you haven't heard of the country, surely you've heard about the supreme leader of the country.

Sapramarat Turkmenbashi the Great. As Paul mentioned, there's some children still on the way. I think it's a great name for a child. Sapramarat Turkmenbashi the Great.

Now, if you haven't heard of Sapramarat, that just simply reveals that you've never flown into the capital city, Ashgabat, on Turkmenistan Airlines.

[1 : 0 7] Because, you see, if you had, the greatness of Sapramarat would be imprinted on your mind. You see, in the aircraft, on the cabin wall is his photo.

His face is literally on every page, the first ten pages of the in-flight magazine. As you leave the airport, Sapramarat's photo is on giant hoardings.

Airports or airport streets, a city, moss, factories, collective farms, even a meteorite have been named after him. Recently, he renamed the months and the days of the week in honour of his family.

As you do. And in the schools, a volume containing his autobiography is compulsory reading. Get the picture? I mean, you don't have to look too far, do you, to see this massive representation of human pride.

In fact, the age travel writer, Michael Kalinger, when he was writing on Turkmenistan and its wonderful leader, a journalist who clearly knows his hymns, he sarcastically entitled his travel story, How Great Thou Art.

[2 : 1 8] Pride. Pride. The deep-rooted but so very evident condition of looking to self rather than being submissive to God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Pride. Trusting in ourselves, trusting in our own self-sufficiency, seeing things in our own light but not by the light of God. Well, the Apostle Peter proclaims in this last chapter of his first letter, Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God.

And Peter's call is to Christians, Christians that were scattered throughout Asia Minor, what we know today as modern Turkey. It's a call to live humbly before the Lord.

And Peter's letter, this first epistle of Peter, is God's very word. This is a call not just to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. This is a call to those who live in Turkmenistan.

And it's a call to us here in Doncaster. Well, today we come to the end of this tremendous letter, the end of our sermon series on 1 Peter. And if you've been with us in recent weeks, you'll know that Peter has had much to say about living for Jesus Christ in the world.

[3 : 37] Living in a world that in reality is hostile to Christ and his gospel. Living godly lives as God's people. And again, if you were here last week, you'll recall that we are called to live out Christ's victory.

His victory won through his death, resurrection and ascension back to the right hand of the Father. We're called to live out that victory in a world that rejects Christ.

And we're also called to live out that victory within the community of God, the body of Christ, the church. And so if you're following in the text there on page 986, Peter closes his letter to the Christians and in this last chapter it breaks into just three simple sections.

In verses 1 to 5, Peter gives some final instructions regarding shepherding the flock. And then in 6 to 11, some instructions on accepting difficult times, standing fast, trusting God, and then some closing words in the last verses.

And again, if you were here last week, perhaps you remember that chapter 4 linked directly into chapter 3 and we see the same pattern here where chapter 5 links directly into chapter 4.

[4 : 55] And if you've got your Bibles open there, note at the end of chapter 4 from verse 17 on that Peter instructs his fellow brothers and Christians that it is better to suffer persecution according to God's will for being a Christian than to renounce Christ in order to avoid trouble in this world and then face a worse judgement later.

And so in verse 19 of chapter 4 we read, those suffering in accordance with God's will should entrust themselves to a faithful creator while continuing to do good.

So as we come to verse 1, in fact in the original there's a little word and we can just simply translate it as therefore. Peter's linking in chapter 5 what he's just been talking about.

It's important not to draw back from persecution. Persecution in fact is a sorting process. It's purifying in the church.

God uses persecution to encourage believers to hold fast to their faith in Christ. And it's especially important then that the elders, the leaders of God's people don't draw back from shepherding.

[6 : 13] The reality of course is that by leading the church leaders make themselves a much bigger target for persecution. You will have known as we've gone through the letter that Peter's pastoral heart just shines through on every page.

At the beginning of his letter he makes it very clear that he's got apostolic authority. But he identifies with his fellow leaders. Look at verse 1. Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed.

You see all believers are called to be prepared to suffer for their faithfulness in Christ. But the leaders of the church are to be role models.

And Peter in his leadership role he makes himself vulnerable to the same hostile forces that killed Jesus. And the local leaders that he's writing to they also make themselves vulnerable.

Notice in that first verse that suffering for Christ and the glory of eternal life are really two sides of the same coin. Those who like Peter faithfully serve the church will receive the unfading crown of glory when Jesus appears.

[7 : 29] And so Peter instructs his fellow leaders to notice in verse 2 shepherd and oversee God's flock. And of course the Bible both in the Old and the New Testament presents God as the divine shepherd of us as individual believers and as the flock the body.

In Ezekiel 20 we read that God knows each one that enters the sheepfold. In Isaiah 40 that magnificent picture of God carrying his lambs.

Again in Ezekiel 34 God seeks the lost he brings back the strays he binds up the injured and he strengthens the weak. And then just in that most magnificent glorious psalm Psalm 23 it's God who provides for his own.

