

God's Flock: Motivated by God's Glory

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. It's a real privilege to be speaking to you tonight from 1 Peter chapter 5 as we bring our little series to an end. I hope you've found it as challenging and as encouraging as the guys that have been working through it have done.

So, just before we do that, let's pray. Our God and our Father, we acknowledge and we praise you this evening as our powerful and glorious God.

I thank you that you are gracious and that you care for each one of us. Please help us to still our hearts so that we can hear what you have to say to us through your living and active word this evening.

In Jesus' precious name, Amen. Amen. So, in Peter in chapter 5, his message for us really is that we are to be motivated by God's eternal glory to live humbly together through temporary suffering. Most of you will no doubt be familiar with the film Chariots of Fire, which tells the story of Eric Liddell, who in fact went to church down at Holy Corner for a time.

[1 : 13] And that's now the Eric Liddell Centre. And the film tells the story about Eric Liddell competing at the Olympics in 1924. He was the Usain Bolt of his day and he was the favourite to win the 100 metres.

But the 100 metres was scheduled for a Sunday. And Liddell, being a committed Christian, famously refused to compete. And to the world, it looked like he was throwing away his shot at Olympic glory.

However, he entered the 400 metres instead, which wasn't his distance. He wasn't as good at that. And nobody really gave him a chance. But incredibly, he managed not only to win the gold, he also set a new world record.

And Eric Liddell explained his experience of winning the gold medal in this way. He said, And after the Olympics, Eric Liddell, who was in the peak of his career and could have gone on to win many more gold medals, gave up his athletics career and went to China to become a missionary. His actions demonstrated that he was truly motivated by God's eternal glory to live humbly through temporary suffering. Serving God was more important to him than the earthly glory that his athletics career promised.

[2 : 57] So the question for us as we look at our lives tonight really is, what are we living for? Is it success in our exams? Being promoted at work?

Is it about having the best holidays or experiences that you can? Or are we truly motivated in how we live by the majesty of God and what he's done for us?

Peter is asking us in chapter 5 if we are living like sheep who belong to God. Because that is what Christians are. We're going to think about what chapter 5 tells us about what it means to be a sheep of God's flock.

And then what it looks like to live as a sheep of God's flock. So being a sheep of God's flock means firstly that you belong to God.

In 2005 a group of Turkish shepherds sat down to enjoy their lunch together. They thought their sheep would be okay. They kind of enjoyed their lunch, were chatting, having a bit of a laugh.

[4 : 04] And as they began to relax, something rather alarming caught their attention. They could only watch in horror as hundreds of their sheep followed each other, one after the other over the edge of a cliff.

In verse 2, Peter refers to Christians as God's flock. This means that we are sheep who belong to God and have him as our shepherd. If that's the case, can we have confidence that we will fare any better than the Turkish sheep who were so badly neglected by their shepherds?

Well, Peter's emphatic answer is that we can have such confidence because of who God is. And if we look at some of the verses here, we can see some of the characteristics of God that Peter draws out.

Firstly, we see that God is powerful in verse 6. He has a mighty hand. And in verse 11, we see that the power belongs to him for eternity. God is also eternally glorious.

In verse 10, we're told that Christians are called to his eternal glory in Christ. But the really amazing thing I've found in this passage is that God isn't just powerful and glorious.

[5 : 19] He's also gracious and caring. In verse 10, Peter describes God as the God of all grace. In verse 10, sorry, verse 7, we're told that God cares for us.

God isn't just the almighty creator of the world who's perfectly holy, righteous, and just. He's also a God of incredible mercy who loves his people and sent his son to live in this world of brokenness and sin so that we can be brought back into relationship with him.

So Peter assures us that we belong to a God who's not only powerful and glorious, but who is also gracious and caring. And he reminds us that God has displayed these attributes most fully in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus describes us as lost sheep wandering away from God. And he describes himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Notice how Peter describes himself in verse 1 as being a witness of Christ's sufferings.

It's Christ's sufferings that was the price that it took to bring us to God. Earlier in chapter 2, verses 24 to 25, Peter explains it in this way.

[6 : 37] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, for you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

And what a privilege this is, to know that we belong to a God who is also our shepherd, who feeds us, cares for us, guides and protects us. And I suppose this evening we need to ask ourselves, do we believe that this is who we belong to, this powerful, glorious, gracious and caring God?

Do you really believe that he's powerful enough to answer your prayers, glorious enough to merit your praise, gracious enough to forgive your sins, and caring enough to deal with the situations that you're facing?

If you don't, I hope that you might see something of who God is this evening in this passage. And if you do, I hope that you're challenged to see how this should cause us to live distinctively for him.

Being a sheep of God's flock also means that you will share in God's eternal glory. Again, what is your motivation in life? For me, it's sadly no longer achieving any sort of athletic success, but it might be making money, it might be just being comfortable, maybe it's just simply enjoying your family and your friends.

[8 : 07] And for each one of us, the truth lies in our hearts, but it's normally displayed in the way we spend our time and our money. For Christians, Peter tells us that our ultimate motivation and goal in life is to be God's eternal glory.

And this means reminding ourselves each day who God is and what he has done for you as your motivation for living for him. In verse 10, we're told that we've been called by God to his eternal glory in Christ.

And Peter says in verse 1 that he will share in the glory to be revealed. And this promise doesn't just belong to Peter, it belongs to every Christian. If we belong to God's flock, then we will share in God's glory.

