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Living as Exiles in a Hostile World– The Epistle of 1 Peter

Part 32 –Life in Christ's Exiled Flock

April 9, 2017

Sermon Text: 1 Peter5

Scripture Reading: Psalm 23

Peter closes his first letter to the elect exiles with a sobering, serious-minded caution to both the shepherds and the flock of Christ. In exile, Christ's church is much like a flock of sheep in enemy territory where wolves and lions are on the prowl, and therefore we must not be careless.

He begins with instructions to Christ's undershepherds – the elders of the church – and then moves on to the flock. Then he winds up with a very clear and serious statement of why shepherds and flock must be on guard and in unity. This is how life in the church is supposed to be.

1Pe 5:1-14 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: (2) shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; (3) not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (4) And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

(5) Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (6) Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, (7)

casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

(8) Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (9) Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (10) And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

(11) To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (12) By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. (13) She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. (14) Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Suffering, then Glory

Have you noticed how frequently Peter speaks in this letter of *suffering* and then of *the glory to be revealed*? It's a common theme and we do well to pay attention to it. He mentions it in verse 1 (a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed), and again in verse 10-

(10) And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

And we have seen the same theme throughout this letter. Peter's eyes are focused upon the Day Christ returns and as we do the same, this present life in which the Christian suffers is kept in proper perspective – *a little while*.

We do not just suffer persecution because we belong to Christ, but we also suffer from the lingering effects of the curse. Our bodies grow old and "corrupt" as Scripture puts it. We are subject to disease. We are faced with death and dying. The remedy? *Christ is coming. Think of the glory that is going to be ours. Think of the New Earth and your new, IN-corruptible resurrection body*. This is how we overcome the world, believing the promises of Christ to us.

Joh 14:1-3"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe

also in me.(2)In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?(3)And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

So there is number one. Keep it in perspective. Suffering for now, for a little while, then glory forever.

Marching Orders for Elders

Listen once more then as Peter gives instruction to the elders of the church –

1Pe 5:1-4 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: (2) shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; (3) not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (4) And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Who is Peter talking to here? That is to say, who are the elders? He says that he himself is one of them – a fellow elder. He also reminds them that he certainly knows what he is talking about:

- He was with Christ and saw His sufferings
- He also saw Christ resurrected

Here then is someone who makes this incredible claim. Namely that not only did he see Christ crucified and buried, but that he saw Christ raised from the dead:

Joh 21:13-19 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. (14) This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. (15) When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."(16) He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."(17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.(18)Truly, truly, I say to

you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go."(19) (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

Understand? This is the kind of thing that we read in the Bible repeatedly. Eyewitness accounts – in this case Peter's account of the death and resurrection of Christ. Peter *saw Christ*. And Jesus was no ghostly apparition – He ate fish!

He says something very similar in his second letter –

2Pe 1:16-18 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (17) For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," (18) we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

He is obviously talking about what happened at the transfiguration of Christ. Peter says he was there. He saw it and he heard it –

Mat 17:1-6 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. (2) And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (3) And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. (4) And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." (5) He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." (6) When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.

Once again then we are faced with a decision. Either the Bible is full of lies and fiction and myths – that is to say, either Peter is lying about all this – OR it is true and the Bible really is God speaking to us. It is no mere "good book."

So Peter says he has seen with his own eyes a glimpse of "the glory

that is to be revealed." He has seen Christ's deity bursting out in blinding light. He has seen and talked to Christ after he rose from the dead. And he is telling us this to emphasize that we can believe what he is telling us.

"So I exhort the elders among you…".

Notice that Peter visualizes a local Christian church as consisting of "elders" and "those who are younger." Of course the term "elder" is used in the Bible as a formal term for a particular office of the church – very similar to "pastor." Elders "shepherd the flock of God." They are to feed (teach) and care for Christ's sheep (His people). Peter was very mindful of this duty as Christ Himself appointed Peter to it, as we just read in John 21.

But by "elder" and "younger" I think that Peter is also thinking of Christians who have been following Christ longer and those who have not been Christians very long (younger). Normally that would play out in chronologically older Christians watching out for the younger ones in the church. Normally.