See David could say the Lord is my shepherd. It's a beautiful picture isn't it? of David in a personal relationship with the living God.

And friends that's the life changing truth which can be the reality for each one of us. Each one of us that are gathered here this morning we can have a personal relationship with the living God solely and simply by placing our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 50] Well this picture of God as the divine shepherd it gets even sharper as we come into the New Testament with the betrayal of Jesus. He goes out he searches for the lost ones in Matthew 18 he calls each sheep by name each sheep knows his voice he preserves their lives and he gives them eternal life.

That's what John writes about in John chapter 10 and so Peter as he comes to his letter he speaks of Jesus as the chief shepherd at the end of chapter 2 and here in verse 4 of chapter 5.

It's a wonderful title isn't it? Jesus the chief shepherd if you like it brings together it climaxes all of the biblical imagery of shepherding leading feeding watering protecting healing retrieving strays the image of Christ as the chief shepherd provides great comfort for all believers standing firm in their faith in Christ believers often do suffer unjustly for their confession of Christ being obedient to God and suffering the consequences of maybe at a minimum strange looks barbed comments perhaps a little bit stronger humiliation criticism from unbelieving friends and family being treated as social outcasts an absolute reality throughout the world even within Australia and perhaps even physical abuse

Jesus is the true pastor the true shepherd of the flock and all others all other shepherds must model themselves on him they can only work under his direction they can't work independent of him and they're totally answerable to him notice in verse 2 that the flock is God's it's not the leaders the human leaders flock the Lord of course uses human leaders to care for his people and so Peter goes on and he spells out the type of shepherd leadership that's needed to assure the survival of the church in difficult and trying times indeed in all times and he makes three points the first one is in verse 2 leaders of God's people the elders are to serve willingly not under compulsion this is God's will leaders in fact may well be the first targets of persecution if you think back just in the last 10 or 20 years of world history this has clearly been brutally attested to in the former

Soviet Union and also in China leaders willingly undertake their shepherding role why because they love God and they love God's people someone has rightly said if you can't stand the smell of sheep you shouldn't be a shepherd indeed leaders of God's people must be people with magnets in their hearts and compasses in their heads they know where they're going and they care and nurture for the flock along the way that's the first point serving willingly not under compulsion the second point is at the end of verse 2 leaders of God's people must not undertake the role out of greed it's a tragedy that in say the last 10 to 15 years that leaders of some churches in the west have grossly misused their trusted position for personal financial gain the Lord condemns such behaviour the shepherd of God's people is to serve eagerly not for sordid gain that's the third point that's the second point and the third point is in verse 3 leaders of

[12 : 49] God's people must be examples to the flock not lording it over them those that are in their charge if you like the church leaders use their authority to serve to be role models following the supreme example of Jesus himself as I move around the parish many of you express real and deep gratitude to God for the provision of Paul as a shepherd amongst us and yet the question that came in my mind this week as I was preparing this message is how well does our vicar really measure up I want to tell you that I have come across the perfect minister he preaches exactly 20 minutes then he sits down he condemns him but never treads on anyone's toes he works from 8 o'clock in the morning till 10 o'clock at night doing everything from preaching sermons to sweeping he gives half of what he earns to the church but he still drives a late model car he buys lots of books that's probably true wears fine clothes has a nice family he already stands ready to help every good cause he's 31 years old but in fact he's been preaching for 40 years he's tall but on the short side heavy set but in a thin sort of way and handsome he has eyes of blue or brown to fit the occasion he wears his hair parted in the middle left side dark and straight the right side brown and wavy he's a burning desire to work with the youth but he spends all his time with senior citizens he smiles all the time while keeping a straight face because he has a keen sense of humour that finds him seriously dedicated he makes 15 calls a day to church members he spends all his time evangelising non-members but is always found in his office when he's needed well unfortunately he burnt himself out and he died at the age of 32

Paul makes three points about shepherd leadership serve willingly not under compulsion don't do the roll out of greed and be examples to the flock not lording it over them recall that Peter's addressing groups of Christians that are scattered throughout this area what we know today as modern day Turkey and having spelled out the responsibility of the leaders notice in verse 5 that he's got some instructions for those who aren't leaders he describes them simply as those who are younger but he's not referring to chronological age remember again this context many Christians have been displaced they've been scattered through this region and they're now called to recognise the authority and the leadership of new elders new leaders in new situations and this is not a blind call command to obedience leaders who violate

Christ's gospel simply should not be followed and we've already seen that leaders are not to dominate but to serve those under their charge but note conversely the flock are to accept the authority of the church leaders leaders and flock he says all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another that is humility is like a piece of clothing that you are to put on arrogance pride can easily rear its ugly head in any group of

Christians when the leaders dominate and when the flock are contemptuous of those who are in leadership smooth relationships in the church can be preserved but they're preserved if the entire congregation adorns itself clothes itself with humility remember what Peter said back in chapter three he writes finally all of you have unity of spirit sympathy love for one another a tender heart and what else a humble mind first Peter is a very challenging letter isn't it it's a challenging letter to preach as you think about the application of this in your own life all of us need to confess to God and turn around from any attitudes behaviors that put a priority on ourselves and not on serving others you see simply the members of God's community are to live for one another as they follow Christ humility is to be our very clothing for God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble

