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The Under-Shepherd

1 Peter 5:1-4

God gave a glimpse to His people as to what the future held for them in and beyond the exile. In Jeremiah He said this:

Jeremiah 3:15, "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding."

There is no question as to the importance of pastoral care in the context of the local church/the people of God- it can mean the difference between God's people thriving or dying.¹ Take for

example the account of Father Kolbe as told by Chuck Colson in *The Body*. It was July 1941 in Auschwitz. The previous evening a prisoner from Barracks 14 successfully escaped from a work detail. To punish the Barracks, ten of its men would be selected to die in the Starvation Bunker — where prisoners were left to die without food or water. It was a horrible death! Chuck Colson described it this way:

The prisoners had heard the stories from the starvation bunker in the basement of Barracks 11. They said the condemned didn't even look like human beings after a day or two. They frightened even the guards. Their throats turned to paper, their brains turned to fire, their intestines dried up and shriveled like desiccated worms. (Colson, 1994, p. 324)

One by one the names of the ten men were called who would die on account of the escaped prisoner. Uncharacteristically, one of the men began to weep, *"I'm married... I'm a father. My poor wife. My poor children. What will they do?"* Suddenly there was a commotion; a prison had broken out of line, calling for the commandant! Rather than shooting the man on the spot, the Commandant shouted, *"Halt! What does this Polish pig want of me?"* That "Polish pig" was Father Kolbe who said, *"I would like to die in place of one of the men you condemned."* *"Why?"* boomed the Commandant. *"I am an old man, sir, and good for nothing. My life will serve no purpose."*

Father Kolbe's ploy worked; the Commandant allowed the priest to die in the place of the grieving prisoner. The ten men were led to Barracks 11, stripped naked, and then locked in the bunker. Colson finished the story:

As the hours and days passed, however, the camp became aware of something extraordinary happening in the death cell. Past prisoners had spent their dying days howling, attacking one another, clawing the walls in a frenzy of despair. ¶ But now, coming from the death box, those outside heard the faint sounds of singing. For this time the prisoners had a shepherd to gently lead them through the shadows of the valley of death, pointing them to the Great Shepherd. (Colson, 1994, pp. 325-326)

The glorious benefit of pastoral care. That no doubt is what prompted Peter to exhort his fellow elders during this time of persecution- that God's people might NOT falter or shrink back, BUT boldly serve the Lord in their suffering!

As we look at the work and role of the under-shepherd remember that last section of 1 Peter (4:12-5:14) where the persecution which began in Rome under Nero in 64 AD had descended upon God's people in its fulness in Asia Minor! Accordingly, this last section brings with it an urgency and directness that God's people might stand in the day of trial! But to do that, they'd need faithful shepherds to walk with them through the valley of the shadow of death!

The opening words of 1 Peter 5:1 are introductory, giving us 4 considerations, which elders must keep in mind if they are to prove faithful to the Lord in their ministry. Notice with me the first one is that the call of an elder is a sober charge.

1 Peter 5:1, “Therefore, I exhort the elders² among you...”

Any time we read a “therefore” in the Bible, we always want to ask the question: “What is the ‘therefore’ there for?” In this case, it draws us back to the previous section.

1 Peter 4:17-19, “For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? Therefore [in light of the fact that ‘judgment begins first with God’s household’] let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. [And now a second ‘therefore’ ...] 5:1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you...”

Based on the parallelism, we understand that the “therefore” of our text is in reference to Peter’s statement in 4:17 that “Judgment begins with God’s household” — which is significant!

When we looked at 4:17, I didn’t have time to reference the fact that Peter there is quoting from Ezekiel 9 where you may recall that God showed Ezekiel in a vision that judgment was coming to Judah! Now if you are at all familiar with Ezekiel 9, you know that the judgment at that time began with whom amongst God’s people? The elders! In the vision God told the attendant:

Ezekiel 9:5b-6, “...‘Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity, and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.’ So they started with THE ELDERS who *were* before the temple.”

God’s people would have been familiar with this which no doubt is why Peter began this section with this:

1 Peter 5:1, “Therefore [in light of the fact that ‘judgment begins with ELDERS of God’s household’], I exhort the elders among you...”

Family of God let me tell you something: this is why I don’t want to be an elder! In fact, when I first discovered this in seminary, all I wanted to do was run! And that still is my impulse every time I read of this truth.

Hebrews 13:17a, “Obey your leaders, and submit *to them*; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account...”

