

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/15/93
I Peter 5:1-4 "Straight Talk to Church Leaders"

Intro: Leadership.

Q: What makes a leader? Talent? Not necessarily. Charisma? No.

Quote: Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, "The overriding need..."

We come to another timely text this morning. Our church annual elections will occur in a little over a month. Even now we are seeking qualified individuals to serve in leadership capacities in the church. And undoubtedly, with the calling of an Assistant Pastor in mind, the topic of leadership is relevant.

I've entitled our study this morning, "Straight Talk to Church Leaders." That's what the Bible gives us in I Peter 5:1-4.

Q: What does God expect of leaders in the church?

Proposition: In I Peter 5:1-4, the Bible offers straight talk to church leaders. The kind of church leader that pleases God must have a grip on 3 key issues.

I. The Leader's Relationship with Christ (1)

II. The Leader's Role (2-3)

A. The Task (2a)

B. The Tension (2b-3)

1. Proper Ambition

2. Proper Aspiration

3. Proper Approach

III. The Leader's Reward (4)

Let's set the stage for our study. I Peter is a marvelous letter. Peter wrote it to Christians living in Asia Minor. The theme of the book is How to live the Christian life in a Non-Christian world.

In ch 4, Peter talked about how to handle suffering. What should Christians do when they face opposition because of their faith? V 12, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial..." Why not? V 17 "For the time is come..."

Q: What's the connection between the topic of suffering in ch 4 and leadership in ch 5?

A: When the church faces tough times, what does it need? It needs leaders to guide it through the rough waters.

What kind of leaders?

Notice the first issue Peter addresses...

I. The Leader's Relationship with Christ (1)

V 1 "The elders who are among you I exhort..."

Q: What does Peter mean by "elder"?

The NT uses 3 different terms to refer to the same church official.

1. Elder (I Pt 5; Tit 1)--refers to the dignity of the office
2. Bishop/Overseer (I Tim 3)--refers to its function (to oversee)
3. Pastor (Eph 4)--refers to the giftedness needed (a shepherd)

In v 1, Peter uses the term the first term "elder" ("presbuteros"). An elder is a leader in a local congregation. By definition, it refers to an older man, someone recognized to have wisdom. It has a Jewish background. In many ways, the early church patterned its structure after the Jewish synagogue. A Jewish synagogue had elders. They were responsible for leadership and even discipline of the members.

In v 2, Peter uses the term "oversight." It come from the term "episkapos" (Paul uses in I Tim 3:1, "bishop, overseer"). It has a Greek background.

In v 2, Peter speaks of "feeding the flock." That's the root used in the term "Pastor."

It's to the elders, the church leaders that Peter is talking here, those responsible for the spiritual direction of local congregations in Asia Minor.

V 1 "The elders who are among you I exhort..."

Q: What does it take to be a church leader?

A: First and foremost--A Vibrant relationship with Christ.

I find it interesting how Peter refers to himself in v 1. In his life, he had been a lot of things: a fisherman, an Apostle, a church leader, and even a writer. But notice the credentials he lists about himself here (he doesn't call himself a "pope!"):

1. A Fellow Elder
2. A Witness of the Sufferings of Christ
3. A Partaker of the Glory

When speaking to leaders, Peter highlighted his relationship with Christ.

I want you to notice the connection between suffering and glory. Peter saw Christ suffer. He saw the agony firsthand. He was also privileged to see a foretaste of Christ's brilliant glory. When? On the Mount of Transfiguration. First the suffering, then the glory. It was true for Christ. It's true for followers of Christ.

You say, "What does all that have to do with being a leader?"

Listen. If I am to be a leader that pleases God, I must be a person who walks with God. I must have a grip on my relationship with Christ. Do you know why?

Key: I can't give someone else what I don't have.

Illust:

Peter was a leader. Now don't get me wrong. He blew his share of times. But the bottom line was this. He knew Christ. Christ was real to him. He had a handle on the sufferings of Christ, and on His glory.

