

## 1 Peter 5:2-3

We're back again today in 1 Peter 5 and we're picking up the threads of where we left of last time. We were thinking then on Peter's genuine humility as a servant of God; the bottom line is, there is no place for pride in the Christian ministry and the acid test is always seen in our attitude to one another in the family of God. You see, here is a man who was personally called to a life of discipleship by Jesus himself, here is someone who is one of the original Twelve, here is a man who blazed a trail for God in a pagan culture, here is the earliest spokesman for the Christian church, here is an anointed servant of God, here is a man whose ministry was signally blessed by God; in one sense, his credentials are impeccable and yet, he says nothing about what he has done or what he hasn't done in these verses, the focus is almost exclusively on his intimate relationship with the risen Christ. He's certainly not a man with a swollen head; on the contrary, he's a man with a big heart and a generous spirit. So far as Peter is concerned, he has no desire to appear centre stage, he has no desire to hog the limelight, he has no desire to be top dog; actually, he sees himself as no better than they are, the fact is they are in it together, they're not on their own, he's alongside them. Their relationship has an authentic ring to it. I think, from Peter's privileged viewpoint, he sees this as the best way forward. You could almost say there was a strong sense of commitment to each other, it's a genuine feeling of partnership that the old apostle quietly and warmly commends and it seems to me, by consistent example, Peter leads the way! As an aside, I have been really blessed through reading Warren Wiersbe's commentary on 1 Peter and especially some of his insights on this particular section. One thing that really struck me was the incredibly clear link between Peter's personal experiences with Christ and what he later wrote in 1 Peter 5. If you have your Bible open, you can follow them through with me. In verse 1 he takes us to Gethsemane and Calvary, we saw that in our last study. He also takes us to the mount of

transfiguration when he speaks of 'the glory to be revealed'. You find that allusion in Matthew 17:1-5. The emphasis in verse 2 on the shepherd and the sheep immediately brings to mind the classic chapter of John 10 and our Lord's admonition to Peter in John 21:15-17. The timely warning in verse 3 about 'lording it over' the people of God reminds us of Christ's lesson about true greatness which is recorded for us in Luke 22:24-30; this is also an echo of the many other times when Jesus taught his followers about true humility and lowly service. The little phrase tucked away in verse 5, 'clothe yourselves with humility', takes us right back to that memorable scene in the Upper Room where Jesus took a towel and washed the disciples feet, you find that unforgettable instance recorded in John 13:1-17. The unmistakably clear warning about the devil as our adversary in verse 8 runs in tandem with our Lord's warning to Peter that Satan was going to 'sift' him and the other apostles, we read that in Luke 22:31. We all know the sequel to that incident, don't we: sadly, Peter did not heed that warning and he ended up denying his Lord three times! It is also interesting to note that the verb 'restore you' in verse 10 is akin to the translation 'mending their nets' in Matthew 4:21; that, as you probably realise, is the stirring and heart-warming account of the call of the four fishermen into the Lord's service. In other words, as Wiersbe himself concludes, 'Peter wrote these words, inspired by the Spirit of God, out of his own personal experience with Jesus Christ. He had a vital and growing relationship with Christ, and this made it possible for him to minister effectively to God's people.' It takes one to know one, that's why as an elder he writes to them in the same capacity; it's one elder to another group of elders. If you like, he has been there, he has done that, and that is why his insights are earthed to reality and they are born out of a singular and passionate desire to see them go from strength to strength. Peter says to them in verse 2 is: 'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to

serve.’ At the risk of sounding simplistic, Peter’s challenge can be summed up in a handful of words, be to them what you already are! He tells them, you are shepherds, therefore, that is what you are to be in relation to the flock gathered all around you. They are to shepherd them as only a true shepherd can do! The problem was exacerbated in his day because there were some who were in it purely for what they could get out of it, there were men in the ministry who were only interested in pursuing their own agenda, there were those who were only content when they were fleecing the flock of God; such unscrupulous men brought the role of the true shepherd into disrepute and the serious charges levelled against them are matched only by those we read of against the false prophets back in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. I think you can always tell a genuine shepherd, you can spot him a mile away; in fact, there are a couple of distinguishing traits in the way they conduct themselves: number one, you can pick him out by the way he leads the sheep and, number two, you can’t help but see him because of where he takes the sheep! The same principles or tell-tale signs hold true in relation to under-shepherds and their care and concern for the flock of God. We are not talking here about a professional approach to ministry, we are homing in on a pastoral ministry which is a calling from the Lord. And the one to whom we are ultimately accountable is none other than the one who said, ‘I am the good shepherd’, and that confession, as we all know, came from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s interesting to note that Peter borrows the phrase from Psalm 100 when he refers to people as sheep! He could have said we were as brave as lions, as noble as horses, as beautiful as gazelles, but in his wisdom he didn’t! For us to be called a sheep is less than unflattering, there’s no chance of it going to our heads, I can assure you of that; for sheep are well known for their weakness and their waywardness. Most of us probably realise that sheep have a built in tendency to behave in most unrealistic and unhealthy ways. They just love to wander, they have a nose for trouble, and they follow without thinking. It is