1 Peter 5:1, “Judgment begins with the elders!”

Honestly brothers and sisters, At times I struggle to be an elder as I'm sure is the case for every elder in Christ's church who understands that they have been charged with caring for the "flock of God" for which someday they will render account! In this regard, we need your prayer and we need your understanding! It is so easy to be a back-seat driver! And in the context of the church, that means hundreds and hundreds of suggestions, criticisms, and attacks from sheep who bite. Chuck Swindoll wrote of this:

I've encountered church members who have accused me of wrong motives, criticized my candor, questioned my sincerity, and walked out in anger. I've made my share of mistakes and miscalculations, too, failing to live up to the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1–7. That's ministry in the raw. (Swindoll, 2014, p. 234)

As such, any elder worth anything feels the horrible weight of their inabilities, their neglect that comes from their inability, fear, or laziness, their failures, and their folly! Truly, we need your prayer — NOT ONLY for God's grace to do the work of ministry, BUT also to deny that nagging voice in the back of the mind, "*You don't need this! Find some other way to serve God!*" So, we begin with a sober charge. Notice secondly that the call of an elder is realistic.

1 Peter 5:1, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder..."

What a wonderful balm/salve to wipe on any wounded conscience. What Peter is saying here is something that he *HIMSELF* is bound by and endeavoring to embody in his own life. Just think of it: Peter could have pulled out the big guns and said this: "As an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ!..." Yet He doesn't. He identifies himself with every elder/shepherd of God's household- which means what is written here to the church leader is that which fell upon Peter as well!³ Spurgeon wrote of this:

At the same time, let us especially note the wisdom of Peter, for it would have been an unwise thing for him to speak to the elders as an apostle. They might have replied to him, 'You do not know the worry and toil and trouble of our service. You labor in a higher sphere. You, sitting on the apostolic benches, are far above us. We, poor plain elders, cannot hope to attain to such eminence as yours.' 'No, my brothers,' says Peter, 'I am one of you, for I also am an elder. And, as a brother speaks to brothers, so do I exhort you.' (Spurgeon, 2014, p. 1 Peter 5:1)

Why is it that "misery loves company"? I don't know! But what a joy to read the words of a man who himself lived ever mindful of the judgment that awaits the elder on the last day on account of our pastoral care of the body! IOW, it is possible to serve as an elder in light of the teaching of this text! Peter did!

Knowing that, though we are reading heavy words, nevertheless they come from someone who himself was bound by them.⁴ That makes this exhortation incredibly encouraging — and by the grace of God — do-able!⁵

Thirdly, the call of an elder is given to sinners who will fail.

1 Peter 5:1, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ..."

It is tempting to think of this as a statement of Peter's credential as an apostle. For recall, one of the primary qualifications of an apostle is that they had to have seen the resurrected Christ (cf. Acts 1:21-22). In light of this MacArthur wrote of our text:

That he had seen the suffering and risen Christ affirmed the reality of his apostolic identity (Luke 6:12-16; cf. Acts 1:12-17) and gave him authority. (MacArthur, 1 Peter MacArthur New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series), 2004, p. 266)

Yet, I believe MacArthur got it wrong at this point. Peter here does NOT say that he was a witness of the resurrected Christ, BUT of "His sufferings"! Now when you think of that time when Peter witnessed the sufferings of Christ, what comes to your mind? It would NOT be the cross (since Mark 14:27, 50 tells us that Peter deserted Christ prior to His crucifixion). Rather, that which Peter witnessed was the trial and abuse of Jesus! Recall what happened when Peter "witness... the sufferings of Christ."

=Matthew 26:57-58: "And those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. But Peter also was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome."- so while Christ was being tried before Caiaphas, Peter was brought into the courtyard (John 18:15-16) where he witnessed the trial. As it wrapped up with a guilty verdict, we read of the soldiers...

Matthew 26:67-68, "Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said, 'Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?'"

What a horrible scene! These soldiers are whaling on Christ with closed fists and then cruelly mocking Him, "*Who hit you? Prophecy now!*" And Peter witnessed it all!

And yet, there is more here. For in this midst of the trial and suffering of our Lord, what was Peter doing while he "witnessed Christ suffering"? We pick it up in Luke.

Luke 22:54-62, "And having arrested Him, they led Him *away*, and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. And after they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. And a certain servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight, and looking intently at him, said, 'This man was with Him too.' But he denied *it*, saying, 'Woman, I do not know Him.' And a little later, another saw him and said, 'You are *one* of them too!' But Peter said, 'Man,

I am not!’ And after about an hour had passed, another man *began* to insist, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.⁶ And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, ‘Before a cock crows today, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”

When Peter referenced this event in his exhortation to the elders, it is this scene that would have come to mind! Everyone knew of it! So, get this: As an elder, Peter began as a failure! Even after Christ rose, Peter continued to put his foot in his mouth! Do you recall what Paul wrote?

Galatians 2:11, “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”

Paul is NOT speaking hyperbolically here. Peter’s actions preached a false gospel of “salvation by works”! And so, Paul publicly rebuked him!

