

## WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY The Glory of Shepherding God's Flock

### INTRODUCTION

After many years, I remain thankful for the day when Elk Point Baptist Church appointed its first Elders. It's our Biblical conviction that the local church is to be led by qualified Elders and Deacons. As was read for us from Acts 20, Elders are to "care for the church of God" (v28). This is a legacy passed down to Elders from Christ's apostles. As the early Church developed there was a gradual shift from Apostles to Elders. The Biblical term Elder is synonymous with pastor and bishop. Paul wrote to Titus, "*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—*" (Titus 1:5, ESV).

The responsibility of the Elders to replicate themselves. As Paul said to Timothy, "*You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*" (2 Timothy 2:1–2, ESV).

Even Peter who plays a major role in our message today experienced this transition from Apostle to Elder. He writes, "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:<sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you."<sup>1</sup> [Emphasis mine]

So, the message this morning is going to particularly apply to Elders. But if you're not an Elder, please don't close your ears because you will see that you also have a significant importance in the message.

### SCRIPTURE TEXT: JOHN 21:15–23 (ESV)

### THE EXPOSITION

The disciples responded to Jesus' invitation for breakfast. After breakfast it seems that Jesus took Peter for a walk ("Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, ..." (John 21:20, ESV). Along the stroll Jesus asked Peter, three times: "Do you love me?" The first time though He asked, "do you love me more than these?"<sup>2</sup> I need to clarify 2 things:

1. The use of the word love.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Pe 5:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 21:15). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

There was a time when scholars made much of the Greek words for love. There was much ado about words like *eros* (erotic love) or *agapao* (Divine unconditional love) and *phileo* (brotherly love). But careful study of the Greek text notes that particularly *agapao* and *phileo* are sometimes used interchangeably. There were sermons in the past and books that made much of Jesus' use of love in this chapter and Peter's response. I believe its wise not to make too much of them here.

Dr R.C. Sproul, Sr. comments, "John uses the words *phileo* and *agape* interchangeably, so there is no reason to assume that the change in words here is due to anything more than stylistic preferences without any profound theological significance. I'm convinced of that."<sup>3</sup> The Expositor's Bible Commentary agrees, "Both words represent a high aspect of love. Since they are used of both God (3:16; 5:20) and men (14:21; 16:27) in this Gospel, they seem to be interchangeable with no great difference in meaning."<sup>4</sup> Dr. Carson points out that in this passage John uses 3 other pairs: feed/take care of; lambs/sheep; and in verse 17 the word "know" is translated by 2 different Greek words. He writes "It is difficult to see why the first pair should."<sup>5</sup>

I think it is sufficient to say that Jesus was pressing Peter: "Do you really love me?" It was the pressing of the 3 times that frustrated Peter, not the use of different Greek words ("Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time."<sup>6</sup>).

2. A second clarification we need to make regards the first question of Jesus to Peter where He adds the phrase "more than these". "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"<sup>7</sup> [Emphasis mine]. What does Jesus mean "more than these"? There are 3 main opinions:

- a. "Do you love me more than these fish"? Implying is fulltime ministry more important to you than your occupation of fishing?
- b. "Do you love me more than you love these other disciples?"
- c. A third option is, "Do you love me more than these disciples love me?"

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<sup>3</sup> R. C. Sproul. John (St. Andrew's Expositional Commentary) (Kindle Locations 5273-5275). Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> *Expositor's Bible Commentary, The*, Pradis CD-ROM:John/Exposition of John/v. The Epilogue (21:1-25)/B. The Reinstatement of Peter (21:15-23), Book Version: 4.0.2

<sup>5</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 677). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Jn 21:17). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>7</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Jn 21:15). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Of course, good, and godly expositors disagree. But I prefer the third option. It sounds to me like Jesus is making a flashback. Remember this occasion in Matthew 26:32–34 (ESV)

<sup>32</sup> But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” <sup>33</sup> Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”

Peter seemed to have the attitude prior to this that of all the disciples, he was Jesus’ man. Jesus could count on him above anyone. Maybe he was suggesting that he loved Jesus more. The grammar seems to indicate that in the original.<sup>8</sup>

It is my opinion that Jesus is pressing into Peter’s heart and in frustration Peter responds: ““Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”<sup>9</sup> Peter in humble submission admitted the omniscience of the Lord and it was as if he said, “Lord I always thought I could fool you. No more. You know my heart and You know that I love you.

Jesus then prophesied Peter’s future. This love that Peter truly had for the Savior would end up in a day when he would not go where he wanted to go or do what he wanted to do. He will be brought to humiliation. Many Christian theologians see the “stretched out hands” as a foreshadowing of crucifixion.