perfectly natural for them to behave like that, it's in their genes!

Sounds good, doesn't it! But, for better or for worse, that's the way we are and we have no alternative but to live with that; at the same time, it is true to say, that's the prime reason why we need a shepherd. And that's why, in every local church, which is compared to a flock of God's people, there is a need for good and godly Christian leadership in the person of gifted elders. It appears that Peter is emphasising two very important functions in relation to the elders in a local church environment. The first one is their role as a shepherd. The Greek word for 'shepherd' in verse 2 can also be translated 'pastor'. The same is true of the word 'overseer' which appears in the same verse, there are times when it is translated 'bishop'. Basically, these terms are interchangeable but they can be differentiated quite neatly by looking at them like this: the word 'elder' seems to indicate the title of the man and the two words, 'shepherd' and 'overseer', describe the work which he did. As Stuart Briscoe helpfully points out: 'When we talk about a pastor we're talking about a shepherd, and shepherding is an eldership responsibility.' It makes a lot of sense for us to assume that Peter's approach to shepherding God's flock was coloured by the shepherding he received from the Master Shepherd himself. At an emotion charged service of rededication on a Galilean beach in John 21, Peter was challenged and commissioned by the risen Lord to engage in a threefold ministry: number one, he was to 'feed the lambs', you find that in verse 15; number two, he was to 'take care of the sheep', you find that in verse 16; and, number three, he was to 'feed the sheep', you find that in verse 17. I think most of us realise there is a world of difference between the feeding of lambs and the feeding of sheep and it is the task of an elder to make sure they get it right in terms of nurturing the flock of God; there are also different levels of care needed by those who are young and those who are older and, again, it is the responsibility of the elders to ensure that this is dispensed with a tender heart of loving concern. I think this is illustrated superbly by the following story. Lucas

Cranach's altarpiece painting in Wittenberg shows on the right side Martin Luther preaching, and on the left side the congregation listening. In the middle the artist has represented Christ on the cross. The painting was evidently intended to show that worship centres on the preaching of Christ crucified. The people see not the preacher, but Christ. It is probably wise for us to read that picture from the other side as well. The preacher must present Christ; more than that, to know his people, he must know Christ. In other words, he must serve the flock in the light of the cross for their value to the Lord is the price of his precious blood. You see, in every aspect of our wide-ranging ministry as elders-cum-shepherds, whether in leading or in feeding or in caring, we should always seek to imitate and display the quality touch of the Good Shepherd. At the end of the day, we need to remember they are not our sheep, it's not 'my' church, they all belong to the Lord, you find that truth echoed in Acts 20:28 for we are 'the sheep of his pasture' as David so eloquently puts it. It's no easy task when it comes to shepherding God's flock, it's a tough and demanding role, but the joys more than compensate for the hassles and frustrations which are often encountered.

When you think of a bishop, what is the first thing that springs to mind? Probably someone with a purple vest, an unusually shaped hat, a cross dangling round his neck and a big ring on his finger! Well, when you go back and examine the annals of early church history you will find that a bishop was responsible for the spiritual oversight of God's people. To all intents and purposes, he was an overseer; the Greek word employed by Peter in verse 2 is 'episkopos' and it incorporates the twin idea of someone who has a 'watching-out-for' aspect to his ministry as well as one who gives oversight. Such men are placed in these positions of trust because they are eminently suitable for the task assigned to them; to be a competent overseer in a local church is to fulfil a hugely responsible role and, especially so, when we realise that authority is delegated