Now I’m sorry that in his life:

- Peter served as the spokesman of Satan such that Jesus said to him, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” (Matthew 16:23)
- Peter denied the Lord three times.
- Years later when the church was being built, Peter fell again such that “he stood condemned”!

BUT let me tell you something: I’m so thankful that God deigned to record Peter’s foibles- which clearly here Peter had no problem confessing!⁷ And so, though what Peter writes about the elder makes me at times want to run, hide, and never look back, NEVERTHELESS it was written NOT ONLY by a fellow elder, BUT a fellow sinner who in Christ’s darkest hour turned his back on his Lord!

Yet, who here doesn’t think that when Peter died Christ welcome him home with open arms saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21, 23)?!

How is this possible after so much unfaithfulness on Peter’s part? Because — and this is so important when it comes to any who would seek to serve the Lord- the ministry God honors is NOT perfect service, BUT the imperfect service of one who has been made perfect by the blood of Christ!⁸

And thus, what is the call of every elder, servant, parent, husband, wife, child, worker, etc.? It is NOT perfection, BUT faithfulness (cf. John 17:4)! As such, our goal should NOT be a perfect ministry, BUT a ministry that honors and glorifies Christ! This brings us to Peter’s fourth introductory statement that the call of an elder brings reward.

1 Peter 5:1, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed.”

You might be tempted to think that Peter here is talking about the Mount of Transfiguration where, you will recall, God lifted the veil to reveal a small glimpse of the glory of Christ (cf. Matthew 17:1–8; cf. 2 Peter 1:16–18). Yet if that was the reference, Peter here would NOT have spoken of a glory that “is to be revealed” BUT one that ‘HAD BEEN revealed.’ What Peter is talking about is the “glory” that he has referenced now many times in this epistle⁹- a glory that lies in front of us and yet is so certain that it is something Peter says he already had laid hold of!¹⁰ What is that glory? Speaking of our glorification on the last day, Peter wrote:

1 Peter 1:6-7, “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

On account of our God-centered theology it is natural to think that Peter here is talking about God. What is our purpose on this earth? God’s “praise, glory, and honor” (cf. Isaiah 43:6b-7)! What therefore must be the End/Telos of all service in Christ? As Peter wrote here, God’s “praise, glory, and honor”!

God is NOT the One referenced here! Consider that in vv. 3-5 & vv. 6-9, Peter is writing to encourage his persecuted brethren by which he describes that which awaits them in Christ. And so, in v. 4 Peter speaks of the “inheritance” that awaits us in Christ. Accordingly, the theme of this section is the pointing of God’s people to the future blessing that awaits them in glory! Secondly, Peter is talking about a specific event in Redemptive History, “the revelation of Jesus Christ”¹¹ (v. 7d) which throughout the Bible is a reference to the Last Judgment.¹² Now at the “revelation of Jesus Christ”/the Final Judgment, speaking of what constitutes a genuine child of God and hence the true Jew, Paul said this:

Romans 2:29, “But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

This is referencing one of the “rewards” promised to the child of God at the end of their life. There is a day in our future when we will stand before God and BE COMMENDED for that which God Himself gives, specifically our faith (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9)! Toward the end of the Parable of the Talents, Christ’s describes the Last Judgment speaking of the faithful:

Matthew 25:21, “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave [What is that, but commendation?!]; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy [the approbation/gladness] of your master.’”

Do you understand what awaits us in Christ at the Last Judgment? Commendation! On that day,

the Lord will verbally commend His servants- giving them “praise and glory and honor!” Wayne Grudem wrote speaking of Peter:

He does not specify whether this praise is the praise which God gives to his people on the last day (as in Romans 2:29; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Peter 5:4), or the praise which people give to God. It seems more likely that the initial thought is of praise which God gives to his people, since in this context Peter is encouraging his readers to hope in their heavenly reward (v. 4). Furthermore, it is the genuineness of faith which is here affirmed to be more precious (in God’s sight, apparently) than gold. But in this present age faith does not receive much outward or evident reward. Therefore it would appropriately receive a reward as an expression of God’s approval at the day of final judgment. (Grudem, 2009, p. 69)

Based upon all of this we conclude that the glory in which we partake involves God’s commendation! MacArthur wrote of this:

In an incredible reversal of roles to demonstrate the master’s pleasure at such readiness, Jesus says he proceeded to gird himself to serve the ones who served him and had them recline at the table as his equals as he waited on them. That is what Jesus Himself did for His beloved disciples (John 13:1–5; cf. Matthew 20:28; Luke 22:27) and will again do at the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven (Luke 13:28–30). (MacArthur, Luke 11-17 MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 2013, p. 160)

It is the knowledge of the certainty of this “glory” that impels the elder as he goes about his work. Yes, it is a difficult calling BUT it comes with a glorious reward! Knowing this is what alone impels the faithful elder in the vanity of his service.

