

## 1 Peter 5:4-6

Peter writes in 5:4 some words that have been a tremendous source of encouragement to Christian leaders from day one; he writes: 'And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.' At times this is what has kept many a pastor going and especially when his back has been against the wall and it seems as if he has been knocking his head against the same immovable brick object; on numerous occasions in church life when everything seems to be going wrong and the pressure is really piling on, it's the marvellous promise of seeing Jesus face to face combined with the exhilarating prospect of being rewarded fairly for all the service rendered in his name that has enabled many a shepherd to hang in there! It's the old adage, isn't it: pay-day, someday! Did you notice, when Peter speaks of the second advent of Jesus he portrays the returning Christ as the one who is the 'chief shepherd'? You can trace the development of this idea throughout the New Testament. For example, in John 10:11, Jesus is the good shepherd who died for the sheep; in Hebrews 13:20,21, Jesus is the great shepherd who lives for the sheep; and right here in verse 4, Jesus is the chief shepherd who is coming back again for the sheep. The Christ who revealed himself to Peter in a fishing boat on the sea of Galilee is the same one who will be revealed a second time in the clouds of heaven. What Peter has done is quite breathtaking, he has encouraged the elders to remember the good shepherd as their example; now he urges them to look forward into the future, he wants them to scan the horizon and focus their eye of faith on him as the chief shepherd, the one who is their hope! It was C S Lewis who said: 'What the wicked most dread, and the redeemed most desire, will be revealed: the face of the Lord.' Because of who he is, a God of truth, a God of impartiality, a God who has no axe to grind with his people, a God who has no favourites, a God who never makes a wrong decision: because of who he is, he alone can assess a man's ministry and give him the proper reward. The fact is, there

could be a number of major surprises on that final day of appraisal, some who appear to be first may end up last when the Lord puts each of our efforts under the divine searchlight. To all those who have served their Lord well as undershepherds of the flock of God, there will be given what Peter calls 'the crown of glory'. If you like, it's a garland of glory. The use of the word 'glory' simply explains the meaning of the garland; at the end of the day, their reward and joy are the glory of their Lord and Saviour. I was fascinated to discover that the Greek word translated 'crown' in the NIV can describe any circlet, it may be of gold or silver; on the other hand, there was nothing to stop it from being a laurel or even one comprised of flowers. This is extremely interesting for the word translated 'that will never fade away' is the Greek word: 'amarantinos'. Now, it is well within the bounds of possibility to say that the garland is of amaranth, and those of you with green fingers will know that it is a flower chosen for its 'everlasting' quality. The phrase would then be translated as 'the amarantine garland of glory' rather than 'the garland of glory that will never fade away.' If you backtrack to 1:4, you can't fail to notice that Peter unwittingly compares our heavenly inheritance to the amaranth in that it is unwithering! A crown may be given to us but, I can assure you, we will cast our crowns before the throne of him who wore a plaited crown of thorns on our behalf; that scene of spontaneous worship and glad surrender is previewed for us in Revelation 4:10. I think the message from Peter to those who occupy positions of leadership in the work of God can be best summed up in the words of the old gospel song: 'It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus, life's trials will seem so small, when we see Christ, one glimpse of his dear face, all sorrow will erase, so bravely run the race, till we see Christ.' I feel the idea advanced by Warren Wiersbe is so apt at this point where he says: 'We lead by serving, and we serve by suffering.' To me, that is a succinct summary of the message of verses 1-4. If we keep on going, you will notice in verses 5-11 that Peter not only changes gear, he changes tack as well! He singles out the young