Application: If I don't have a vibrant, growing, fruitful relationship with Christ, I can't lead others into the green pastures of fellowship with Christ.

As has been said before, "I must never be so preoccupied with the work that God is doing THROUGH me that I miss the work He wants to do IN me."

Challenge: Do you know what kind of people churches need in leadership positions? People with lots of ability? No. People with a vibrant, contagious relationship with Christ.

Tran: It starts with Relationship. Secondly...

II. The Leader's Role (2-3)

Q: What kind of job description does Peter give for a church leader?

If you'll notice, it's very general. There's more emphasis on CHARACTER than on performance. In fact, this passage (along with I Tim 3 & Tit 1) says very little about what leaders are to DO, but a whole lot about what they are to BE.

Notice Peter's exhortation.

V 2 "Feed the flock of God which is among you"

Q: What image does Peter use to depict the role of the elder?

Pastors are Shepherds. The KJV translates, "Feed the flock of God." That's good, but it's too narrow. The verb actually means "to act as a shepherd." The NASB puts it this way, "Shepherd the flock." Church leaders are shepherds.

Q: What do shepherds do?

They feed the sheep when they're hungry. They lead the sheep when they need direction. They protect the sheep when they're in danger. They calm the sheep when they're frightened. And they mend the sheep when they're hurt.

No doubt Peter has in mind a conversation he had with Jesus.

READ Jn 21:15-17 "...Feed my sheep."

An effective church leader sees himself in light of this Role. So do effective congregations. The pastor is a shepherd. Let that sink in. Pastors are not CEO's. Pastors are not bosses. Pastors are not foremen. We need to throw out the IBM executive image when we think of church leaders. In the church, a leader has the role of a shepherd.

Now the leaders role involves 2 components.

A. The Task (2a)

V 2 "Feed the flock of God which is among you"

Lit. the phrase means "Shepherd the among you flock of God." That's important. It means that a leader is responsible for his people. He's not a hireling. He's a shepherd. He's loyal to his flock.

But it also indicates that it's not really HIS flock. Whose is it? It's God's flock!

Every once in awhile I'll be talking with someone in the community, and be asked, "Is that YOUR church that's across from the Post Office?" I know what they mean. In the sense of responsibility, I could say yes, but to be totally accurate I would have to say, "No, that's not my church. I don't own the flock. That church, just like every other church, belongs to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ."

That fact should cause every leader in this church to think twice. This is God's flock. God has given us the awesome task to take care of His Church. No wonder James said in 3:1, "My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment."

Challenge: Every church leader must view himself as a Shepherd.

Illust: We used to have a Border Collie dog named Andy. He had a shepherding instinct that wouldn't quit. It could be pouring down rain, and he'd be out there in the muddy pasture, drenched, watching the animals. He was loyal to his task. He'd rather guard the animals than eat!

So it must be for church leaders. Our task is to shepherd the flock. Jer 3:15 "And I will give you shepherds according to mine heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

Here's what Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus. Acts 20:28 "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseer (episkopos), to feed (shepherd) the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood."

That's our task. Now, that's not an easy assignment. Why not?

B. The Tension (2b-3)

V 2 "taking the oversight of it..."

Here's the tension. Shepherds are both "among you" and "over you."

Quote: Wiersbe, "You will notice that the shepherd is both 'among' and 'over,' and this can create problems if the sheep do not understand. Because he is one of the sheep, the pastor is 'among' the members of the flock. But because he is called to be a leader, the pastor is 'over' the flock. Some people try to emphasize the 'among' relationship and refuse to follow the authority of the shepherd. Others want to put the pastor on a pedestal and make him a 'super saitr' who never mixes with the people." (429)

Q: What will it take to keep this tension in proper balance? Notice 3 contrasts.

1. Proper Ambition

V "not by constraint, but willingly"

The word "constraint" means "necessarily." Not by compulsion. We must never twist people's arms into serving in the church.

