

“WHEN THE CHIEF SHEPHERD APPEARS”

1 Peter 5:1–4

Key Verse: 5:4

“And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

What keeps you going? For most of us, it’s hoping for a good outcome. After serving, we’d all like some personal benefit, recognition, or at least to see that it was meaningful. And usually hard work pays off. But in the work of caring for people, things can seem useless. We might feel used, unappreciated, or like it all turned into nothing. In this last lesson of our Shepherding Series we look at Peter’s words to elders. Some may think, “Wait, isn’t this addressed to *elders*? Why do we *all* have to hear it?” But his words speak to every believer. And in the Bible, Peter’s words here may be the most direct: shepherding requires a *willing* spirit, the *purest* of motives, and setting the example of Jesus. These unseen things are just as important as the work itself. Why do it? Peter says, “And when the chief Shepherd appears...” This was Peter’s hope, and it’s the hope of every believer. This hope shapes all we do. How does it keep us going, and our spirit and motives healthy? May God speak to us through his word.

What is the context? Peter is writing to “elect exiles of the Dispersion” scattered to places in modern Turkey (1:1; see map). They’ve been uprooted, pushed out, and they’re really suffering.¹ Peter says they face not only outward persecution but also the passions of the flesh warring against their souls (2:11). So far Peter has addressed the servants (2:18), the wives (3:1) and the husbands (3:7). Now it’s “the elders among you” (5:1). Regardless of their role or the challenges they face, each group can find their way through faith in Christ.

Look at verse 1. Peter starts with the word “exhort.” He means, “I urge you,” or even, “*I beg you*.” Then he says, “as a fellow elder.” He’s not thinking of them as inferiors or opponents, but as his brothers. He adds that he’s a fellow “witness,” or “martyr.” Facing persecution, Peter is ready to die for Christ, as they are. He hopes to “partake” in the glory that’s going to be revealed, as they do. But this is not just a humble appeal. By mentioning the sufferings of Christ and

¹ In this letter the word “suffer” is repeated 17 times, more than any other book in the Bible.

the glory to be revealed, Peter is making this as solemn and serious as he can. Then he says it bluntly: "...shepherd the flock of God that is among you..." (2a). By placing this direction at the end of his letter, Peter is making it most important. He's telling them, and us today, to shepherd the people around us as our first priority. We all have so many things to do: our studies, our jobs, maintaining the basic elements of our lives, and our family duties. But in a world that's hostile to the gospel Peter urges us to stay focused on shepherding the flock of God. This charge is not only for elders but for all of us because of the new identity we all have in Christ. Peter wrote in 2:9, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." As a royal priesthood in Christ, we're all his priests, his shepherds. Every one of us is called to proclaim to people around us the grace of God in our lives.

Here, "shepherd" is not a title but a *verb*; it's not a position but *action*. What does a shepherd of people do? First, since the flock is "among you," to shepherd simply means to "be with" our people. We may be shy and prefer to be alone. But we shouldn't hide. To shepherd our people, we've got to be present with them. Who is *my* flock that God assigned to *me*? A working parent comes home to a spouse, and little ones or teenagers. They are our personal flock. "The flock of God that is among you" also means those who gather with us in the name of Jesus, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Ultimately, "the flock of God" means all the people in our mission field. Whether they are not yet Christians, brand new believers, struggling Christians, or faithful coworkers, to shepherd people, we first need to see them as "the flock of God" among us. God sends them (John 17:6), and we have to accept them as they are. We need to open our eyes to see "the flock of God" all around us. Without Jesus, people are perishing without the living hope. Why must a shepherd be "among" the flock? Is it for our human ambition? No, it's because of the compassion of Jesus our Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep (John 10:11). To be among them requires real humility and self-sacrifice.

But what does it mean to "shepherd" people? There are many good ideas about it, but maybe we should listen to the chief Shepherd. He said, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones...What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?...So it is not

the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matt. 18:10–14). Leave everything to go after one? *Really?* Honestly, we may think, “That person doesn't fit into my strategy. Her problems are not my problems.” That's trying to do God's work like a business, not as a shepherd. Even one person that God brings to us is “the flock of God.” Why? Because each person is God's creation, made in his image. As the flock of God, God cares for each one. In shepherding, our Lord Jesus is telling us that one person is most important. God wants each one to have a good shepherd. When a totally lost person meets a good shepherd, that person changes. But being with needy and flawed people is hard. We have to get to know them. We need to be asking good questions and listening carefully and patiently. We need to get genuinely interested in their welfare. As we learn about their brokenness and sins, we shouldn't try to escape; we need to stay with them and keep pointing them to Jesus. To shepherd people, we need to bear with them in love. And to truly shepherd them, we've got to pray for them, and for ourselves.

