

Studies in First Peter

"The Lion, the Sheep, & Your Wardrobe"

First Peter 5:1-14

Introduction

I can remember taking the kids to the Fresno Zoo and seeing Mojo. You could hear his growl all over the grounds - *and that wasn't even his roar!*

The first century Christians would have a different image of a roaring lion. In just a short while, official Roman persecution would break out upon the Church. Many believers would find themselves in the Roman amphitheater, facing the roaring lion. One such martyr, a man named Ignatius, is quoted as saying,

"Let me be given to the wild beasts... I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts that I may be found pure bread... Come grapplings with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, hacking of limbs, crushing of my whole body, come cruel tortures of the devil to assail me."

Peter's words were more than a prediction of the future. They were a description of present. Peter likened the devil at large to "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." The devil was *already* at large, seeking to destroy believers by any means possible. The imagery was all the more potent when you consider Christians are compared to sheep. What can a sheep, or even an entire flock, hope to do against such hatred and cruelty from so evil and powerful a predator?

Staying with the image of the sheep, Peter suggested two things sheep should do: Submit to your Shepherds and Stand-up to Satan.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Sheep Submit To Your Shepherds: They Are The Leaders God Appoints To Watch Over You, and #2, Sheep Stand-up To Satan: He Is The Lion God Allows To Come Against You.

#1 Sheep Submit To Your Shepherds:
They Are The Leaders God Appoints To Watch Over You
(v1-7)

Reading through the New Testament you encounter the following terms to describe leadership in the Church: Apostles, prophets, pastor-teachers, evangelists, elders, and deacons.

Apostles and prophets were men with special gifting and authority who laid the initial foundation of the Church in the first century. Pastor-teachers and evangelists are men who through the subsequent centuries have built upon the initial foundation laid by the apostles and prophets. Pastor-teachers and evangelists are further described as specially gifted men who are given to the Church. Elders and deacons certainly have gifts; but they are offices men hold within the Church.

How exactly do all these men work together? *There are those who think they know!* They write books about Church government. The truth is, there is a lot of talk in the Bible about the *qualifications* and *characteristics* of these men, but very little about exactly how they operate. If you have the right men, they operate in love and with humility for the good of God's people. Church government is by love, regardless the exact method you adopt.

Peter was an apostle; he was a pastor-teacher; he was an evangelist; and he considered himself an "elder." When he addressed the "elders," this included the pastor-teacher of the local Church and those men raised-up by God to assist him in the spiritual work of the ministry. Deacons were not specifically mentioned by Peter. These are the men raised-up and then appointed by the pastor and elders to assist them with the daily working-out of ministering to God's people. They are not mentioned, but should still take heed to what Peter said.

Peter indicated there were *perspectives* for leaders and provided a *profile* for leaders in these opening verses. The perspectives are in verse one.

1 Peter 5:1 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:

Peter had witnessed "the sufferings of Christ." After Jesus was raised from the dead, He told Peter he would suffer martyrdom. Suffering was not an abstract idea to him. It was his daily existence and his earthly destiny. Peter was someone qualified to exhort leaders about personal suffering.

He couldn't talk about suffering without immediately mentioning "the glory that will be revealed." Jesus will return in power and with all His great glory! The sufferings of this present life cannot be compared with future glory. Suffering and glory: It's a **perspective** your leaders must hold in their hearts; it must permeate their ministry.

In verses two and three Peter provided a profile for leaders:

1 Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;
1 Peter 5:3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

The Church is likened to a flock of sheep. Your leaders are like shepherds over sheep; *but the sheep are not their own*. They are "overseers" of "the flock of God." Their leadership should be just like what Jesus would do if He were here.

Peter spoke about their manner of ministry when he said, "not by compulsion but willingly." Many Churches compel men to serve. The result is grudging, burdensome, joyless service. Leadership is a calling, *not* a compulsion. When it is your calling, there is a "willingness" to serve the Lord that is carried out with joy and gladness.

Peter next spoke about motivation, saying, "not for dishonest gain but eagerly." Leaders should be "eager" to serve, whether they get paid or not; and whether the Church grows or not. It's OK to be paid by the Church; it's OK to encourage the Church to grow. But it is also possible to take advantage of God's flock by seeking "dishonest gain." Dishonest gain is seeing the Church as a resource rather than the flock of God.

