

Being a Shepherd

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Preacher: Michael Reader-Harris

[0 : 0 0] 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 and when the chief shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away in the same way you who are younger submit yourselves to your elders all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you

Amen Let's pray as we sit May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen What I'm going to do tonight I'm going to start by saying a little bit about the passage and then we'll come to the context after a while and I hope you'll find that helpful So I think there are the way I'm going to split the passage up is that there are four imperatives four commands in this passage and they are these shepherd it's a verb in the Greek translated here as be shepherds submit clothe and humble surprisingly enough cast isn't a command in the Greek it's humble yourself casting your cares etc and that gives me my my four points form they don't really spell a word they spell more a sort of sound the librarian's favourite sound shh which I'm spelling s-s-c-h in order to get shepherd submit clothe and humble and I think the first imperative that first command shepherd is the key word in the passage and the other three are going to go together submitting clothing humbling oneself and that first verb comes very powerfully from Peter's mouth as I read this passage and prepared tonight

I was struck by the way in which this comes from the mouth of Peter himself because Peter's whole life must have been shaped by the words that Jesus spoke to him on the beach in John 21 after the resurrection the words go like this I'll shorten it slightly when they had finished eating Jesus said to Simon Peter Simon son of John do you love me more than these yes Lord he said you know that I love you Jesus said feed my lambs again Jesus said Simon son of John do you love me he answered yes Lord you know that I love you Jesus said take care of or more literally shepherd my sheep and then the third time again the conversation and Jesus said feed my sheep now when John recorded the story he remembered the number of fish remember it was 153 which happens to be the sum of all the numbers from 1 to 17

I'm not sure that's relevant or important but that's what John remembered but Peter remembered these words to him what he remembered was that Jesus had said shepherd my sheep as we've already heard this idea of people as God's flock is a very common idea in the Bible we might think of Psalm 95 oh come let us worship and fall down and kneel before the Lord our maker for he is the Lord our God and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand later we're going to sing a version of Psalm 23 you might think of other Psalms all of them speak of us as God's sheep of God looking after us God caring for us and Peter will have heard

Jesus speak of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep he'll have heard Jesus speak of himself as the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep in that passage from the beach in John 21 we've heard how Jesus commissions Peter to shepherd the sheep God is the shepherd Peter's an under shepherd and now Peter says to the elders be shepherds of God's flock at St Silas we have the office of elder or presbyter we would normally call it and people are ordained to it so Martin is a presbyter an elder and James was ordained as an elder but tonight I'm not just going to speak to Martin because that would be a very strange sermon do you lead a roots group or do you lead a growth group or are you involved in leaving kids zone or youth zone then there are sheep for you to shepherd maybe you lead the CU in your hall then you have a shepherd ministry there are always sheep in need of care

[6 : 21] I expect you actually you all have other people for whom you care you exercise a shepherd ministry somewhere now I'm not saying that church government isn't an important subject but I'm not going to talk about it tonight I think it would be better in a discussion than in a proclamation and also I think this passage is actually about how to exercise a shepherd ministry and so that's what I'm going to talk about tonight so let's look at shepherd ministry Peter calls the elders to shepherd God's flock that is under your care at least that's how the NIV puts it but actually the word under is slightly unfortunate I think there's no sense of under you it's actually among you the ESV has the flock of God that is among you so there's not much sense of hierarchy about this activity perhaps none at all it's about caring for other people equally and rather oddly there's not much description of what shepherding actually involves in the passage it does say the elders are to watch over the flock the ESV has exercise oversight episcopantes the word from which we get episcopacy watching watching over involves taking responsibility for the care of others that's what shepherding involves if we go across to

John 21 shepherding involves feeding the sheep that's what Peter's told to do feed shepherd feed presumably feeding the sheep with the word of God shepherding I guess people knew lots of shepherds they had a picture of what was involved in a way that we probably don't it involved keeping the sheep safe from the evil one that'll come up more in next week's passage it involves binding up the wounds of the sheep it involves patience with the awkward sheep I don't have the actual quotation from John Stott where he pointed out there are awkward sheep Jesus bought them with his own blood shepherding for us may involve simple care may involve giving the sheep meals going for walks with them caring for them in different ways but our passage actually says little about what shepherding is it says much about how we go about it it says we have to go about it with the right attitude in the right spirit and with the right motives with the right attitude not because you must but because you are willing as

God wants you to be now as Christians we have a certain reluctance to accept any office in the church because we know our unworthiness and inadequacy nevertheless willingness is important if you organize anything you know how attractive willingness is when you go around and people go alright I could do that it's quite discouraging but actually willingness is what we're called to be it's called to have I know it's not always easy sometimes sitting in front of the fire watching death in paradise imagining ourselves on a Caribbean beach seems rather more attractive than going out to lead our home group on a gloomy Tuesday in the rain but we're called to go willingly and it says we're to go as

