

SHEPHERDING THE SAVIOUR'S SHEEP

A Sermon on I Peter 5:1-4

By
Daniel L. Akin

SHEPHERDING THE SAVIOR'S SHEEP

I Peter 5:1-4

- I. There is encouragement for the servant of God. 5:1
 - 1. Be encouraged by your partners in service.
 - 2. Be encouraged by your perception of the Savior.
 - 3. Be encouraged by your participation in salvation.

- II. There are expectations for the servant of God. 5:2-3
 - 1. Shepherd God's people. 5:2
 - a. The flock is God's possession.
 - b. The flock is under our protection.
 - 2. Serve (supervise) God's people. 5:2-3
 - a. Serve willingly. 5:2
 - b. Serve eagerly. 5:2
 - c. Serve humbly. 5:3

- III. There will be an exaltation of the servant of God. 5:4
 - 1. Look to the chief Shepherd.
 - 2. Live for a crown of splendor.

CPS: The task of shepherding God's church is filled with encouragement and expectations.

“Shepherding the Saviour’s Sheep” (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Introduction: The ministry is in trouble today. Respect for the office of the pastor is at an all time low. Methodists have openly solicited their need for ministers through the newspapers, with promises of a position, salary, and no demotions in pay as you are moved from one church to another by their hierarchy. Among Southern Baptists, problems with the ministry are also quite evident. Seminars and workshops for those fired by their churches or burned out by the work of ministry abound. Lifeway’s adoption of the “Wounded Heros” ministry for those “hurt in service” is just one example of the crisis at hand. It has been estimated that over 1,000 men leave the ministry of Southern Baptist Churches yearly. In the Dallas/Fort Worth area in the 1980s and 90s, it was estimated that there were close to 1,500 ministers who were out of the work. Today, the average tenure of a pastor in a Southern Baptist Church is approximately 22 months, of other staff persons 16 months, hardly enough time to unpack and settle in, much less get to know and care for the people of that church. Yes, the ministry is in trouble, severe trouble. But why? What is the problem? I personally believe there are several reasons. (1) Men have lost the vision of what a great privilege and honor it is to be a servant of God. Ministry is often viewed as an occupation rather than a calling. (2) Churches have failed to recognize the necessary encouragements that exist for the minister. (3) We have neglected God’s expectations rather than our own personal preferences for His minister. (4) The esteem due God’s man by the Church has been lost. Those who have received that undeniable call of God on their life need again to examine Scripture that they might discover God’s blueprint for their lives in what I believe is the greatest occupation in the world: a shepherd of the Saviour’s sheep. I Peter 5:1-4 contains such a portrait, a divine pattern for the effective servant of Christ. Observe first:

I. There is encouragement for the minister of God. (5:1)

Several avenues of encouragement are discussed in this verse, and they come from three sources: (a) his partners in service; (b) his perception of the Saviour; and (c) his participation in salvation. Historically, Peter is writing to those who are undergoing suffering and trials. It is possible the madness of Emperor Nero, who burned Rome in A. D. 64 and blamed it on the Christians, had found its way to the outer edges of the Empire (cf 1:1). It was essential that the local churches encouraged and instructed men as their pastors, their elders. It is necessary if these men are to rejoice as they share in Christ's sufferings (4:12) and as they commit their souls to God in doing good (4:19).

1. Be encouraged by your partners in service.

Exposition: Peter begins by exhorting (Gr. *parakaleo*), by calling alongside or encouraging, the elders of the churches. The word "elder," (*presbuteros*) from which we get our word presbyterian, signifies the office of a church leader. Originally, it was a word of respect bestowed upon an aged and mature man of wisdom. It later became a term of respect, honor, dignity, and esteem that the office itself requires. To these men, Peter encourages them as a "fellow elder," as one involved in the same work, experiencing the same trials, and enjoying the same privileges. He is indeed one of them and one with them. He is one who understands and can sympathize with their responsibilities and their difficulties.

Illustration: Anyone who has ever run a marathon will tell you what an agonizing, painful experience it is. They will testify to how your mind plays games with you, and time and again you will say to yourself, "I must quit, I cannot go on. I'm tired, I hurt, I don't have what it takes to finish." And, some do drop out, literally hundreds every time such a race is run. But, at the same time there are others who finish this grueling 26 miles, 385 yard endeavor. Probably

most if not all trained hard and long. But some did not finish. What is the difference? For many, it was the encouragement they received from a partner in the race, from others trodding the same course, seeking the same goal. Though running is a solo venture, they chose to seek encouragement and support from fellow-racers and in many cases, this was the intangible factor that meant the difference between success and failure, finishing and quitting.

Application: To be an effective and successful servant of God, you need the encouragement of others. There is no place for a Lone Ranger in the ministry, you need the support and shoulder of those walking the same path as you. You need others and they need you.