men for special attention in verse 5 where he exhorts them in this fashion, he says: 'Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."' This is the kind of verse that radically impacts the younger generation in our churches and, quite honestly, many of them squirm with a high level of discomfort when they hear it read in public; when push comes to shove, it's a one liner that many of them wish wasn't there! You see, it is characteristic of young men and women to give the impression, rightly or wrongly, that they are the most important people alive in today's world, they often see themselves as God's answer to the local church. They are full of ideas, they are creative, they tend to be enthusiastic, they want to get on and get the job done, they want to participate and be in the thick of the action, they want to be where it's all happening, they are not backwards in coming forward; that's par for the course, and that's fine. When you hear them speak, you could be forgiven for thinking that there is no subject upon which they are not experts. They often reveal a high level of frustration and a degree of impatience with the rest of us who struggle to keep up with them; at times, we are made to feel as though we are a spiritual underclass. That's the way it is in the twenty first century, and you know, when life was lived at a much slower pace without spin doctors and cyberspace, it was no different back in the first century! Sure, there are times when younger folk need to take a back seat, it is imperative for their own good and for their own spiritual development that they take on board a healthy attitude of submission to those who have travelled a lot longer on the road than they have. I'm not saying that they should be dogged down and should not be given the opportunities to exercise the gifts which God has given to them, far from it; but there is a right time for them to be brought into the limelight of leadership in the local church. To implement what Peter is suggesting in some circles would be tantamount to kick starting Armageddon, you could end up very

quickly with world war 3 on your hands, and before you know it, the church is split right down the middle! At the same time, Peter's input is sound advice to all. Submission is the name of the game! If the young men have a close walk with the Lord and are living their lives in submission to him, then this injunction will not be a problem, still less will it be perceived as a threat, they won't feel as though they are being manhandled into a corner and told that it's fine for them to be seen but it's best for them not to be heard; if anything, they will appreciate the safeguards which are built into it and they will recognise it is for their benefit in the longer term. You see, Peter's suggestion is one of checks and balances and, when it is adhered to, the entire operation will run smoothly. I think most of us realise that young men are often better educated than their elders, they probably have more paper qualifications, they have travelled extensively, but what they generally lack is a genuine all-round experience of life and that's one thing you can't buy on a supermarket shelf. Dr Howard Hendricks is credited with the statement: 'Experience is not the best teacher. Guided experience is the best teacher.' The key word in that pithy saying is the word 'guided', the secret lies in the guide and the thought there is one of mentoring. The psalmist David suggests that one of the advantages of being that bit older is that the young only know what it is like to be young but those who are older have experienced both 'worlds'. You find that in Psalm 37:25. At the end of the day, younger folk should respect those who are older because of their age and, in this context, where Peter is talking about elders, they should respect them because of their role in the local assembly as undershepherds. This is a clarion call to the young men to give deference to those in spiritual leadership. If we slip up here, we make the ministry much more difficult for those who are involved in it, we cause enormous pain and heartache to those in leadership for it is relatively easy to snipe from the sidelines, and we fail to have a cornerstone in our own spiritual lives. You know, it seems to me that older people need to be appreciated and younger people need to be affirmed

and, I believe, both are equally possible and both are desirable. When we submit to the Lordship of Christ in our lives then submission to one another is not a problem and, when that happens, there is a lovely working relationship which everyone benefits from. I suppose if we were to take a couple of hours and look back through the dusty archives of history, the chances are, we would come to one conclusion; I realise it's probably cold comfort but, here it is, anyway: our culture did not invent the generation gap!

Peter, the big fisherman-cum-apostle, widens the net in his next comment in verse 5 for it is addressed to 'all of you'. This is a call to every member of the congregation, this is a challenge to all within the sound of his voice, this is a message to everyone who reads his epistle, it is not restricted to age or gender in any way. It is to everyone! And what are we to do? We are to be humble! The 'clothe yourself' metaphor employed by Peter comes from a rare word that pictures a servant putting on an apron before serving those in the house. The word literally means in the Greek, 'to tie something on yourself with a knot or a bow.' The effect of this action is twofold: number one, it would keep his clothes clean especially if he was working in the kitchen and, number two, it would indicate his status as a slave in the household. The apostle who writes this verse is the same man who was present in the room when Jesus took a towel and tied it around his waist and then proceeded to wash his disciples' feet. The timely lesson on humility from that act of pure servanthood was indelibly etched on Peter's mind, it is something he never forgot, and that's why he is so keen for the rest of us to take it on board as well. The humility of those who serve the Lord Jesus is not merely the absence of pride or the awareness of our personal limitations for that can often lead to a false humility or perhaps a bogus ego. We don't have time to go into it today but true humility is superbly described by Paul in Philippians 2:1-11. It's what has been labelled: 'the way to up is