God wants us to be literally that's according to God which must mean something like either in accordance with his purpose or after the pattern of God I like God God has shown outstanding willingness to go out into the darkness of this world Jesus came and he came to the wandering sheep and he brought us back and now he calls us to go out into a difficult situation to reach the sheep to look after them we're called to shepherd others with the right attitude willing not shrugging okay we're to do it in the right spirit that's described as not pursuing dishonest gain but eager to serve now

I don't think many people go into the ordained ministry in Scotland for the money but we are aware that there are those who do appear to do it in other places shall we say we have we are a bit suspicious of tele-evangelists in some cases and perhaps I don't know any ordained minister who's done this but it's not unknown for people in caring professions to be left money inappropriately by those for whom they care I think the contrast is between dishonest gain on the one hand which is doing something for what I can get out of it and doing it eager to serve which is carrying out this ministry for what I can give so the right attitude was to be willing rather than just okay the right spirit is what I can give to others not what

[12 : 52] I can get out of it and we're to shepherd with the right motives not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock now I don't know whether you still read Anthony Trollope Barchester Towers and all that I mean if you want examples of people lording it over others it's spectacularly good but even when I was young it wasn't unknown for ministers to talk about my people and it's good to be reminded that it's God's flock not ours please never say in my presence Michael's nine o'clock because that is very inappropriate and the contrast to lording it over others is to lead by example that's what we're called to do not driving the sheep forward and telling them what to do you know do what I say not what

I do but to lead in such a way that people are shown how to do something and then they're able to do it for themselves so now after those thoughts I want to go back to the context I mean why is this passage here that's always a crucial question why now I mean it might you would have thought Peter might have said this a couple of chapters earlier a couple of chapters earlier we have those sections that talk about slaves and masters wives and husbands might we not have had sheep and shepherds another contrast that might have fitted in well there mightn't it but no he's put it in here and I think he's done that we don't know why he's done that so we're left to speculate it's perhaps not the right word but we're left to think it out for ourselves but

I think it's clear that Christian leadership is of particular importance and Peter is writing to people who are under immense pressure they were being persecuted and so at the very end of chapter four it goes like this so then those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good so that the suffering church is to keep on going continuing to do good and I think if that was to happen it would depend on there being faithful leadership that's why Peter says to the elders be shepherds I mean we might think of some particular reasons that are possible maybe in a situation of persecution the elders are sometimes in the firing line for particular persecution so it gets even more difficult to be willing or eager to serve so he says to them carry on be shepherds maybe the danger is that in a time of persecution the devil is looking to pick off members of the flock we come to that next week your adversary the devil prowls around and so in a situation of danger for the flock

Peter says be shepherds look out for people watch out for them watching over them maybe it's that we're not sure exactly why but it's obviously crucial in this situation what they really need is faithful shepherds and the shepherds are to go for it and Peter says in verse 1 of our passage that he writes as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's suffering who also will share in the glory to be revealed I love the way this fits so well with what we've just thought about not lording over people not lording it over people Peter doesn't say I'm an apostle go and do this he says I'm a fellow elder go and do this I think that's rather lovely he's exemplifying what he's talking about he's a fellow elder and he's a witness of

Christ's sufferings now Peter witnessed Christ's sufferings in a distinctive way remember how he followed Jesus into the high priest's house and three times he denied him and the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter and then he went out and wept bitterly what he witnessed particularly was Christ's suffering when people deny him and now he bears witness to what he saw and he's calling on people to be faithful and he's calling on leaders to step up and not let Christ down loyal and faithful a fellow elder a witness of Christ's sufferings and also a sharer in the glory to be revealed and again Peter knew about glory he was there at the transfiguration that site of

[18 : 49] God's glory Jesus' glory that was given to Peter and to two others to keep them going as they headed up towards Jerusalem as they headed towards the cross they were given that glimpse that view of glory that enabled them to keep going and not give up so Peter knew what glory was and now Peter says and when the chief shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away the chief shepherd could translate the arch shepherd any of us is at most an under shepherd Jesus is the arch shepherd when the chief shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory other glories fade we remember our victories less whatever they are but this glory will never fade there is suffering now he's talking to a suffering church he says that Christ suffered and has been glorified and he says to the elders you too will share in the glory to be revealed take the strain now as shepherds shepherd submit clothe humble don't worry the last points are much shorter than the first verse 5 in the same way you who are younger submit yourselves to your elders all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because