Peter citing Proverbs 3 verse 34 God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble throughout the Bible again and again we see God setting his face against the proud but lavishly pouring his grace on those who are humble again in chapter 3 in verse 12 we read that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous but his ears are open to their prayer but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil friends in a hostile world the church is to be a place of safety it's to be a place of well-being for its members a place where common beliefs unite us rather than differences dividers a place where Christ's likeness is modelled by the leaders and by the flock a place if you like that radiates the light and the love of Christ to a world lost in its sin to a world in fact that

[19:19] God loves so much that he sent his only son to die for it and so this morning let me say if you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as your saviour and Lord then the gospel comes both as a command but also as a gracious invitation turn from your self-centredness a life that's wrapped up in itself makes a very very small package turn from your self-centredness turn from not submitting to your creator and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ he is the good shepherd he's the good shepherd who laid down his very life and he's the chief shepherd so Peter has to say to us in verses 1 to 5 and as we come to verse 6 through to verse 11 Peter's giving some final instructions to his fellow Christian brothers and sisters brothers and sisters that were experiencing a variety of trials and difficulties and he links what he's going to say directly back with what he's just been saying on humility look at verse 6 with me humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that he may exalt you in due time

I'm sure you will have heard the expression pride comes before a fall well I wonder if that expression had its origin in the animal kingdom a big mean lion met a monkey in the jungle the lion pounces on the poor monkey and says who's the king of the jungle the frightened monkey says oh you are a mighty lion and the lion lets him go the lion comes across a zebra he pounces on it and roars who's the king of the jungle oh again you are a mighty lion and he's let go then the lion meets an elephant and he asks him the same question what does the elephant do he grabs the lion he twirls him around he throws him into the air and landing with a thud the lion picks himself up and huffs just because you don't know the answer it's no reason to get so rough friends you see the lion saw himself as the king of the jungle and that in reality is an easy trap for each one of us to fall into

I mentioned C.S. Lewis last week and again C.S. Lewis makes this comment pride is like a telescope turned the wrong way it magnifies self and makes the heavens small humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God of course a demonstration of our humility before God is to accept the difficult times difficult times that we each face as from God's hand not railing against God not raging against those who may have brought unjust suffering our way we're to humble ourselves see what the text says so that God will exalt us and give us the reward of eternal life on the last day when Christ returns which he absolutely will do that's what the Apostle Peter says in verse 6 but humility also manifests itself in handing our worries over to God look at verse 7 cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you it's a famous verse isn't it usually just quoted in isolation it's important to see where this verse sits in the flow of

Peter's argument an expression of our humility before God is handing our worries over to the sovereign Lord I mean the news at the moment is just chock-a-block full isn't it of the talk of the need for massive supplies of an antidote if there to be a worldwide breakout of bird flu the antidote for worry is believing in it is resting in God's care for believers his flock cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you we're called as God's people to be humble but we're also called to be sober and alert look at verse 8 alertness is necessary why because the devil is prowling he's prowling about and he's using suffering to think of it in that image to roar at believers to frighten them to seek to turn them away from their trust in Christ well given that situation what are we to do

Peter addresses it in verse 9 resist him resist the devil steadfast in your faith for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering the message is simple we must continue strong in our faith and when we do face various kinds of trial and suffering be encouraged that in reality around the world your fellow brothers and sisters are undergoing the same kinds of suffering and then Peter concludes and he concludes by reflecting on the grace and the sovereignty of God God will give strength he will give strength to those who he has called he'll give strength to enduring the sufferings of this life this earthly life this age in which we live that's why he writes in verse 10 and after you've suffered for a little while the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore support strengthen and establish you to him be the power forever and ever amen it's a fantastic letter isn't it first Peter it's a letter that is so relevant to each follower of Jesus Christ living as aliens and exiles in a foreign land the Lord calls each one of us as followers of the Lord to live in the world to be in the world but not of the world so if you have repented of your sins and trusted in Christ and recall as we looked at that first chapter you have been given a new birth into a living hope you have an inheritance that is imperishable it's undefiled that's unfading everything in this world as we know it as we look about will fade but our inheritance in heaven is kept for us absolutely secure absolutely perfect Peter has shown us clearly the reality that in this world we will experience various kinds of trials that's the reality if we're followers of Jesus Christ but God will keep us he will ensure that we arrive at our heavenly inheritance as we appropriate God's power through faith do you recall that in those first messages in chapter 1 and see how Peter pulls this whole message together in the flow of his letter Christ has secured the victory he secured it through his death his resurrection and his ascension and then we as God's flock we're called to live out that victory we're called to live it out in an unbelieving world and we're called to live it out within the body the body of Christ the church humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that he may exalt you in due time

[27 : 20] Amen