The ministry of Peter was to care for the Church, the sheep of God. He was to feed them, take care of them. The ministry of Peter is described by verbs: tend, feed, etc. Notice, contrary to Roman Catholic doctrine, Peter wasn’t given an office or a title. He was commanded to feed the flock of God. Peter would serve the Church and in old age he would suffer and die for His Savior.

Knowing his fate and his marching orders Peter then asked about John who was following behind. Christ’s short answer was that that was none of his business. He had but one job: follow Christ.

## Application

So how will we apply this? I believe the first and most important message is to myself and the Elders of Elk Point Baptist Church. The life of Peter was characterized by bold, brash, pride. Now things have

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<sup>8</sup> “Grammatically, the comparative adverb “more” (*pleon*) is followed by the ablative of comparison “these” (*touton*). Whether the ablative represents the first or second alternative is not clear (see BDF, 185.1, p. 99). In view of Peter’s boastful promise that whatever the others did he would not fail, the former alternative seems more likely.” - *Expositor’s Bible Commentary, The*, Pradis CD-ROM:John/Exposition of John/v. The Epilogue (21:1-25)/B. The Reinstatement of Peter (21:15-23), Book Version: 4.0.2

<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 21:17). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

changed. He truly loves Jesus, and he has been given a mandate and an idea of what is going to happen in the end. We Elders must note at least 3 things:

1. The sheep are not Peter's they are Christ's sheep. Those who are members of our local flock do not belong to us. They belong to Jesus, and we need to care for them with that in mind. We are stewards of God's flock. Much like parents receive children as a gift and are to care for them as the Lord would, Elders must have that same attitude. We must look at the Members of our Church and think, "Christ gave you to me to care for."

Notice how Paul addresses the Ephesian elders: "*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*" (Acts 20:28, ESV)

The members of the Church were bought with the precious blood of Christ, and it is none other than the Spirit of God that has called Elders to care for the Church. The question might be, "How?" "How are we to care for you?"

2. The first and primary role of caring for Christ's Church is feeding the sheep. The teaching and preaching of God's Word is the first priority of Christian ministry. "Maintaining the flock of God is one of the keys to the mission of the church. The lost cannot truly be reached with success until the saints are deeply fed and mobilized."<sup>10</sup> It is our role to ensure that the Church is receiving healthy food in their spiritual diet.

Sadly, in too many evangelical churches the priority is not in feeding the sheep's spiritual tummies but scratching their ears. In 2 Timothy 4:3–4 (ESV) Paul said to Timothy:

*"<sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."*

Some sermons sound more like TED TALKS or a therapy session. The Bible is clear: "*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*" (2 Timothy 4:1–2, ESV)

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<sup>10</sup> Osborne, G. R. (2018). *John: Verse by Verse*. (J. Reimer, E. Ritzema, D. Thevenaz, & R. Brant, Eds.) (p. 484). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

The Old Testament teachers clearly understood their task. We note "*They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*" (Nehemiah 8:8, ESV)

3. Thirdly, Jesus reminds us of the motivation behind ministry is a deep and sincere love for Jesus. "Personal agendas, soapbox issues, confused priorities, and personal kingdom building are all the result of loving something else more than God."<sup>11</sup>

I often pray that God, the Spirit would give to me according to Paul's instruction, "*The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*" (1 Timothy 1:5, ESV)

Of course, you know this to be true. "*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*" (1 Corinthians 13:1, ESV)

As I conclude, please turn with me to 1 Peter 5:1–4 (ESV),

*"<sup>1</sup> 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: <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."* [Emphasis mine]

You might be sitting here and thinking, this story has little to do with me. You might be thinking, "I'm not an Elder." Firstly, let me point out a little phrase that Peter uses: "but being examples to the flock." Elders are not to do ministry FOR the Church. Elders are to minister as EXAMPLES to the Church. Church members ought to be seen doing this same thing: caring for God's flock by nourishing the lives of others with His Word; and doing this out of a sincere love for Christ. Your Elders ought to be human examples of that.

Secondly, as we are convinced that the Scripture places the responsibility of choosing pastors and elders on the Church Membership, this means that Members must seek men who are motivated by God's love and prepared to feed the flock, tend the flock. This doesn't always mean in public, formal ways, but Paul clearly revealed that Elders are to be "able to teach."<sup>12</sup> Elk Point Baptist Church should reflect mentoring and development of all kinds of ministry leaders and servants, but specifically we desire a

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<sup>11</sup> Carter, Matt; Wredberg, Josh. Exalting Jesus in John (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>12</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Ti 3:2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

culture where potential Elders are encouraged and equipped for this important ministry. Let us pray that God would continue to raise up men who love God's Word and love God's people.