

Elders: Shepherding God's Flock

Sermon Summary • 1 Peter 5:1–5

Overview

Peter calls elders to shepherd God's flock, following the example of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. Eldership is not primarily about position or authority. It is about loving, serving, protecting and leading God's people.

The sermon develops this under three main headings: the calling of the elder, the cost of eldership, and the crown of elders.

1. The Calling of the Elder

The biblical picture of leadership is shepherding. This imagery runs throughout Scripture. Jacob, Moses and David were shepherds, God is portrayed as Israel's shepherd, and Psalm 23 declares, "The Lord is my shepherd." Jesus then identifies himself as the Good Shepherd.

Therefore, elders are under-shepherds, caring for a flock which ultimately belongs to Jesus.

- **Heart: willingly, not merely from obligation.** An elder's fundamental motivation should be love for Jesus which produces genuine love for God's people. Duty alone is not enough.
- **Motivation: eager to serve, not seeking personal gain.** Jesus contrasts the shepherd with the hired hand. The hired hand runs when danger comes because the sheep are merely a means to an end. The true shepherd cares about what happens to them.
- **Method: leading by example, not lording authority over people.** Peter himself models this by addressing the elders as a "fellow elder", despite his apostolic authority. Christian leadership is exercised through service, example and discipleship rather than domination.

This is the pattern seen in Jesus and also in Paul, who could tell Christians to imitate him because his life was intended to demonstrate what following Christ looked like.

2. The Cost of Eldership

Peter describes himself as "a witness of Christ's sufferings". The sermon argues that this is significant because suffering is part of shepherding.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down his life for his sheep. Elders likewise should expect leadership to involve sacrifice, opposition, spiritual attack and personal cost.

Christian leadership therefore is not simply receiving authority or recognition. It means being prepared to lay yourself down for the good of the flock.

Peter himself makes this especially powerful because he was not a flawless example. When Jesus suffered, Peter failed badly, denying Jesus three times.

3. The Crown of Elders

Peter's failure leads into the sermon's final emphasis: grace and restoration. Jesus knew Peter would fail, yet told him that when he had turned back, he was to strengthen his brothers.

Peter's experience of failure and restoration prepared him to minister God's grace to others. After the resurrection, Jesus restores Peter and commissions him to feed and shepherd his sheep. Peter had first experienced Jesus as his shepherd before being called to shepherd others.

Peter promises that when the Chief Shepherd appears, faithful elders will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. The suffering and sacrifice involved in Christian leadership are temporary. The ultimate reward comes from Christ.

Main Idea

An elder is an under-shepherd who follows the example of Jesus, loving God's people, serving them sacrificially, leading them by example and looking ultimately to Christ for his reward.

There is also a strong secondary application to fathers: just as an elder shepherds the church, a father is called to lead, guide, care for and protect his family.

Sermon Structure at a Glance

The Calling

- Love the sheep
- Serve willingly
- Seek their good, not personal gain
- Lead through example rather than domination

The Cost

- Shepherding involves sacrifice
- Christian leadership brings suffering and spiritual opposition
- The shepherd follows Jesus in laying himself down for the sheep

The Crown

- Elders are imperfect and dependent upon grace
- Jesus restores failed shepherds
- Faithful service ultimately receives its reward from the Chief Shepherd

The thread tying the whole sermon together is Jesus the Shepherd: elders can shepherd God's people only because they themselves have first been shepherded, rescued and restored by Christ.