2. Be encouraged by your perception of the Saviour.

Exposition: The word “witness” (Gr. *martus*) identifies one who has seen something, who speaks of it, and, if necessary, suffers for it. Peter saw Christ suffer. He spoke concerning our Lord’s passion, and he suffered for the message he proclaimed. Tradition says Peter eventually was put to death in Rome, being crucified upside down. He was a faithful witness, a martyr for his Lord.

Application: Fear is a great silencer. In your life and mine, as in the life of Peter, this must not be the case when it comes to the gospel. We must spend time in the Word and prayer that we might know and perceive fully the passion and person of our Saviour. As one has well said, “If we would make Christ known to others, we must first know Him ourselves.” But in knowing Him, we must speak concerning Him, we must boldly proclaim His gospel and be willing to suffer for Him, if necessary. [Modern illustrations abound here: Columbine, Wedgewood, Paducah, East Timor, China. Think also of persons like Polycarp, John Hus, Savoralala, William Tyndale, Jim Eliot.]

3. Be encouraged by your participation in salvation.

Exposition: Peter refers to himself as a partaker (Gr. *koinonos*), a sharer, a present participating saint of the glory of God which will ultimately and fully be unveiled at the Lord's second coming. In the midst of suffering and the circumstances of this life, Peter states that we are experientially and objectively (cf. Eph. 2:6) already sharing in the benefits and blessing of God's glory which someday will fully and totally be ours.

Illustration: The year before my wife Charlotte and I were married, I did not see her except at Christmas. She lived in Atlanta, Georgia, and I lived in Dallas, Texas. We loved each other, and distance could have been a very discouraging enemy. However, during that time letters, gifts, phone calls, and pictures of the one I loved kept me going. They greatly encouraged me in anticipation of that day when we would be separated no longer, but would behold one another face to face for the rest of our lives.

Application: For the servant of God, through the agencies of prayer (telephone), the Bible (God's love letter), the Holy Spirit (a gift), and God's people, we have a foretaste, a sharing today of what heaven's glory, and Jesus' personal presence will be forever. We can know now in a small way what life with Christ will be like someday in heaven, for we are sharers now of that glory to be revealed. It is "blessed assurance Jesus is mine, oh what a foretaste of glory divine." As we avail ourselves of these privileges, so shall we be encouraged as servants of God's church.

Transition: Having laid a foundation of encouragement, Peter moves to the minister's marching orders, his job description. In verses 2-3 of Chapter 5 we find that:

II. There are expectations of the minister of God. (5:2-3)

Exposition: Whereas elders (Gr. *presbuteros*) in our passage denotes the office of a

minister, the word feed or shepherd (Gr. *poimen*) from which we get our word pastor, and taking the oversight or serving as overseers (Gr. *episkopos*) from which we get our word bishop and episcopal describe the function of the minister. All three terms appear elsewhere in the New Testament and together in Acts 20:17-28. An examination of the New Testament reveals that these three words are used interchangeably to describe the minister, the spiritual leader of the church. He is an elder, a pastor, and a bishop or overseer.

1. Shepherd God's people. (5:2)

In verse two, the elder is commanded (aorist imperative) to feed or shepherd, to tend the flock, a flock which is not his own but God's. This shepherding is further amplified by the phrase "serving as overseers," meaning to look upon or over (epi=upon, skopos=to look). A minister of God is to care for the needs of His church. He is to protect and provide. He is to feed and lead. It is a full time job, and one which requires hard work, and much personal attention and spiritual commitment.

Illustration: After the resurrection in John 21:15-19, our Lord commanded Peter to feed, pastor, shepherd His sheep, knowing that sheep without a shepherd wander aimlessly. Without direction they get lost and hurt. They may starve in desolation without the care and protection of the shepherd.

Application: The job of a spiritual shepherd is hard work, and it has many facets. Three key aspects are those of feeding the church the Word of God, protecting the church from heresy and division, and presiding continually over the safe delivery and nurture of new lambs, i.e., evangelism. Ministers must preach and teach their people God's infallible, inerrant word. This demands study, prayer, hard work and expository preaching. Secondly, we must protect and warn our people concerning anyone who would question the total accuracy of the Bible and the

essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Thirdly, we must do the work of an evangelist, making it a priority to be about the business of leading people to faith in Christ. Such activity is the expectation of the Lord who called us and is the need of the sheep for whom we care.

2. Serve God's people. (5:2-3)

Transition: Three phrases in these verses give us a negative and a positive perspective revealing how a minister of God is to serve (supervise) the church:

a. Serve willingly. (5:2) (for the right reason)

Exposition: It is not to be by constraint or compulsion, because you were pushed into it, because of intense pressure from without. You shepherd God's church willingly, voluntarily, because you want to, because you love to.

Application: There is one reason to be in the ministry and one reason alone: because God called you and you can be happy doing nothing else. It is simply the fact that you love doing it, you must do it, you want to do it. With all of the pressures that come with the territory of being a minister of God, you must have the right reason for being in the work, because of an internal willingness and love implanted by God for God's people.

b. Serve God eagerly. (5:2) (for the right motive)

Exposition: It is not to be for the sake of getting rich, which becomes dishonorable or dishonest gain. It is not to advance financially as I Tim. 6:7-10 warns the minister. Rather, we are to do our work with a ready mind, better, eagerly, with enthusiasm and zeal, with sheer delight, joy, and love for the work.

