

Sermon – 1 Peter 5 – Leroy Coote 9th May 2021

Do you need any furniture? Do you need any crockery? Do you need any electrical appliances such as a washing machine? Do you need a hand moving your stuff to your new place? Have you got enough clothes including ... a set of clean underwear for everyday of the week? Can you afford this? Are you ready for this big step? Please keep in touch and come back for dinner once a week even if it is with your washing? You are welcome back if things don't work out.

These are but some of the questions and pearls of wisdom, and I'm sure that there are more, that parents ask or tell their children when they move out of home. They feel like a set of last instructions, don't they? In our bible reading from 1 Peter today, there is a sense that there are some final instructions for the churches that he is writing to. Given that, at this stage, Peter is approaching the end of his life, the advice that is given is the last piece of advice that he gives the church that he is writing to. Peter addresses his advice to the church in his letter, specifically and then generally. He starts by addressing the elders of the church first. The reason that he does this is because they are the main ones who are going to be carrying on the work that Peter started. He addresses then from a position of being in the same place as them. This is spelt out in the first part of verse 1 when he says, "*To the elders among you, I appeal to you as a fellow elder.*" Peter identifies with them as an elder of the church. Why is that? It is because Jesus himself has passed down the eldership of the church to the 11 disciples which Peter was one. So, therefore, Peter identifies as an elected leader of a church just like the elders of the church that he is writing to.

This leads me to ask – what is an elder? Elders are leaders of the church chosen by God to lead the church. What then, are the qualifications of an elder? Whilst there are great descriptions in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 2, what would be a prudent thing to do is look at how 1 Peter deals with this subject. In 1 Peter 1:1 – that person is elected by God through the sanctifying work of the Spirit for obedience to God. In 1 Peter 1:3 – They have been given new birth into a living hope. In 1 Peter 1:15 – in response to being given new birth, they are called to be holy like God in all they do. In 1 Peter 1:22 – they love others from the heart. In 1 Peter 2 – They are submissive to the authorities under God. In 1 Peter 3 – If married, they are married to someone of the opposite gender. In 1 Peter 4 – they live for God and do this while withstanding suffering. While the book itself doesn't say that these are qualifications for elders, they are consistent with the content of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2. I wonder: Do our church leaders match up to these qualities?

But this is not the only position from which Peter speaks to the elders. This is found in the rest of verse 1 which says, "*A witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed.*" Peter speaks to them as a witness to Christ's suffering because he saw Jesus die on the cross. He was also a witness to the persecutions Christ experienced during his earthly ministry, not to mention the trouble he caused Jesus in relation to the subject of denial. So Peter speaks to them from a significant position of credibility...but also he speaks to them as someone who shares a common goal. That common goal is someone who will share in the glory to be revealed – the glory to be revealed in the return of Christ which all those who are chosen by God will partake in... and that is something I'm sure all believers in Christ are looking forward to. So Peter identifies with the elders of the church in a very significant way as he is walking with them as one of them. In light of the commonality he shares with the elders, what are his instructions to them?

These instructions start in verse 2 when he says, *“Be shepherds of God’s flock ...”* Sounds pretty generic at this point but then Peter gets more specific when he says, *“... that is under your care ...”*. Remember, right at the start of 1 Peter we were told that Peter is writing *“To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,”* This means that he is writing to a number of churches and each church has a group of elders. This, therefore, is why Peter is very specific to the elders that they are to be shepherds of the flock under their specific care because you can’t be a shepherd of multiple flocks according to this. This is a good principle for the church of the future. What then are the elders to do with the specific flock that God has placed under their care? Willingly watch over them and being eager to serve them.

Listen to what the rest of verse 2 says, *“... 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;”* The elders are to watch over their specific flock because they are willing – in other words – it is a “want to” task and not a “have to” task. And it needs to be a “want to” task because the elders need to be eager to serve but also qualified based on the criteria spelt out earlier. What else must the elder do apart from eagerly shepherding or leading the flock? Be an example to the flock and not lord it over them. Holy living, which is a very strong theme through the book of 1 Peter, is the example that the elders are to set for the flock that they are in charge of. This is not an easy task as elders are being watched all the time and their example, more than their words, is being watched. In saying that, what is laid out in the first three verses of Chapter 5 of 1 Peter is the true foundation of the church – biblically sound leadership equipped by God that wants to set a biblical example for its people.

This is passed on to the congregation who, in turn, engage with the world around them in order to lead other people to Christ and live holy lives pleasing to God. If that is kept up, it appears that there is great reward in the end. Look at verse 4 with me, *“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”* The unfading crown of glory will be what is awaiting the elder of the church when Jesus returns to take His people with them. And that is a prize that is worth having one eye on as we serve our Lord. However, Peter changes tack and points away from the elders towards another group – young people. Listen to what verse 5 says, *“In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders.”* It is interesting that there is only one sentence to those who are younger. However, it is a very important sentence that reiterates a concept that was mentioned quite a bit in the book – submission. It means submission to all whilst living a holy life. Therefore, why is submission to the elders important for those who are younger? It is because the example that the elders set can be passed on to the next generation. Implicitly, this is discipleship and this is also mission because the word of God and therefore, holy living is passed on.