Then Peter spoke of methods when he said, "nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." Leaders

should **never** use the methods of the world; never intimidate; never be overbearing. The Church is not cattle to be driven; it is sheep to be led.

When Peter said "example," one of the things he meant was an example of suffering in the persecution that was coming. **Leaders would be targeted first.** So he encouraged them in verse four:

1 Peter 5:4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Peter thought backwards. He saw leaders at the Reward Seat of Jesus and then encouraged them to endure their earthly suffering in the light of being exalted and rewarded in the future.

All this talk about your leaders was laying the groundwork for what he really wanted to say, in verse five:

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders...

"Younger people" literally means, *recently born*. These are most likely new converts, worthy of special mention because they were born-again into immediate persecution. *This was Peter's new convert class!*

Suffering and struggle were already upon them and things would soon get much worse. The lions awaited them in the Roman amphitheaters. God had graciously provided them with gifted leaders, and with leaders who had gifts. The new converts should support and submit to them; then they would be enabled to follow their example in suffering.

So should **all** believers support and submit to their leaders, and support and submit to one another:

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, **all of you** be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

"Humility" is humbling yourself by putting others and their needs ahead of yourself and your needs. Peter gave you a picture of how

it's done when he said "be clothed." It's a word describing a servant or a slave tying his or her apron on in order to stoop and serve others. **He was describing Jesus in John thirteen!**

"God resists the proud" who think they can face life on their own. You can't; you need God, **and** you need His people. Humble yourself among other believers and you will be given all the "grace" you need to face your struggles and sufferings; or to help them face their struggles and sufferings.

Next you are reminded to humble yourself before God:

1 Peter 5:6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

Humbling yourself before God means submitting to His ways and wisdom as revealed in the Word; it means accepting the seemingly arbitrary twists and turns of personal providence; it means believing He is sovereign despite your struggle and suffering. "He may exalt you" means He will do so - but it will be in His "due time." It will be as God sees fit - mostly in eternity, when your struggles and sufferings have ended.

1 Peter 5:7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

"Care" means *worries, burdens*. **You give them to God to worry about and carry!** Here is how this works: If you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, you begin to think backwards and see the present in light of the future. You realize and believe that your own struggles and sufferings are actually working for you to produce an eternal reward. You're then free to think more about others and seek ways to serve them. As you serve them, God gives you the grace you need. **Your** burdens - no matter how severe - seem light as you help others bear their burdens.

Let's try to tie all this together. Persecution was about to get fierce. The leaders - the "shepherds" - would be the first targeted. Normally when you strike the shepherd, the sheep are scattered and become easy prey. So Peter exhorted the shepherds to be examples to their sheep. Suffer with grace; be an Ignatius as you were being devoured

by the lions. For their part, the sheep would be strengthened if they were supportive and submitted under their shepherds. Submission to leadership was part of humbling themselves before God and among each other. Together the sheep and the shepherds would endure the lion's roar.

Which brings us man-to-man with the lion:

#2 Sheep Stand-up To Satan:
He Is The Lion God Allows To Come Against You
(v8-14)

I can't even begin to imagine the terror of hearing a lion's roar out in the wilderness. Peter told his readers - and is telling us - that we are out in that wilderness with the lion on the prowl.

Peter wanted believers to overcome the lion. I think it's based on his own previous encounter with the lion. You might remember that, on the night before Jesus was crucified, Peter proclaimed he would never abandon Jesus. Jesus told him he would betray him three times... And he told Peter that the devil was behind it. Jesus used a different analogy, saying that the devil wanted to sift Peter as if he were wheat... But the idea was the same: Your adversary is after you. Peter failed and fell; Jesus graciously restored him. Now he could offer a strategy for others to follow to succeed where he had failed. He laid-out the strategy in verses eight through eleven.

First, See the lion:

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Peter pledged his allegiance to Jesus, proclaiming he would never abandon him. He was thinking on a purely natural level. Jesus raised his sight to the supernatural by telling him the devil was after him. You must understand that your life is not natural; it is supernatural. You live here on earth; but you're also seated in heavenly places.

