

1Peter 11-06-24a

This is Friday, the 24th of June, 2011. We continue our study in the book of 1 Peter. We're at chapter 5, looking at verse 4. That's where we kind of pick up.

We'll pause just a moment as we begin, give each of us the opportunity to go before the Lord and ensure that we're prepared and receptive and enabled by God's Holy Spirit to take advantage of this time of fellowship and investigation of the truth of God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, we pause and reflect on the magnitude of the salvation that you have granted to us. For us to be so lacking in value or in any redeeming feature, and yet to be purchased with so precious a price is an amazement that never fails to humble us and to cause within us such great gratitude for your grace and your compassion on us, for the work of the Lord Jesus in coming and dying on the cross for us.

And we are members of your family. We have an eternal destiny because of that great work in which your glory is so fully reflected. We know that we are left here in this life after our salvation to learn and to grow and to be prepared for the transition from this momentary earthly existence to the eternal kingdom that awaits us and the presence of the Lord Jesus and the opportunity to be of service and to reflect your glory in the ages to come.

We thank you for the time that you have given us in this earth. We thank you for the equipping, the perfecting, and the challenging that takes place through circumstances and the enablement that we receive because your Holy Spirit dwells with us and the truth of your word informs us and gives him voice and power within our souls. We thank you for this portion of your word and we ask your blessing on us as we study it together.

In Jesus' name, amen. You'll remember that Peter has been addressing people who are scattered, who are in difficult circumstances. They're not in their stomping grounds.

They've been put out of their comfort zone. And we are often most stressed and most challenged to remember our faith and remember our purpose in life when we're not comfortable, when we're not in our natural element. When anybody can do well, anybody can be pleasant, anybody can even be patient and have a good time when life is easy.

The boat is going gently down the stream, merrily, merrily, merrily. Life is but a dream. But when we are challenged, when we're stressed, this is when we find out what we're really made of.

Out of several examples that come to my mind, I always think of the piece of citrus fruit. Looks fine on the outside. You take an orange.

Those of us from California remember those great big juicy pieces of fruit out there. And it looks nice on the outside, but it's not always nice on the inside. You find out what it's like when you squeeze it.

External appearances can be deceiving. I found that a new yard decoration had arrived at our house. And it looks like this piece of carved stones, very elegant.

It's going to sit on those little wings that stick out of the front of our house. And there's a little ornament that's going to be sitting there. And it looks like it's a piece of carved granite.

However, the stock boy at Walmart must have dropped it because the back corner is chipped. It's one of my projects for tomorrow, so get some mighty putty and fix that. But when it got dropped, when it got stressed, come to find out it's not stone.

It's just artfully disguised hollow plastic, which of course is what you would expect because I ain't made out of the kind of money that's going to be buying granite lions. But the point is, we find out what our quality is under pressure. You can veneer a thing.

You can artifice a thing. You can make countertops out of all kinds of stuff. But when you put the heat on it, when you put the stress on it, that's when you find out what it is it really made of.

And that's what Peter is addressing when he's writing to these people. He knows what they're going through. He has been through the refiner's fire himself, and he knows what it is to fail in that situation.

So he's probably at least as qualified, if not more so, than any of the apostles to address this particular subject. So he has been reminding them that these stresses... If you look, if you're New King James is like mine, in the latter part of chapter 4, there's a little subtitle there that says, Suffering for God's Glory. Well, this brings to my mind sort of a Joan of Arc thing.

You're lashed to the piling there, and they've gathered the wood at the base, and they're about to light it, and you're going to be suffering for God's glory. But really, the reality for most of us is that we are tested for God's glory. Suffering isn't so much that they're whipping us, that we're losing liberty or property.

I mean, that does take place around the world. And there are Christians suffering for their faith. And believe me, I am not belittling that.

But this is our group, and most of us are not being actively persecuted. We're not being imprisoned. We're not being beaten.

We are not suffering as many of our brothers do in the world. But we are still stressed. We are challenged.

We are tested. And when you are the one being stressed and challenged and tested, I really don't have time to make a comparison between myself and somebody that is going through something worse somewhere else. I'm thinking about me.

I'm trying to pass my test. And as I've pointed out before, when you're a scrawny guy and you go to the gym and you sit down under the bench press and you put a certain amount of weight on there and you're pushing for all you're worth, maybe you're only benching 85, 95, 110 pounds. You look over to the next bench and here's a guy that's built for weight lifting.

He's been doing it a long time. He's bulked up. He's like a hefty guy.