But in our day, sadly, young people do not often have the privilege and benefit of being taught and protected by a wiser, older generation of Christians. In fact it has been my experience in churches today that churches have to be led by younger Christians who are subject to all kinds of pitfalls. Why? Because there just wasn't an older, godly, mature generation for them to look to.But really, it should be the older believers who serve as elders. This is a huge void in today's churches.

Alright then, what is a pastor or elder's calling? How is he to go about caring for Christ's flock? Peter says:

- Shepherd the flock
- Exercise oversight
- Not under compulsion, but willingly
- Not for shameful gain, but eagerly
- Not domineering over them
- Being an example to the flock
- Looking for their reward to come from Christ when He returns

False church leaders abound. And what characterizes them? *Abuse of authority and greed,* not to mention of false teaching they dish out. They are in it for money and

self-glory. They are not an example of Christ to their flock and they look for their reward *now*.

Christ's true shepherds really do serve at Christ's calling. They are to be respected and even emulated. But they love Christ and they love His people just as a true shepherd loves and cares for his sheep. They are rare today.

Humility for All

1Pe 5:5-6 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (6) Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

This is how Christ commands that His church be structured then. Shepherded by elders/pastors, the younger in the faith permitting themselves to be shepherded. It is a foolish sheep that decides it is going to go it alone, doesn't need the flock or a shepherd, and heads out into the wilderness.

Notice however the overarching climate and attitude – *humility*. Toward one another and toward God.

You know, it doesn't take very long to spot pride and arrogance. In every church I have been in it wasn't too long before the prideful ones were evident. They want power and control. They are there to get for themselves. But what a great place to be when a church really consists of leaders and members who know Christ genuinely, love one another, and are characterized by *humility*.

NOTE: This humility is possible ONLY because we look to the Lord for our reward – *so that at the proper time he may exalt you.*People who want their glory NOW, are not humble people. People who want their glory now are like the ungrateful Prodigal son who demanded his inheritance *now.And God is opposed to the proud!* Think about that. So many, many people who pretend to be "servants" but who are actually looking to be worshipped themselves – *God is set against them*.

Does Anyone Care?

Do not miss this remarkable promise:

Casting all your anxieties on him, because He cares for you.

If you live your life for very long at all, you are going to experience *anxieties. Cares. Worries. Trouble.* Ultimately, what do you do with these cares? You lose your job. You lose a loved one to death. You find out you are sick. Your friend deserts you.

How many people eventually ask the question – *does anyone care about me?* Well here is the remarkable answer – *The almighty Creator of the universe, this God who sustains every atom and molecule, who powers all the suns of every galaxy, who is infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present, cares for YOU.*This is why the Bible speaks in terms of God as our Father and the Christian as the Father's child.

And this is why Christ came into this world to die for our sins – so that people who were once estranged from God, without hope, could be brought near to Him, adopted as His children, and *come to know him and be known by Him*.

Think about this one small yet powerful statement very carefully this week. This is *God*!

He cares for you.

Finally – Why this is all Necessary

We are going to have to look more closely at these verses in two weeks (next Sunday being Easter), but let's make just a few comments about them now.

Why do Christ's people need shepherds? Why do we come together in local churches (flocks). Here is a very large part of the answer-

1Pe 5:8-11 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

(9) Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

(10) And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (11) To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

We have an enemy. An adversary. He is real. And he is on the prowl.

He is looking for sheep that wander. What is his goal? *Devouring*. Destroying.

Think about it. If you went to, let's say, Africa to hunt lions, what kind of preparations would you make? Many such hunters don't take a long-range rifle with a high-power scope, but choose instead a very large caliber rifle, often with double barrels – the .400, .500, .600 and .700 nitro express class. Why? Because they know what a lion is and what it is capable of.

YOU have an adversary who is on the prowl. *Be sober-minded, be watchful*. He is crafty. He has an arsenal of tactics to use against you. His goal is not to just kill your body, but to draw you away from Christ, the Good Shepherd, and he does this through lies and deceptions. We need the Lord's truth to counter Him, and we need one another as well.