

## **A COMMUNITY CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY**

*1 PETER 5:1-5*

Well, we are getting close to wrapping up our series in First Peter that we've been in since the beginning of January, and I just give you a sense of where we're headed over the next several weeks. Next week we will finish off First Peter, and then Father's Day I will have something special, and then on the 26th we're going to go into a seven-week series in 2nd Peter, and so by August we'll have wrapped up all of Peter's writings in the New Testament

And it's been a great series for us in the book of 1st Peter, hasn't it. There is so much in this book that has been really relevant for the cultural moment that we find ourselves in right now. We've been tracing several major themes over and over again throughout this letter. Seeing what it means for us to live as an exilic people, as sojourners and strangers. We've been trying to get a handle on what it looks like to live counter-culturally when we're marginalized, and when we're pushed out of the center of society, and when following Jesus means facing hardship. What does that look like? Peter's first four chapters have pressed us, probably beyond where we're comfortable, at what it means for us to walk in Jesus' steps.

And now, as Peter is coming to the close of his letter, he reminds us in these five verses that this whole thing that he's been talking about, living faithfully as a follower of Jesus in the middle of a world that's broken, this lifestyle that we're called to..... it's not just an individual endeavor, but a community project. In other words, if you are going to live faithful to Jesus, trusting God in the middle of stuff that's really hard, you need community.

But, it's not like just any kind of community will do. The local Rotary Club isn't going to get you through hardship and keep you trusting God. In fact, even your weekly coffee with your best Christian friend, at least by itself, isn't going to fully form you into what Peter's called you to be. And so here in Ch. 5 Peter's says that as you're formed as a follower of Jesus, you need be intimately connected to an authentic, biblical, Christ-centered, local community of faith called a church; a community where there is form and function to our life together. This type of community is integral to the life of every sojourner.

And here's the connection in the text, just so you don't just think I'm pulling this out of thin air. Look back at where we ended last week, in v. 19 of Chapter 4: "Therefore," Peter says, "let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

That's really a summary statement of all that Peter has been saying, right? God's intention for us is that in the middle of suffering and hardship we would trust ourselves to Him and endure in following him. That's is what Peter wants for us. Then look at the transition he makes into chapter 5. Peter begins with this word, "so". Therefore, he's saying, "*because* I'm calling you to trust God and endure hardship, I exhort you toward this type of life in your community. In other words, it's your participation in and commitment to this type of community life together that nurtures and guards and sustains and feeds the lifestyle Peter's calling you to live.

And church, even though this text is packed with exhortations specifically for pastors, there is one quality that ties everything that's said here together - look at the middle of v. 5. "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another...." The quality of community Peter is pointing us to, has as a fundamental flavor to it, and it's a taste that is tinged on every level by humility. There's much more to say about that, but we'll get there.

Here's my hope for us this morning as we start to unpack this text. These five verses have some significant things to say to us on very personal and practical levels:

a.) First, there is a paradigm here that we want at Summit. There is a picture for how Mike and myself, and Craig and Nick pastor and lead you, and for how you are pastored, and for how we live together as God's new covenant community. And that picture is beautiful and attractive and full of life. So I want us to come away seeing that picture, and praying and striving for this biblical reality to mark more and more of our life together.

b.) Secondly, I want you to see that your thriving as a Christian cannot be separated from your connection to this community. If you just hang out on the periphery and only see Sunday as your personal spiritual filling station for the week ahead, you will not be able to live out faithfully what God has called you to in this world.

c.) Third, I know that not all of you will die in this church. Meaning, at some point you will move or you'll get married, or some circumstance will move you on from here. And so I want you to have an image in your mind of the kind of church community you need to seek out and commit to in order to keep growing and enduring in your faith.

OK, so those are my goals. Essentially, my hope is that we don't just separate ourselves from the text and just sort of leave this out here to look at, but that we allow it to press in on us so that we can become the type of humble gospel-community God is calling us to.

So here's how we are going to walk through the text this morning. As we've already said, Peter is basically showing us how functioning in humility as the gospel-centered community of the church forms us as followers of Jesus through humble leaders and humble followers who have their eyes fixed on a humble Savior. OK, the church functions as a formative community of faith, through humble leaders and humble followers looking to a humble Savior. *Note-takers...*

## 1. Humble Leaders

v.1 - "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, shepherd the flock of God that is among you..."

There are two groups of people that Peter talks about in this passage. The elders, and those who are younger. And let me just help define those terms for you, because Peter isn't just talking about age here. When he talks about elders he's not talking about old people but mature people who are called to lead, and younger people aren't just those who are young in age, but those, who may or may not be spiritually mature but who are called to follow. So we have two categories being addressed: elders, or pastors, or leaders (which we're going to use interchangeably this morning), and those who are pastored.

And Peter begins by exhorting the elders, the pastors, and tells us several things about how we are to lead the church. *And our commitment to leading in these ways matters for your growth and discipleship.* And for me, as one of your pastors, these verses are incredibly challenging and significant on a very personal level, and so what I want to do is just kind of pull back the curtain on my own heart, and walk through some observations and implications for us as elders, and for us as a church community.