This, then, emphasises an important role of the elder – to pass on the faith. This means that all leaders of groups in our parish are to pass on the word of God because Scripture, and therefore the church, says so. May we have elders who pass on the word of God. So far, Peter has spoken to the elders and those who are younger. He now goes onto speak to all. He speaks to all extensively from the second part of verse 5 to verse 11 which is the biggest section of the letter in terms of speaking directly to a group. The first aspect he speaks about to the readers of 1 Peter is humility. He starts by encouraging the people he is writing to in 1 Peter to clothe yourselves with humility toward one another. Being humble towards one another is placing others as more important than yourself. So, as God’s people, we are to treat others in the

church community as more important than ourselves. That doesn't mean we should treat ourselves as least important because we are all of equal importance in the eyes of God.

But why should we do that? Because at the end of verse 5, *"God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble."* The focus of the proud is that they are focussed on themselves as more important than anybody else. However, the humble think of others and God as more important than themselves. I ask you this, which type of behaviour is the more heavenly? Before you answer that from your own mind, the next verse in the passage gives us the right answer. Listen to what verse 6 says, *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."* We are called to humble ourselves before God's mighty hand and he may lift you up in due time. This means that we put God above all else in our lives if we have truly humbled ourselves before God, and if we do, then he will lift you up when the Lord calls us to be with Him. In a way, this is God showing us His model of motherhood because more often than not, mothers put their children of higher importance than anyone else.

On Thursday night, I read a wonderful example of humility from the newly elected Archbishop of Sydney – Kanishka Raffel. He said this, *"You have elected a weak servant, and you too, are but weak servants. But we have a mighty saviour – full of grace, sovereign, sufficient, supreme; having the supremacy in all things so that through him God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through his blood shed on the cross."* That my friends is humility – but also focussed humility in that there is no desire to stray from relying on and trusting God. That's what we should do in humility – draw strength from the grace of God to strengthen our walk with God. We should do the same with our anxiety. Listen to what verse 7 says, *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* This also comes under the category of humility because when we are anxious, we need to cast our anxiety on him because he cares for us. It is important that we submit our concerns as well as ourselves before the Lord because the Lord wants us in the best shape possible to live out the grace that He has given us.

So, dear friends, we need to humble ourselves before the Lord if we are genuine believers in Christ. Why? Because the devil is prowling around our lives trying to take us away from our living hope. But he does this much like a lion stalking his prey. The lion does this stealthily to the point that he sneaks up on its prey and before you know it – the lion has devoured its prey. But not only do we need humility – we need to be alert and of sober mind as mentioned at the beginning of verse 8. Why? Because the devil is looking for someone to devour which effectively means take them away from their heavenly inheritance. What are we to do with this prowler? Verse 9 tells us that we need to resist the devil and we do that by standing firm in the faith which is effectively being humble before God, which means placing God before anything else. The reason why that works is that when God is first, his protection is unbreakable against the devil. This means the inheritance we accepted from God that Jesus gave us through his death and resurrection is preserved. Our need to resist according to Peter is not just foreign to the church he is writing to. Why? Because he mentions that at the end of verse 9 that there are believers around the world who are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. These sufferings were not just an internal battle with the devil but also contained physical persecution to turn away from following Christ. The churches Peter is writing to are undergoing the same sufferings as the rest of the world.

Not much has changed because Christians are suffering in the world today and you could say that some of our COVID rules are causing us to suffer for the gospel as well. Despite these COVID rules, we are called by the word of God to be obedient to the laws of the land. But there is a reward for hanging on and that is found in verse 10 when we will be called to His eternal

glory in Christ after we have suffered for a little while. If there was a Christian reality check, then here it is. So therefore, we need to be humbled before each other and before God. We need to resist the devil and put up with the sufferings until we are taken to be with Jesus. This my friends and the rest of the letter according to Peter is the true grace of God and we are to stand fast in it. This means that our lives are an expression of the grace of God because of the gracious gift God has provided us in our salvation. This is the message for the world today and the message for our time. Humbly stand fast in the grace of God and we will be in Christ and have peace with God until He returns to take us to be with Him. 1 Peter is a letter for our time. It sounds like good wholesome motherly advice. But it is more than that. Why? Because it spells out the foundation for the local church for the 21st Century and his post-COVID era. It is anchored in God's grace and challenges us to live holy lives in all aspects of our lives. I pray that you have been blessed through this series on 1 Peter and I pray that we will be solely reliant on God's grace and Spirit to live our lives the holy way people gifted with God's salvation should.