Illustration: Sadness must engulf the heart of God when in our day ministers parade about like celebrities and superstars. We need to look no further than the tele-evangelist who fills the airways with a pseudo-gospel message. The cause of Christ is brutally marred when

men prostitute the gospel for personal gain, and others leave a smaller church for one that is larger, stating publicly it is God's will, but whispering privately it was the money, with the congregations knowing the truth all along. God forbid that the overriding concern of a pulpit committee will ever be: "How much will it take to get you here?"

Application: The Bible does not condemn the paying of a minister. Obviously ministers were being paid or this phrase would not be here. In fact, a good minister is said to be worthy of double honor. Furthermore, a church devoted to our Lord should see that its ministers are well provided, and not abused and burdened with financial worries. However, Scripture does condemn the manipulation of the ministry for the gaining of wealth. Servants of God, you work not for pay, but for the sheer love, joy, and delight of the work. The acquisition of wealth is never to become a goal of yours. God forbid that you should ever compromise your stand for God because of money. That includes your location of service too! You are to have the attitude that, "If I could, I'd work for nothing and work in this place forever." That and nothing less is to be the attitude you cultivate in relation to money.

c. Serve humbly. (5:3) (in the right manner)

Exposition: One is to care for God's church, "not" (a strong negative) as lording over (lit. lording down upon), but as an example, a model (Gr. *tupos*), a type. You are not to be dictatorial or authoritarian because of the position with which God has graced you, but rather you are to be a pattern worthy to be copied. You are to be a model; you are to be an example. You are to cultivate such a character that your life is a type and example of the one you are following—Jesus Himself.

Illustration: In the good old days(!), when you typed a paper and wanted the letter

“a,” you hit the “a” key and an “a” appears on the page. Yet in reality, the “a” was on the key within the typewriter, the typed “a,” a copy of the real “a,” was now on the paper. That which is on the paper is a type.

Application: Your life as a minister of Christ is to be on the paper of life, a type, a copy of that true and eternal life of Jesus. Your life is to be so much like Jesus that your people could legitimately look at you and say, “When I look at him, in many ways, it is like looking at the Jesus I see in Scripture.” You are to be a model for the flock to imitate; you are to set the standard in every area. You are to love both Christ and people more, witness more, serve more, pray more. It is well said, “The church needs leaders who serve and servants who lead.” And remember, “We cannot lead others where we have not been ourselves.”

Transition: Having set forth the encouragements and expectations of the minister, Peter lastly turns to the minister’s future exaltation. In verse four, Peter states:

III. There will be an exaltation of the servant of God. (5:4)

Verse four reveals to those in the ministry two precious and eternal truths which we shall examine together.

1. Look to the chief Shepherd.
2. Live for a crown of splendor.

Exposition: When Jesus “appears” the second time, better “is manifest,” He will come as the chief shepherd, the arch-shepherd (*archpoimenos*). Then He will grant to His faithful ministers a crown of glory that is everlasting. The phrase “fadeth not away” comes from the Greek word *amaranth*, which was a flower in paradise that never faded, but was everlasting and eternal. Jesus, who is the chief shepherd, the good shepherd, and the great shepherd, shall be the

one to exalt and lift up the under-shepherds of His flock. In doing so, He will bless them with the gift of an incorruptible, eternal crown of glory.

Illustration: In Peter's day, men ran in the Olympics to win the victor's prize which was a flowery wreath to be worn about the head in triumph and splendor. Yet it was worn for only a short time for it soon wilted and faded. It was not incorruptible.

Application: Christian workers may labor for many rewards. Some seek to build personal empires, others long for the applause of men, yet others strive for denominational acclaim and promotion. All of these, like the ancient wreath, will fade and pass away. The minister's true reward is not present but future. It is not from men, but from God. It is not perishable, but imperishable. For the faithful minister of Christ there is reserved the eternal, unfading crown of glory. Interestingly, as one scans the book of Revelation and comes to chapter four verse ten, he finds the 24 elders on their knees before God casting forth their crowns of glory before the throne of Jesus, acknowledging even then with great humility that all that they rendered in service on this earth was because of Him and for Him.

Conclusion: A call to ministry is the greatest calling one can receive in life. It is greater than being the head of a major corporation, the commander-in-chief of a great army, or even the president of a great nation. It is a calling with strong encouragement, great expectations, and future exaltation.

Illustration: A young prideful preacher once ascended the pulpit of a church with self-confidence and open arrogance only to be greatly humbled as he stumbled and erred repeatedly throughout his brief message. As he descended from the sacred desk with head down and spirits low, a wise old saint was heard to say, "If you had only gone up like you came down, you would now be like you went up." James 4:6 reminds us, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace

to the humble.” May it be that we are worthy of His grace for the honor of shepherding His sheep.