### a.) The first is this: Humble leaders need Jesus.

Look at how Peter addresses these elders: "I exhort you as a fellow elder and [the word fellow is actually meant to be carried over to all of these points] *fellow* witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a *fellow* partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed."

If Peter is identifying himself as a fellow elder, and fellow witness and fellow partaker, he's explicitly saying that us pastors also have to be witnesses of Jesus (meaning we have seen

and experienced him and now proclaim him) and we ought to be present partakers of the reality of his glory (meaning we are tasting of his goodness now). In other words, we need to *have* both tasted and seen, and *be* continually tasting and seeing the goodness of Jesus.

Even as pastors, we don't grow beyond our need for Jesus. And so it's only to the extent that Jesus is everything to us as leaders, that will Jesus be everything for us as a church. And I say that as an exhortation to myself, and an encouragement for you to pray.

And church, if I am not experiencing the goodness of the gospel, and the grace of God at work in my life in an ongoing way, if Jesus has ceased to become sweet to me and the reality of his life, death and resurrection has been subjugated to some other goal or ambition — get me out of the pulpit, because the person and work of Jesus, stepping into history, redeeming God's people through the cross, winning victory over sin and death and everything opposed to God, that is the center of everything, and has to be the center of our life together as His church.

And so as elders, Jesus has to be the center of gravity in our preaching and teaching, but more than that, the *telos*, the goal, the end to which our lives personally are directed isn't ourselves, it's him. And we need to be genuinely experiencing his goodness in our lives. Because we cannot lead you somewhere we haven't been.

And to broaden the implications of this — that reality is true for any *and* all of you as you disciple and lead others. If you are a dad of a young family.... your kids will know quicker than anyone else whether you actually love Jesus and humbly recognize your need for him. And no matter how consistent you are with family devotions, or how often you bring your kids to church activities, or how much you want them to follow Jesus, you will not be able to give them what you don't have. So the priority for you is what? Jesus. You need him before anything else. Witness and partake of him. Taste and see that He is good. Humble leaders need Jesus.

b.) Second: Humble leaders shepherd.

Look at v. 2: "Shepherd the flock of God among you..."

Notice Peter doesn't say, have a bunch of meetings and decide stuff. He also doesn't say, create spiritual product for people to consume. He doesn't say create programs, or fundraise, or manage systems, He says: shepherd. And it's not that as your elders we don't do any of that other stuff, but it *that* isn't our primary God-given task. We are to shepherd. And that means that what we should care about above everything else is the health of the sheep. So we care about all of you. There is a burden that we carry for you. And what we care about more than anything is that there is authentic spiritual life and vitality going on in you.

And so you need to understand that God has put us as pastors and leaders into your life, for your good.

Now think about a shepherd for a moment. A shepherd really has two primary tasks as they care for their flock. They pasture and they protect. And we are responsible to lead in both of those areas. Let me explain.

First, we pasture, which means we lead you toward good grazing ground. Now this primarily means that we are responsible for feeding you through preaching and teaching, but it's not limited to that. It means we care for you in putting in your path the things that will nourish your soul.

Second, we protect. That means that we're on the lookout for threats to your health and life. We're looking over the surrounding hills for where external harm might come from outside *and* we're working at being aware of the direction your steps are taking you that may involve risk.

And so pasturing and protecting require us to stay close to you and sometimes say hard things. So, if you get irritated with us... like why does this matter so much to them, or why are they up in my business like this... It's because God has given us this job in your life. Who else is going to care for your formation as a follower of Jesus like this? And brothers and sisters - God has given us this role for your good.

c.) Third (observation): Humble leaders shepherd in the right way.

"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you..."

Peter's saying that your pastors shouldn't separate themselves from you. There are all kinds of churches where the pastors, and especially the pastor who preaches the most, lives life apart from their people. Meaning you might see them on Sunday in the pulpit, but their life isn't real or accessible from Monday to Friday. And by the way, that's not just a problem in larger churches. Peter's saying there should be an integration of life between pastors and leaders and those they are pastoring. We in this together. We're among you.

But the flip side of that is that your pastors needs to be the pastors that are among you. Matt Chandler and John Piper and R.C. Sproul, as gifted as those men are, are not your pastor. As frustrating as it might be at times for you, God has sovereignly and graciously given you four incredibly ordinary guys to lead you for a reason. You might not know what that reason is, but you need to trust God that it is for your good!

So elders shepherd the flock that is among them, exercising oversight - we are among you, but also over you, there is a God-given authority in this relationship, but it's an authority that is exercised in an utterly counter-cultural way. That's what Peter means when he says that we exercise oversight willing - as God would have you, or in the way God would have you. We do this God's way, not ours, and that is in humility - not for shameful gain, in other words, not focused on ourselves and what we can get out of it, but because we love you — not domineering, ok, not beating the sheep, but with gentleness, being examples to the flock.