Rather we ought to serve "willingly." Voluntarily.

I want to be very frank with you. The ministry would be a great place to be lazy. A pastor sets his own schedule. He could easily "borrow" sermons from other preachers and use them as his own. In fact, pulpits today are filled with men who have the gift of gab, who are abusing their calling, and apparently getting away with it.

But God has a pretty sobering critique of the self-seeking leaders in Jer 23:1-2.

Jer 23:1-2 "Woe be unto the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture saith the Lord. Therefore, thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds..."

Illust:

2. *Proper Aspiration*

V 2 "not for filthy lucre (eagerness for base gain), but of a ready mind"

In Peter's day, much like ours, the elders of churches took care of financial matters. But unlike us, they didn't have banks in which to deposit the offerings. It would be pretty easy to be like Judas, who lined his pocket by taking from the money bag. An elder could dip his hand in the benevolent offering, and take money that was intended for the poor.

There's no place for greed in ministry. Peter says, "Don't be a leader because of filthy lucre, but because of a ready, an eager mind."

Ezek 34:2 "...Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds: Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

Challenge: I want to ask a question to those here aspiring to be a leader.

Q: What's your motive?

Quote: Eugene Peterson, p. 1

3. *Proper Approach*

V 3 "Neither as being lords over God's heritage..."

"being lords over" = to exercise dominion over; to lord it over

Have you ever been in a service where a speaker browbeat you? Have you ever got the feeling that a preacher was talking down at you?

That's heartbreaking.

Illust: When in Seminary, I pulpit-supplied at a church like that--Edmore

We're not to lead by lording it over. We're to lead by being what?

"examples" = a stamp or impression made by a die

Listen. You don't drive sheep. You lead them. The Eastern shepherd goes before his flock and beckons them to follow in his steps.

No doubt Peter remembered a conversation Jesus had with His disciples many years earlier. Turn to Mt 20. James and John's mother came to Jesus with a request. She wanted her sons to sit on thrones next to Jesus in the kingdom (she was a political lobbyist!). That really ticked off the other disciples. Listen to how Jesus responded...

READ Mt 20:25-28 "Ye know that the princes...exercise dominion..."

What's the point? In the world, the way to the top is by might. You scratch and claw and manipulate to accomplish your agenda. The world views you as an effective leader if you can pull strings and get things done. But for Christians, it's just the opposite. Jesus is our Pattern. The way to the top is to become a servant.

Quote: "It has been well said that the church needs leaders who serve, and servants who lead." (Wiersbe, 430)

Illust:

Objection: "It's hard to be that kind of a leader! Is it worth it?"
It's worth it once you get a handle on the third issue.

Tran: The church leader that pleases God is the one that has a handle on his Relationship with Christ, has a handle on his Role as a shepherd, and...

III. The Leader's Reward (4)

V 4 "And when the Chief Shepherd..."

In the Bible, Christ is called the True Shepherd (Ezek 34:11-16), and the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11, 14), and the Great Shepherd (Heb 13:20). But what does Peter call Christ here? The Chief Shepherd.

Church leaders are under-shepherds. The flock belongs to the One who gave His life for it.

Q: Do you know what is the right motive for serving as a leader?

There's only one right answer. A leader's aim must not be to please his people. That will be impossible. And his aim certainly must not be to please himself. A leader that pleases God has but one consuming aim. What is it?

To please the Chief Shepherd.

Q: What will happen for those who please Him?

V 4 "ye shall receive a crown of glory..."

There's the leader's reward. In Peter's day, there were several kinds of crowns. Often, a crown was either a garland or a wreath made of leaves or of gold.

It was nice, but eventually it disintegrated.

How about our reward?

"a crown of glory that fades not away"

Challenge:

To leaders...

Q: Are you fulfilling your God-given role?

To would be leaders...

Q: Do you have a handle on the seriousness of your calling?

To the congregation...

Q: Do you expect of your leaders what God expects?