God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble there is a special command for the young which they should not ignore but there's also a call to all of us clothe yourselves with humility the verb used here is a rare one it's only used once in the New Testament it means to clothe yourself by tying on something the corresponding noun is a sort apron worn especially by slaves to keep their clothes clean I wonder if Peter was thinking back to John 13 when Jesus took a towel and wrapped it round him like a slave's apron and washed his disciples feet Jesus clothed himself with an apron of humility and now Peter's saying to the elders clothe yourselves with humility tie that slave's apron on if you're an elder you need humility not to be puffed up by your exalted place and if you're younger you need humility not looking down on older ones because we haven't got much hair or we don't have as much energy as we once had all of us remember

Jesus leaving the glory of heaven and being born in a manger laid in a manger he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross Peter saw himself as a fellow elder when it comes to clothing I think his picture is Jesus himself I remember a former presbyter here some of you will remember Richard Gorey he worked for scripture union he was someone who had an amazing ministry amongst young people but for some bizarre reason I should think 30 something years ago I ended up becoming the chairman of the scripture union committee to which

Richard used to report and you know I was just a little squirt and just as unsatisfactory then as I am now and Richard was so keen to give me my place and here was the great man and little me and yet I saw amazing humility in him he clothed himself with humility humble yourselves therefore verse 6 under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time it's a difficult subject to talk about humility or maybe it's just that I feel it's difficult for me to talk about but I love the way it's described let's look at it slightly more care humble yourselves under God's mighty hand God's mighty hand is quite a common phrase in the

Old Testament it's most often used in connection with the deliverance when God brought his people out of Egypt Moses said the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand in Deuteronomy chapter 3 Moses pleaded with the Lord sovereign Lord you've begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand we can rejoice in God's mighty hand his hand is on us if only we will humbly and faithfully accept his guidance God I saw this picture in a commentary which I rather liked a person in need of healing may choose to become a patient of a particular surgeon and thus submit himself under that surgeon's mighty hand or maybe his operating hand would be a better term the patient goes to that surgeon in the hope of receiving the promised benefit in good time so we go to God we submit ourselves to his purposes pride says I can do it my way humility means that

[25 : 35] I can't I need to take time to pray I need to place myself under God's mighty hand that in due time the right time not necessarily the time I wanted but the right time he may exalt me I wonder if Peter was thinking of that time when Jesus told the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector you remember the story I won't tell it totally but the Pharisee stood by himself and prayed God I thank you that I'm not like other people robbers evildoers adulterers or even like this tax collector I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get I I I but the tax collector stood at a distance he wouldn't even look up to heaven but he beat his breast and said God have mercy on me a sinner and Jesus said that the tax collector was the one who went home justified before God for all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted now it's not that easy to wait for God's mighty hand sometimes we find that very difficult moments when in order to keep going perhaps we might use the magnificat

Mary's words in Luke chapter one where she sings he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts he has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble but as we wait for that lifting up of the humble as we cast ourselves on God and wait for his mighty hand to lift us up we come to that last thought in the passage the one that sometimes appears as a calendar verse cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you just on its own that one verse taken on its own is wonderful the reason that we can cast our anxieties on him is that he cares for us it matters to him and in Romans 8 32 Paul writes he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things we look to the cross we see what God has already done for us in Jesus and then we know he cares for us and so we know that we can cast all our problems on him that our whatever our problem is is less it's much smaller than the really big problem of our sin that God has already dealt with for us but it does say in the passage that we have to do something about this it says cast our anxieties literally it's throw them onto the one who cares and it's worth looking at the context humble yourselves under

God's mighty hand casting literally all your anxiety on him the context is that he has a mighty hand and will exalt in due time those who humbly depend on him that's the calling in the passage to cast our cares and if you know me well you'll know I'm not frightfully good at that I seem to keep picking them up again so it speaks above all to me so who so in conclusion who's on my list to shepherd who's on your list will I care for them pray for them give to them teach them will I do that with the right attitude will I do that willingly not hmm will I do it in the right spirit eager to serve others for what for their benefit not for my own will I do it with the right motives leading by example not lording it over them and will

I do it above all with humility taking that picture of clothing myself with humility as Jesus did in John 13 and I love this passage because I do think it shot through with Peter's memories of Jesus' life his humility his transfiguration his foot washing his sufferings and above all his call to Peter after his resurrection to feed his sheep Peter knew sufferings and had glimpsed glory and he says Jesus suffered and has been glorified and he says to us there's glory to come take the strain now amen let's pray as we sit thank you

Lord that you provide shepherds for your people that we who are a very wandering flock have under shepherds to look after us that we have the Lord Jesus the chief shepherd to look after us and we pray that tonight in as much as we ourselves are shepherds that you would enable us to get on with that task that we would watch over others we would look after them willingly eagerly and not lording over them and father you call us to humility you've given us a wonderful example of it in Jesus and we confess that we often fail ourselves help us to cast all our cares tonight on you whatever they are thank you so much that you care for us amen a to you to