Maybe he's doing three times your weight. But for me, the weight that I'm pushing is just as hard as the 300 and something that he's benching over there. And I don't really care how much he's benching.

I've got my hands full trying not to kill myself with free weights. And this is our struggle. And it is a mistake.

Hear me closely. You'll notice that Peter never points our attention to others. He doesn't say... One time he says, you know, there's suffering that's common to your brethren in the world.

But he doesn't say, look at your neighbor or get together and form a support group for your suffering. He says, look, you've got your row to hoe. You've got your assignment from God.

You are chosen. All through this book, he began the book saying, you are elect. Not elect unto salvation.

You are elect unto the circumstance you're in right now. And you, fill in your name here, have been chosen for the exact situation that you're in right now. Nobody else.

I didn't get chosen for your situation. You didn't get chosen for the person to your left or to your right or behind you or in front of you. God is infinite.

And we have trouble with our time-bound minds realizing that God can be this detailed and this sophisticated in his plan. But if you think about it, he's had eternity to get it ready. God, you know, I can do a good job of planning if you give me enough time.

Most of us can. Well, to use sort of an anthropathism or morphism, take your pick, God has had an infinitude of time to plan your life and my life. He could take them one at a time, plan them in real time, take 70 years to plan a 70-year life.

And in eternity, it would just be a drop in the bucket compared to human history. So, the Bible repeatedly assures us that God has taken an active interest, a detailed interest, a personal interest in crafting and customizing our lives. And no two of them are the same because each of them serves a different purpose.

Each of us is being prepared for a different kind of service, both now and in the ages to come, and mostly in the ages to come. You teach troops how to field strip a weapon, how to put their

uniform on, how to get their 7.82 gear, how to operate their communications equipment, and then you test them over it while they're still in boot camp or while they're in their occupational specialty school. But you're not satisfied that, well, they sure did a good job on that test at the school.

That was just preparation for their life of service. You hope they're going to go on for years and use those skills and pass them on to others. This is just our training.

This isn't the thing. This isn't our life. It's going to be so infinitesimally small compared to life in the eternal future.

But this is the place where God can pit us against real enemies. This is the place where we can come face-to-face with sin, where we can confront evil, where we can wrestle with principalities and powers and rulers. Think about all of the eternal future where evil will never come to our door.

Sin will never rise up in our hearts and try to overtake us and divert us and send us astray. It's never going to happen. Satan will be gone.

Our fallen nature will be gone. The fallen natures of all the people around us that are so pesky and irritating and such an aggravate will be gone. So if we're ever going to fortify ourselves to eschew evil and choose good, it's here.

It's now. This is why Peter writes this letter. He says, look, you have been chosen to be pilgrims to go through this hostile environment because it is going to forge you.

Once you forge one of these... Remember I was talking last week about these great Japanese swords. Maybe the week before, time tends to blend. But how they forge these swords and they hammer it out and they fold it and they immerse it and they hammer it and they fold it and they hammer it and they fold it and those samurai swords are so flexible and so sharp and hold their edges so well because of the way they're forged.

Well, after you make the sword, you don't take the thing down there every other week and stick it back in the heat and do more hammering on it. Once it's made, it's made. You might hone the edge a little bit, although I understand they don't even have to hone those really nice samurai swords.

There's a different, better name for them, but it's what they're popularly called. But once it's forged and made, it's good. It's like these Ginsu things.

Never need sharpening. This is what God is doing with us. Seriously.

Seriously. That's what's happening here. This momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory.

So, that's the context. That's the first four chapters of this letter. So having reviewed all of that, having emphasized it, having found different ways to illustrate it and refer to the example of the Lord Jesus, Peter says in chapter 5, the elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed, shepherd the flock of God.

The elders who are among you I exhort. Now, this is one letter. If I go back to 60-something A.D., 50-something A.D., when Peter writes and sends this letter, he's sending it to these people that are in all these different places.

You get the idea that maybe he made several copies and sent one, or maybe it was an encyclical and they were supposed to pass it along. Somebody might travel to those places and he had the letter and would read it to them. And then they would have fellowship and he'd break bread and spend a few days and they would talk and catch up on the news and then he would go to the next place.

But this is designed to travel and to go. But Peter says, the elders who are among you and this means that even in that remote location, there are recognized individuals who provide leadership, who provide guidance. They're called elders, but this is not so much meaning they're elderly or they're old, but they are elders in the faith.