to the elders of the church. We glean that information from such portions as Acts 20:28 and Hebrews 13:17. Yet, it is vitally important for us to recognise that the exercise of such authority is always a service. As Peter reminds us, and I quote from Edmund Clowney at this point: 'It is ministerial, not imperial. The despised shepherd guarding his flock in the fields, not a pompous churchman, is the model of pastoral oversight; indeed, the model is the Good Shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep.' It is fascinating to note that the shepherd is both 'among' and 'over' the flock, and this can create all sorts of problems and tensions if the sheep do not understand the dynamics of the situation. Because he is one of the sheep, the pastor shepherd is 'among' the members of the flock; because he is called to be a leader, the pastor shepherd is 'over' the flock. As a leader they are over us, as a brother they are among us; and according to 1 Thessalonians 5:12 we are to respect such brethren who have that dual role in our midst. In no way is this to be seen as a conflict of interests! I imagine most of us realise that it is one thing to talk about the function of leadership, it's another matter when it comes to the frailties of leadership. The bottom line is, elders are sheep just like the rest of us and the pressing question is, who pastors the pastor? That one will have to wait in the pending file to be answered another day! As Stuart Briscoe says: 'All sheep have their problems but those in "leader-sheep" have their own problems and other people's too! While they handle their own frailties they must care for the frailties of others.' The next couple of lines pinpoint some of the more obvious shortcomings and the first one Peter focuses on is a wrong attitude. It's the mindset which says: 'If I don't do it nobody else will' or 'I feel as if I have no option but to accept it'. The fact is, if that's how you feel, you would be better not doing it in the first place! That kind of grudging leadership produces a long line of grumbling followers. Leaders are meant to lead from the front by living exemplary lives and also by showing that they are enjoying it and also finding fulfilment in it. You know, you can be happy, and still be a leader! When a man has

a pastor's heart, he loves the sheep and serves them because he wants to, not because he has to! So, attitude is important! The second difficulty those in leadership often wrestle with is the question of financial gain. Sure, there are some who are in it to line their own pockets, if you look around you'll find a few who want to make a quick buck at the expense of others, there will always be those who want to advance their own careers and push themselves into the top jobs; thank God, most of the men involved in a pastoral role are in it because they believe God has placed them there, they have a sense of calling on their lives. I have met many brethren who would be much better off financially if they were working in commerce or industry but such men are happy to sacrifice monetary gain for the sake of the body of Christ. They see themselves as shepherds with a servant heart and they look on life from an eternal perspective. Money should not be number one on our list of personal priorities; in fact, it probably should not feature at all. We need to make absolutely certain that our motivation to serve the Lord in his church is not influenced by what is written on our pay cheque at the end of the month! The thought behind being 'eager to serve' is a spirit of enthusiasm, we should be fired up, we should be relishing every moment of our lives, it's a healthy zest for life; I can assure you, when we have that attitude, it is contagious, it rubs off on other people, it really is infectious! Peter gives a further example of less than desirable behaviour when he writes in verse 3: 'not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.' I think you'll agree there is a fine line drawn here by Peter. You see, leaders have to lead, otherwise they are not leaders in the accepted sense of that term. It's not the fact that they are doing it, it's how they do it. A good leader will not walk over people, he'll not ride roughshod over them, he'll not knock them at every available opportunity, he'll not brow beat them into submission, he'll not get them into a corner and threaten them by waving his finger in their eyes! I have to say, that is not biblical leadership, that is not the style of a shepherd who has the best interests of his sheep

at heart. Quite frankly, such an appalling management style is what the classroom bully does! I appreciate the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse in *The Message*, he writes: 'not bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way'. You see, the emphasis is on leading by example and doing it in a real spirit of meekness. We must think of ourselves as shepherds who are servants, not as shepherds who are sovereigns! It's the Moses syndrome. It was said of Moses in Numbers 12:3 that 'he was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.' Here was a man who pastored millions of people but he refused to pander to his fame. He cared nothing for the applause of the public. He would not manipulate the people. In fact, broken-hearted before God, he even said, 'Just take me out of the way'. That's the spirit we want to cultivate if we find ourselves in leadership roles. We don't have to act big or talk big or think big, we are there as overseers, not overlords! It has been well said that the church needs leaders who serve and servants who lead. I agree wholeheartedly with a comment I heard recently, 'the trouble today is that we have too many celebrities and not enough servants.'