Peter adds the words, “exercising oversight.” It means to keep watching over people, checking in regularly. Shepherds of animals need to carefully check on each one daily. Likewise, to shepherd people we need to pray for them daily, find what word of God can best help them, feed them a healthy spiritual diet, and help them obey it. People need reminding to live in the presence of Jesus, to rely on him daily, to “come to him” (2:4a) for his mercy and forgiveness, for wisdom, direction and guidance. People need reminding to trust in Jesus in the midst of all life's problems and challenges. We also need oversight to protect God's flock in our care from evil and from going in the wrong direction. It means not dropping the ball or being negligent, but diligently, faithfully guiding—sometimes gently, sometimes alongside them, and sometimes, strongly. Sometimes it means crying to God in our prayers, and even becoming sleep-deprived.

To really shepherd God's flock is never safe; it's risky. Yes, it often leads to being used, abused and accused, as Jesus was. And often it means having our hearts broken. But we have no luxury of pulling out. The needs and dangers of God's flock constantly keep coming. Shepherding means living an unselfish life, focused on Jesus and others. It's how we share Christ's sufferings practically each day. The only way to sustain such a life is to stay close to Jesus and our living hope in him.

How else should we shepherd? Peter says, "...not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly..." (2b) Shepherding people tests our character and our motives, things that only God sees (1 Cor.4:5). Who volunteers for *this*? Who's eager to *lose* for the sake of shepherding? It's not enough to go through the motions; God wants us "willing" and "eager." The word "eagerly" means "with brisk and cheerful readiness." "Brisk" and "cheerful"? This is shepherding people not with human strength and ability but with a new heart and a fresh spirit. It's the way old Abraham served the three guests in the heat of the day (Gen.17–18). To renew our eagerness to shepherd God's flock, we need circumcision of our hearts (Rom.2:29). We gain such a willing and eager spirit, such pure motives, when we set our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:13).

Peter has one more honest challenge for us: "...not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock..." (3) "Who, *me*?" we may say. But people *may* find us domineering in our teaching or personality. How can we overcome this? Peter says simply, "being examples to the flock." What example? He told us, "...Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps...when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (2:21–23). Learning to be quiet like our Lord Jesus, suffering injustice and abuse with faith like he did, is one of the best ways to overcome being domineering.

How can we shepherd people with such a heart and good example? We may need therapy. But what we really need is a revival of our faith in the living hope. What is this faith and hope? Read verse 4. We need this faith and hope in Jesus, faith that he's watching it all, and faith that he's coming. Earlier Peter calls Jesus the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (2:25). Here he calls him our "chief Shepherd." We all are just flawed undershepherds. One day, Jesus will "appear." When he does, his glory will be "revealed" (1:5,7; 4:13; 5:1). Our Lord Jesus wants us to live with faith that his glory will surely be revealed one day.

What is his glory? It's his salvation for sinners who turn to him in faith. It's also that he's the Judge of the living and the dead—everyone who ever lived. Peter says Jesus is "ready" to do it (4:5), and that his judgment begins with the household of God (4:17). In the hope that he's coming, we also need the deep awareness that I'm personally accountable to Jesus the Judge. If we follow his

example to shepherd the flock of God, he promises “the unfading crown of glory.” This unfading crown of glory is our eternal reward. It’s the mind-boggling privilege to “partake” in his glory (5:1b). In verse 10 Peter says, “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.” To shepherd his people, we need this faith and hope in his coming, and in “the God of all grace.”

We’ve been praying that through our UBF ministry God may raise spiritual leaders for the world and for future generations. Some may be right here among us. We pray to raise shepherds of people like our Lord Jesus: shepherds deeply aware of their accountability to Jesus; shepherds who stay with people because of the compassion of Jesus; shepherds who keep pointing people to Jesus; shepherds who suffer quietly like Jesus; shepherds who have a living hope to share in the glory of Jesus. May God reignite the fire of this vision in our hearts and help us keep praying for it fervently.

So, what keeps you going? May God help us accept these solemn words: “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.” May we do it before God, holding onto his promise with our faith in Jesus renewed. Let’s read verse 4 again. “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”