Maybe they have spent some time with the apostles. Maybe in their days in Jerusalem, they got the chance to attend a lot of Bible class. Whatever it is, they're knowledgeable.

They are spiritual lighthouses in their community. They're the leaders. They probably are some of the older men, the fathers and grandfathers.

And these are the ones that people turn to. The young people look to them. Their wives and families look to them for encouragement, for sustaining viewpoint.

Well, what about this? Everybody in our neighborhood is going this way. What do you say? Well, the elders who are among you, I exhort. And Peter says, I am your fellow elder.

I am like you. And he's setting something up here. It's not false humility.

There's a reason why Peter says, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ. There is continuity. This is sort of a genuine version of what the Catholics have espoused, shall we say, have encouraged down through the centuries.

They have the apostolic succession that goes with the Pope. They think Peter was the first Pope and then he sort of had his designated successor and then that guy had his and there's this unbroken chain of Pope to Pope, Papa to Papa down the way. That's what the Italians call him, in Italian.

And it's the apostolic succession and that there's one remaining apostle in each generation. That's what they believe, and God bless them. But this is the real connection with Peter.

Peter says, I am a witness of the sufferings of Christ. You remember what John says in his letters? That which we have seen, which our ears have heard, which our fingers have handled. And what did Jesus say when he commissioned the apostles? He said, you eleven shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, till the end of the age.

You will be witnesses. They understood this when they were trying to replace Judas and they elected Matthias. They said, we need somebody that has been with us from the beginning.

Somebody that saw the Lord. Paul gets in because he saw the Lord on the Damascus Road and by the way, I think he had some additional, whatever you want to call it, face time with the Lord because he has a lot of information that he didn't get from the other disciples or apostles, nor did he get it on the Damascus Road. He says, I have this from the Lord, like the upper room events.

The Lord Jesus told him that at some point. So he had some quality time with the Lord Jesus that I don't think is even recorded in Scripture. You know, he has a three year gap after his commissioning.

He just goes away. He goes to the mountains. He may have gone down to Sinai.

It's unclear where he went. We'll get the chance to find out one of these days. But, here's the thing.

These apostles are eyewitnesses and this seems to have been a necessary qualification and that's why the gift of apostle died with John at the end of the first century because that's where your eyewitnesses end. And unless and until the Lord decides to come down and have another school of the apostles like he did with the originals, they're the group. They are the authors of inspired Scripture.

This is how we know either they or their associates, their amanuenses, their secretaries. So he says, I whom a fellow elder. Why does he cite this here? He is about to give an encouragement and an exhortation to leaders.

Well, by what right do you tell a leader what he ought to be doing? you've got to pull out your badge. You've got to pull out your ID card. You've got to say this.

And Peter does this with great humility. He says, I'm your fellow elder, but you aren't a witness of the sufferings of Christ. I am.

I mean, that would be a different way of putting it. But he does it so gracefully. He says, the elders who are among you, I exhort.

And then he stops and he says, y'all might not take my exhortation unless I remind you that I am qualified. I have the authority given to me by the Lord Jesus. I witnessed his sufferings.

And also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed. And that's something that everybody can share. And not everybody can go back and witness the Lord Jesus in his earthly ministry, but everybody can be a partaker of his glory as he has explained in these four chapters.

Then he says, shepherd the flock of God. I will remind you, although you probably don't need reminding. In the scale of jobs in the ancient Near East, where does shepherd fall? And not to hurt anybody's feelings, you know, everybody's all politically correct now about garbage men and secretaries and you don't call them any of those names anymore.

But shepherd was the, this is the ditch digger and filler, this is the odd carrier, the stall cleaner. When I think of the basest work I've ever done, as you know, I always go back to the summer I cleaned stalls in the barn for my grandfather. And there is not enough money to pay for that work.

I don't care what the rate is. That is the most difficult summer job for a young skinny boy with sensitive sinuses. Horses that have been kept up in the barn for days and days and days in the stalls.

And there's some kind of a composting effect that goes on in there that is indescribable. Well, shepherd is at that level. Shepherd was the job that almost anybody could do.

You know, there's all this glorification and the Lord is my shepherd, he is the chief shepherd and all that. That's great. And taking nothing away from that, your average shepherd was just a sweaty guy out there trying to keep the sweaty smelly sheep from going astray.

And it wasn't glamorous. It wasn't pastoral. It was a hard job.

You're scrabbling out there trying to find water, trying to find pasturage. It was a low leveling job. And when Peter says, poimane, and the verb cognate there to shepherd, this is what he's talking about.