You must, in a spiritual sense, **see** the lion. If you see him, you will most likely remain "sober." You will not allow yourself to become overly-influenced by, or come under the influence of, anything or anyone that might put you off your spiritual guard.

You will also be "vigilant." I take this to mean you will practice and make progress in spiritual disciplines. Take the spiritual discipline of prayer as an example. Jesus had asked Peter to pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. *Peter and the others instead fell asleep!* Vigilance would have gone a long way that night.

Second, Stand against the lion:

1 Peter 5:9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith...

"Resist" simply means to *stand*. It is described by "steadfast in the faith." You are to stand firm in faith believing God will give you victory over the lion.

Here is some advice from the U.S. Forrest Service if you ever encounter a mountain lion:

"If being chased, turn immediately and face the lion. Do not lose eye contact and remain standing and do not run away or bend over. Face the animal and **stand** your ground. Raise your arms and look big. Talk aloud and in the firm voice. Prepare to use a noisemaker or shout if necessary. If the lion starts to crouch or advance, make noise or throw whatever you can without losing eye contact or bending over. Wait for the lion to withdraw before moving. Although unusual, be alert for a second lion. If you are attacked, FIGHT BACK."

When facing the spiritual lion, we would modify that advice. You still stand; but you are not standing alone! You are standing in Jesus, in the victory He has already won over the devil. Perhaps I can illustrate - "The Bear" (1984).

Staying with Peter's own personal experiences, which were and are well-known... When the mob came to arrest Jesus, Peter jumped out in front of Jesus - thinking he could protect the Lord, rather than the Lord protecting him. He drew his sword and began hacking away. He cut off the ear of one young man. Jesus had to heal him! In the midst of the Lord's own suffering, He paused to help Peter by healing the mess he had made. For His part, Jesus simply stood there and

used His sword: He spoke the Word of God. In one of the truly remarkable moments of all history, when the mob said they were seeking Jesus, He said, "I AM," and they all fell backward! He stood firm in faith, trusting His Father in all things.

Third, Suffer against the lion:

1 Peter 5:9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

1 Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*.

Other believers had and would and will experience "sufferings." You will probably "suffer." But you can only suffer "a while." It may seem a long while to you; but it cannot compare to eternity.

Your suffering is used to "perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." Was he talking about this life on earth? Or your future life, in eternity? **Both!** After Peter's failures; after he'd been sifted like wheat; after he'd been devoured by the lion; Jesus perfected, established, strengthened, and settled him. He served the Lord the rest of his earthly life until he was cruelly crucified upside-down as a martyr. Now he is perfected, established, strengthened, and settled in heaven.

Peter broke out in praise:

1 Peter 5:11 To Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Backward-thinking looks *forward* to glory!

Peter closed-out this first letter mentioning some *people* and a *place*:

1 Peter 5:12 By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.

1 Peter 5:13 She who is in Babylon, elect together with *you*, greets you; and so *does* Mark my son.

1 Peter 5:14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

"Silvanus" is sometimes referred to as Silas. He was often a traveling companion of the apostle Paul. "Mark" is probably Jon-Mark, the young man once kicked-off a missions team by Paul who later got his act together and became a valued assistant.

The place, "Babylon," is not the Babylon by the Euphrates River. It was not a significant city at the time of Peter's ministry. The Christians called Rome "Babylon." They also referred to the entire world-system as "Babylon." In the Revelation of Jesus Christ you read about both a religious system "Babylon" and a real city of "Babylon" that will exist in the last days just before Jesus returns. "She who is in Babylon" was the Church in Rome.

So, if you want to be cute, you can refer to places as "Babylon" to let people know what you think about the world and where it's headed.

First century believers greeted one another "with a kiss of love" - men kissing men, women kissing women. How about we just shake hands? Or an occasional holy hug.

Buried in these closing comments are "grace" and "peace." If you've experienced the grace of God in salvation, you are at peace with God, and can have the peace of God.

Conclusion

It was a serious thing to be called "Christian" in the first century. It was a crime; you could be killed for it.

It is no less serious today. You may not ever be killed for it - although elsewhere in our world believers are being martyred. But you still need to die to be a Christian. You need to die to yourself, live for God, and love His people.

As you leave, clothe yourself with the apron of the slave and be ready to wash someone else's feet - no matter how dirty you think yours might be.