Isaiah 49:4, “But I said, ‘I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity [so what was it that kept him going?]; yet surely the justice *due* to Me is with the Lord, and My reward with My God.’”

Such is the glorious assurance given to every minister in God’s Kingdom! And so, by way of introduction, we behold the opening words on the work and role of the under-shepherd. Herein we have God’s standards and so the calling of the elder- which ALWAYS will produce a sense of regret and foreboding that comes from knowing your failings as a servant of God. And so here with the elder.

1 Peter 5:1a, 2a, “Therefore [in light of the fact that the judgment that begins with the household of God begins with the elders] I exhort the elders among you... shepherd the flock of God among you...”

Again, how could any man in ministry read this and NOT want to run far away? But then — lest we despair — Christ quickly assures us of His grace and goodness which issues forth the glorious assurance that every minister who serves in and for Christ will receive “the unfading

crown of glory” (v. 4)! Though this may sound too good to be true, it is NOT! May it be this that impels us in our service of Christ in and through all times!!!

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End Note(s)

¹ Cf. Jeremiah 5:30-31... How is it that God’s people fell into such horrible sin just prior to the exile? God gives the answer, “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their *own* authority; and My people love it so!”

² “It is significant that Peter used the plural, elders. In reference to this ministry, the term always appears in the plural in the New Testament, affirming that the office was designed for a plurality of men.” (MacArthur, 1 Peter MacArthur New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series), 2004, p. 264)

³ Wayne Grudem wrote of this, “This lets the elders know that he thinks of himself as one of those with whom judgment will begin- even he, an apostle, is not exempt, nor should any among his readers think themselves too important or too sanctified to be exempt. Moreover, as he is about to encourage them to be ‘examples’ to the flock (v. 3), so he demonstrates in the next phrase how he himself is willing to be an example for those leaders to whom he writes.” (Grudem, 2009, p. 193)

⁴ “It is clear, then, that this is an inclusive term that, rather than stressing his authority, stresses his empathy with the elders in their task...” (Davids, 1990, p. 176)

⁵ “He does not say, ‘As an apostle, I command,’ but ‘As an elder, I exhort.’ It is always well to combine the *suaviter in modo* with the *fortiter in re*- that is, suavity in our method blended with strength in the thing itself. There are some who are very blustering in their style of speech, and there are others who, if they do not bluster, yet in the smallest matter always put forth their greatest force, or what they think to be so. They command and rebuke with all authority. Yet here is Peter, who certainly was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles, and he speaks, not by way of command, but, addressing the elders, he tenderly exhorts them. Oh, that we may always manifest such a meek and gentle spirit.” (Spurgeon, 2014)

⁶ Speaking of Peter, Spurgeon wrote, “But he could never forget that gaze of concentrated agony and pity when Jesus looked at him- not so much reproachfully, perhaps, as mournfully, feeling in His own soul the sorrow that He knew that Peter must before long feel. A spark from the torch of the Savior’s anguish set the heart of Peter ablaze, and he ‘went *Spurgeon Commentary: 1 Peter, 1 Pe 5:1*)

⁷ “Why does Peter recall this? Probably to demonstrate that restoration even from grievous sin is

possible with Christ (cf. Paul's similar use of his life as an example of restoration totally by grace, 1 Tim. 1:16), and thus to encourage in the elders a humble willingness to be penitent for sin rather than a hypocritical pride and an unwillingness ever to admit to doing wrong." (Grudem, 2009, p. 193)

⁸ It is this fact- our failures and foibles- which make for the best shepherds! Spurgeon made this observation, "I do not think that any man can be a really useful witness for Christ unless he is a 'sharer.' Can you go and talk to others about the bitterness of sin when you have never wept over it or repented of it yourself? Can you speak of the sweets of divine mercy of which you have never tasted? Will you magnify 'precious faith' (2 Pet 1:1) when you are yourself a stranger to the faith of God's elect?" (Spurgeon, 2014)

⁹ Cf. 1 Peter 1:7; 4:13; 5:4, 10.

¹⁰ "What is significant here is that he expects this so vividly that he considers himself already to be a 'partaker' of that glory. Knowing that he is faithful now, he already anticipates his participation in what is coming (cf. the anticipated joy of 1:6; 4:12). This should encourage his 'fellow-elders' to continue on the same road of witness and participation." (Davids, 1990, p. 177)

¹¹ Peter Davids wrote, "It is an apt phrase, for in the eyes of the NT Jesus already is exalted and already has power and already is present in his gathered church (e.g., Matt. 18:20); what remains is for that power and glory to be demonstrated openly on earth, that is, for it to be revealed or unveiled. That is the point of consummation toward which the church is moving." (Davids, 1990, p. 58)

¹² cf. 1 Corinthians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:13.