That means that we don't just command obedience, we model it. My life should be open to you in a humble and real way so that when you look at my life you see what it looks like to depend on Jesus and believe the gospel in the everyday stuff of life. This carries on this idea of us being among you. My home should be open in a way that you can come in and see how I treat my wife and love my kids and reach out to my neighbors and see what it looks like to walk with Jesus - and not at all because I do it perfectly - but actually because you see my marriage have conflict and see me lose patience with my girls and see me use my time selfishly - and see what it looks like to confess and repent and believe the gospel is true not just as I preach it to you, but as I preach it to myself.

We used to have a saying with some of the guys I was friends with in college — I'm embarrassed almost to say it because it was terribly chauvinistic, probably misogynistic... but these guys weren't believers ok, and it helps my point along. When these guys (not me of course), would see a girl that looked pretty down the road, but when you got up close you realized she wasn't near as pretty as you'd expected - they would say "good from far, far from good." I know, terrible right? But the point is so relevant for how we act as the church. When pastors keep their distance - things might look good from far, but they may be far from good. We need to be close enough to each other that you can see my warts and blemishes, and I can see yours.

And this thought begins moving us toward the kind of humble gospel-culture that God intends for us as a church. We need the proximity to each other to see each other fail. This is why church for us isn't just about Sunday. CGs etc. We want to press in and genuinely know one another, not just so we can have a mutual pity party of failure, but so we can point one another back to the goodness Jesus.

Mike and Craig and Nick and I are sinners in need of Jesus just like you. We have failed you and will fail you. But thankfully, it doesn't all depend on us because look at verse 4: "And

when the chief Shepherd appears..." Ultimately, your pastor and mine, our senior pastor, is Jesus.

If we had an organizational chart for our church it would have one name on the top - Jesus. I am thankful for this more than any other truth here - and you should be too - because ultimately you don't follow your leaders because of their wisdom, or gifts, or charisma, you follow them because of Jesus' perfection. So what v. 5 is asking you to do is not an act of submission to us, it's to Jesus.

v.5: Likewise, you who are younger, ( you who are called to follow, everyone else in the church ) be subject to the elders.

This takes being a humble follower doesn't it. It takes saying, you know what, I don't have it all together. There are decisions that I don't have the wisdom or knowledge or experience to make. There are situations in my life that I don't know how to handle alone. There's a path of discipleship that I don't know how to follow. It takes saying - this thing called life - I can't do this on my own. And in faith I believe that God has put church leadership in my life - elders and pastors specifically - but to be honest also deacons and Community Group leaders and others - God has put these people in my life for my good to help me grow.

Could we be a people that just do things differently? Unlike most Americans who live life on selfish island and don't invite input and help and wisdom - could we be a people that recognize God has given us each other for that very purpose? There was someone I talked to recently who was shocked by the idea that you would want to open up your life plans to the leadership of the church for input. They were thinking through the next step that their life might take them in and we invited them to share their thoughts with us so we could pray for them and think through things with them. They had never thought about doing that before. But when they did - it was life giving.

Now the fear is that you are going to be boxed in and limited by submitting yourself to leaders, because there are horror stories about spiritual abuse and domineering leadership, etc. but when humility reigns the opposite is actually what happens. Instead of being boxed in, inviting others in authority over you into your life for counsel and wisdom and input actually frees you from the weight of working through life on your own. Peter's instructions here aren't to limit your freedom, they are to give you freedom.

The foundation for all of this has to be humility:

That's what ties everything together for Peter in v. 5: "Clothe yourselves, all of you with humility toward one another, "for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

How do you put on humility? This is a weird phrase that Peter uses because we all know that clothing ourselves with humility isn't like putting on our socks and shoes in the morning. It's not that easy. It's not something we just decide to do and make part of our routine.

In fact like a lot of things, if we aim directly at humility, we'll miss it. That's the very nature of humility isn't it? The more that I think about becoming a humble person, the more focused on myself I will become, which is the very opposite of becoming humble. Working *directly* toward humility will actually make me less humble.

So how do we become this humble community that Peter's calling us to be? Well, it doesn't happen by looking at ourselves, it can only happen by looking at Jesus. This was Paul's point in his letter to the Philippian church. Phil. 2:3-9.

The only way we can be transformed toward humility is by beholding our humble Savior. We need to get what Jesus has done for us. You see, if we stand alone before this reality that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble - we have nothing. If you know your own heart like I know mine, you know that it is utterly proud and underserving of God's grace. Every one of us has failed to live with the humility that God requires of us. But the good news of the gospel is this - that in Jesus, God opposed the humble to give his grace to the proud. At the cross, Jesus took our sinful pride on himself and bore the opposition of God for us, that we might receive the favor and goodness that was due to him. And in that great exchange, proud sinners are made humble.

So here's the way we become humble as a community - we look at our humble Savior over and over and over and over. And as that transforms us in humility, we increasingly taste and see his grace among us.

Don't you want to be this type of community? Isn't this life-giving to those of us here and attractive to those who don't know Jesus? A community where relationships of authority actually function with humility? Where we're growing to look more and more like Jesus wants us to look?

This is the community God has called us to be. A community of humble leaders and humble followers looking to their humble Savior.