down' and 'the way to down is up' syndrome. Edmund Clowney concurs with this view when he writes: 'Christian humility is realism that recognises grace.' I think Paul was on the same wavelength when he asked a trio of leading questions in 1 Corinthians 4:7, 'For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?' If the truth be told, the Christian knows full well that he did not make himself nor did he save himself, it's all down to the matchless grace of God. Any sense of humility we may have springs from our total dependence on the grace of God. In the words of Stuart Briscoe we need to remember that, 'apart from God's creation, we would not exist; without his redemption, we would be lost; and apart from his call, we would do nothing of eternal consequence.' The bottom line is, we have nothing to write home about, we have nothing to glory in for all that we are, all that we have, all that we ever hope to be, is down to the wonderful grace of God in our lives! Bearing that in mind, therefore, an attitude of genuine humility is the one and only acceptable mindset that should govern all our interpersonal relationships. John Calvin is spot on when he says: 'No ornament is more beautiful or more becoming, than when we submit one to another.' That's what humility is, it's taking off the trappings and putting on the apron! It is serving others. Peter continues in the same frame of mind by giving us a biblical warrant to support his thinking. He quotes from the Old Testament book of Proverbs, chapter 3 verse 34 and it's worth noting that James uses the same proof text in the course of his epistle. The axiom says: 'It's wise to clothe yourself with humility toward each other because God will give you grace if you do and God will fight against you if you don't!' I think that's pretty good motivation, don't you! The simple fact is, God is opposed to the proud, he flatly detests pride, he can't stand the sight of it. From time immemorial, He has rejected it, and even with the passing of years, his resistance and resolve has not diminished or weakened in any way for he continues to be against it. Actually, the Greek word

for 'opposes' carries the idea of a five-star general getting all his armies lined up! In other words, God sees the proud person for who he is, God sees him where he is, and he commits himself to marshalling all his divine resources against that individual to bring him down. It appears by innuendo that God will ensure the proud person gets his comeuppance! On the face of it, that may seem to be a rather cruel and vindictive response for heaven to take, it may seem as though the punishment doesn't fit the crime, it could come across as the sledgehammer to crack a nut syndrome; but God knows what he is doing and he will do all that needs to be done in order to bring proud man to his senses, he will do all in his power to bring self-sufficient modern man back to the real world with a bump! Peter, bless him, can really identify with this statement for it wasn't the first time in his life when God acted decisively to bring him back into line. God knows what it takes and Peter knows what it's like! So, it's really good that Peter has committed his thoughts to paper, this man is writing from painful personal experience and that means, what he says is well worth listening to! Peter continues by saying in verse 6: 'Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.' When we look at the phrase, God's mighty hand, from an Old Testament perspective it all begins to fit neatly into place. Under the old economy, God's hand symbolised two things. The first is discipline and you find ample illustration of that in Exodus 3:20, Job 30:21 and Psalm 32:4. The second concept is deliverance and that is referred to in Deuteronomy 9:26 and Ezekiel 20:34. What happens is this: when we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of the Lord, we willingly accept his discipline as being for our good and for his glory. Then, we gratefully acknowledge his deliverance which always comes in his time and in his way! This is God's way of doing things and, even though it may go against the grain of human nature to hold back, it is always best to let God take the initiative and work things out for us. It may seem as if it is painfully slow sometimes, it may appear as if God is not as quick at getting off the mark as we

would like him to be, the fact is: our God is not in a hurry and he is a past master at turning events round for his own ends and glory. The promise enshrined in this verse is for each of us to claim, we can stake our lives on it, we can rest our future on it, come what may, God will lift us up in his time, that may even take place this side of heaven and, if it doesn't, there's no need to panic or get worked up about it, for it will definitely happen on the other side of death! I suppose one of the classic examples of this principle working out is seen in the life of David. He didn't go out of his way pandering for success, he didn't elbow other people out of the way and push himself forward for the top jobs, he simply humbled himself under the hand of the Lord and was content to remain in that position. And what did God do? Well, he exalted him to the highest position in the land and he became the shepherd of an entire nation. You know, when that kind of thing happens, it is lovely to see, it is beautiful to watch and it is so stunningly spectacular and awesome that only God could have done it. Yes, our God makes things happen!