You've got mundane work to do. This isn't pedestal work. It's not media work.

It's not send me \$35 for this resource and you'll see my picture on the cover work. This is day by day in the trenches taking care of the sheep. Now, we're so out of the New Testament model of the church that we think, well, this is going to be a brick and mortar church.

It's going to be a brick and mortar pastor with a brick and mortar pulpit and a brick and mortar baptistry and a brick and mortar choir loft and a parking lot and an education building and all of that. Think about what this is like. These people are in these foreign towns.

So what does a church look like in Cappadocia? What does a group of Jewish Christians in

Cappadocia look like? Have they got a big synagogue? Have they got a church building? They're meeting in homes. They're meeting just like we're meeting right here. So what does an elder look like? What does a shepherd look like? If you look around in this group, I can see at least five shepherds without even counting in this group right here.

Different sub-flocks, different sheep. Few sheep here, few sheep there. Just my wife here.

Doesn't matter, you're a shepherd. If you've got one sheep, you are a shepherd. Shepherd the flock of God.

All of those individuals, you might just have one individual to watch, but that individual is a part of God's flock. And he said, you know what? I just want you to take care of this one. You just watch over this one.

For a husband, it's his wife. For a father, it's his wife and children. Sometimes you have extended family.

Sometimes you're just an uncle or you're a close, close friend. You're intertwined. We are familial.

We are brothers and sisters in Christ. And the elders are anybody to whom someone in that group looks for leadership. Sometimes just for example, you may never say anything.

You may never do anything. It's just your example. You may have a particular set of things to deal with.

Younger ones are watching. Other people are watching. And the way you live your life is an example to the flock.

It's not your flock. It's God's flock. I resist any personal pronouns attached to me personally for what a pastor does.

It's God's people. It's God's word. It's God's work.

It's God's plan and purpose. You have the privilege of taking one small part of that and trying to be a good steward of it. Everybody here has that opportunity.

And when he says, shepherd the flock of God which is in your midst, in whom in, among you, he doesn't say which is under you, does he? Shepherd the sheep that have been assigned to you, that have been given to you, that belong to you. Shepherd your sheep. Shepherd your flock.

He doesn't say that. He says, shepherd the flock of God which is in your midst. You're just circulating.

How do I know this? What did Peter just do at the beginning? He says, you elders, among whom I am a fellow elder. So when he says shepherd, you're basically a sheep mingling with the other

sheep. You're just an older sheep and a wiser sheep.

And you can keep some of the less experienced sheep from making mistakes you might have already made or seen. But it is a very horizontal picture, isn't it? The flock in your midst. The flock of God that is among you.

Not below. Not beneath. Not assigned.

And he emphasizes it to say, not by compulsion, but willingly. Well, if I have to. I mean, come on.

There are so many great blessings that come from seeing opportunities and availing yourself of them. Some of us like to fix broken stuff. You find a thing that's broken and you get the super glue and you stick it back together and look, I didn't have to buy a new one.

I fixed the old one. I've got an alarm clock that I got in Okinawa in 1980. That thing has been knocked off the table.

It has been dropped. You want to talk about something showing its quality under stress. I've had to take the electronics apart, the little beeper quit beeping, but it's my old friend.

It's been everywhere I've been for 30-odd years, and every time it breaks, I just keep fixing it. Battery door went away 10 or 15 years ago. I've got a little piece of cardboard taped over the back.

But I love it. Well, now let me tell you, it's a special clock because when it goes off, I've told you this, it goes beep, beep, beep. Beep, beep, beep.

If you don't wake up and turn it off, it goes beep, beep, beep. Beep, beep, beep. And if you're still too groggy and can't find it, beep, beep, beep.

It just gets louder and louder. It's one of those, it's an ascending thing. It was the first clock they ever made that did that, and I loved it because as soon as I hear it go, I turn it off.

I don't even have to hear the softest beeps. I'm tuned to that clock. The clock and I are one.

And so when it breaks, I fix it. But I value it. I value it, and it's gratifying to me to keep it running.

Now it's like a mission. I'm going to keep that clock going until the Lord comes back. As long as they make double-A batteries, I'm okay.

But there's a gratification, and you know this. Ladies that bring dead plants back to life, that make stuff out of cloth, that do projects around the house, you decorate a room, you make something, you know what that's like, right? You know what I'm talking about. There is a gratification that comes from seeing an opportunity and you say, you know what? I can do this.

I can make this better. Well, that's all this is. When he says, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, not by compulsion.

Somebody didn't put it on your to-do list and say, get this done by the end of the day. You look at it and you say, this is something I really, I can do this, and it'll be fun, and it's rewarding when it's done. You don't need any compulsion.

That's the point. You don't need compulsion. I don't need compulsion to teach this class, as you probably know.

I appreciate that anybody would let me have the chance to go in and dig through the scriptures and look in there and see what's there and then talk about it and see what you all think of it. I have never felt compelled by anything other than just the joy of doing it and the enthusiasm of seeing the beauty that's in God's Word and sharing it with people who appreciate it. And that's true for everyone.

Don't think that this is just pastors and, well, I'm going to tune out and wait until he starts talking about somebody else. Everybody, ladies as well as men, there is some sense in which you are a poimane, you are a shepherd. Older women are examples to younger women, to the younger ones who are coming up or to the ones who are less experienced or haven't been through what you've been through.

Everybody has a shepherding function. Everybody. Because you're in the flock and the flock of God is designed, is assembled by God in the same way that he designated these people to be the pilgrims in the Diaspora.

He has designated you to be a part of whatever group you're in, whatever associations with other believers you have, family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, see them once a year. Whatever it is, God designed it. It's not an accident that you know who you know, that you live with who you live with, that you rub elbows with who you contact.

It's designed by God and everywhere where two believers touch, there is mutual ministry. You have a gift, they have a gift. And when we are doing what we're supposed to do, when we have the attitude that Peter has of humility and it's not compulsion, I don't have to get up and think, Oh, how can I go be a blessing to somebody today? It's the Spirit of God dwelling within us.

It's the Word of God doing its supernatural work. It doesn't take any compulsion. And if you feel compelled, stop.

You're doing it wrong. If you feel any compulsion, quit it. Because God's not in it.

The only compulsion we should feel is the prompting and the enthusiasm that God the Holy Spirit puts in our soul. To me, you could call that compulsion, but it's not a human mandate. It isn't

somebody saying, you know, do this or you're fired.

Not by compulsion, but willingly. Not for dishonest gain, but eagerly. The best job you can ever have, and I know a lot of you have had this, you either have it now or you have had it at some time and wish you had it again.

But the kind of job where you can't believe they pay you to do it. It's just such a good fit. You're reasonably good at it.

People appreciate you doing it. You get up in the morning saying, let me at it. Where's my desk? Where's my phone? Where's my computer? Where's my stuff? And you don't have to, you would probably do it if they didn't pay you.

You don't need gain period, dishonest or otherwise. You do it because it's just natural. It comes out because it has to.

This is the nature of genuine Christian ministry. And let me emphasize, this is also the nature of genuine Christian witness. If you ever feel guilty and under pressure to give somebody the gospel, stop right there because you are not prepared and you're not qualified and you're going to mess it up.

The time to share the gospel, the time to be a witness, and you can go years and never share the gospel with anybody. Don't worry about it. God picks the time.

God picks the place. If we're ready and if we are knowledgeable and if we become the kind of people that have that natural fire within, if anybody needs telling and God thinks we're the ones to do it, it will happen as naturally as falling off a log. You don't have to knock on a door.

You don't have to push a tract in somebody's face. You don't have to agonize and make an awkward scene and, well, you know, I was just worried that you're going to hell and I thought I'd better talk to you before something happens. No.

Most people are won by example, by looking at the lives of others. There are people in our midst, just like the sheep that we're in the midst of. So, not by compulsion, but willingly.

Not for dishonest gain, but eagerly. It's something we just enter into because, look, I've got means, motive, and opportunity. It's just right here.

Who wouldn't do this thing in this situation? That's God's way. He makes us the kind of people who can do this effortlessly, naturally, in a spirit-filled way and when it is done in that way, it reflects the glory of God and that's the ultimate point. That's why, when you get down to verse 4, you have the crown of glory that doesn't fade away because it reflects the glory of God.

If we start entering our effort into it, if we start trying to add to it and gild it and nail things onto it

and beautify it with our little paper-mache decorations, it obscures the glory of God. If we become who we are supposed to be, we will do what we are supposed to do. Because if we become who we are supposed to be, we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The man of God who is mature, the person of God who is mature is thoroughly equipped for every good work. Thoroughly equipped. No lack.

No pressure. No real effort. It's just... You're made to do it.

You're a square peg in a square hole. It just is all of God and it reflects His glory. Well, this issue of the crown that comes up in verse 4, when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory.

This brings up the subject of crowns and it is one that we're going to look at when we come back from the break.