And this is such an incredible example of the grace of God. We don't deserve to share in God's glory. Nothing we could do merits that. So God not only saves us, he bestows us this incredible privilege of sharing in the fullness of God for eternity.

The promise of sharing in God's glory means that our reward in death is to enjoy being in God's presence for all of eternity. What's more, verse 10 says that sharing in God's glory means that God will fully restore us and make us strong, firm, and steadfast.

[9 : 34] And that is such an incredible comfort when you're doubting or when you're hurting. I know that in my own life, I find myself to be weak, soft, and wavering in the face of difficulties of life.

I'm frustrated by how often I give in to temptation, how often I lose my temper with those I love the most, and how often I fail to share my faith. And as we look around, we're so often hurt by the brokenness of this world, whether it's experiencing relationships breaking down, friendships lost,

jobs being lost, or the effects of illness taking their toll on our loved ones.

I suspect many of us feel broken or scarred by the effects of sin in our lives or in the lives of others. And it's a tremendous encouragement that God promises ultimately to heal us completely, mind, body, and soul.

And it's this hope in God's eternal glory that is to be our motivation to live for God's glory rather than our own. And this attitude should permeate our whole life, including how we approach our families, our friends, our work, church, possessions, and leisure.

There's not an area of our life that this shouldn't touch. And so what does this look like in your life on a day-to-day basis? And perhaps like me, you might admit that too often your focus and time is spent on pursuing success and enjoyment in these things themselves rather than in the God who provides and sustains them.

[11 : 12] So as we develop a greater appreciation of what it means to belong to God as a sheep of his flock, we will be challenged more and more to live humbly together in the way that Peter sets out in chapter 5.

If you don't belong to God this evening and you don't have this hope of being with him for eternity, then I would challenge you to consider that Jesus sees you as a lost sheep and he wants you to return to God's flock.

So how does being a sheep of God's flock and knowing these things change the way that we should live our lives here on earth? Peter's answer is that we are to follow the example of Jesus, who is our chief shepherd, by living humbly together through temporary suffering.

It's important to remember, as Peter Dixon reminded us last week, that the suffering that Peter is focusing on here is suffering because of our faith in Christ.

And we can think about this in terms of three ships. There's servant leadership, there's humble fellowship, and there's enduring hardship.

[12 : 27] And in terms of servant leadership, quite a big chunk of this passage was about elders and how they should be acting. But there's things that we can all learn from that.

And so in terms of servant leadership, there's, in verse one, Peter appeals to his fellow elders to be shepherds of God's flock.

And he gives three reasons why elders are to display this servant leadership in their role as shepherds. And firstly, the first thing to remember is that the shepherds do not own the flock.

God's flock belongs to God, no one else. In verse three, Peter emphasizes that the flock is entrusted to the elders. And that's really a call on all of us to treat the role of an elder with the utmost seriousness in recognition of the trust that has been placed in them by God.

Elders are to care for the Christians under their care and the knowledge that one day they must give an account to God. And that's a huge responsibility and challenge, but it's also one that can be a huge joy.

[13 : 40] And as members, for those of us who aren't elders, there's a particular responsibility on us to support, encourage, and care for our elders, both in prayer and in practical ways.

And so I suppose I would just challenge you, and I would challenge myself, next time you're speaking to one of the elders, why don't you make a point of asking specifically what would they like to be, you to be praying for them?

Secondly, the shepherds have a chief shepherd. Elders aren't just shepherds, they're also sheep like the rest of us who have a chief shepherd.

And Jesus is the chief shepherd that Peter speaks of in verse four. Jesus set the ultimate example of how to shepherd the flock. In Jesus' death on the cross, we see perfect love, humility, and sacrifice.

And elders have a responsibility to model a Christ-like attitude of love, humility, and sacrifice to the rest of the sheep. Because, in so doing, Peter tells us that in verse three, they are examples to the flock.

[14 : 55] And elders who model Jesus in their lives help to establish a healthy tone for the life of the church. And that doesn't mean the elders strut around saying, look at me, look, I am doing things.

But rather, it means that they should be constantly striving to point people to Christ. And thirdly, the shepherds have an eternal reward.

In verse two, Peter talks about an elder's motivation. They should be willing and they should be eager to serve. And the reason for this eagerness is made clear in verse four. The chief shepherd is coming again and the elders will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away. The reward for shepherding the flock isn't earthly. It's not money, it's not power, it's not recognition, it's not status, it's something far more precious and infinitely more enduring, a crown of glory in heaven. [15 : 57] And on the basis of this promise of eternal reward, elders are to resist all earthly motivations for leadership which are worth nothing in comparison. In verse two, we see that elders are not to be greedy, they're not to pursue dishonest gain.

In verse two again, we see that they're not to serve simply out of duty, they're not to serve simply because they must. And in verse three, we see that elders aren't to serve for some ambition to get power.

It says that elders are not to lord over those entrusted to them. So, I think both elders and the rest of us should be seriously challenged but also strongly motivated by the truths Peter sets out here and we should be reminded how important it is to actively support our elders as they seek to guide and support us.

So, living together as God's flock also means living together in humble fellowship and this means that the church should be marked by an attitude of radical humility firstly, before God and secondly, amongst our fellow Christians.

in verse six, we're commanded to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. And why is this? Because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

[17 : 28] Humility before God means to recognize that God is God and we are not. True humility grows out of an increasing dependence on God and the challenges to trust God with all aspects of our lives, not just the bits we want to give to him.

It's really easy to think that we know what is best and to pursue our own plans, our own ambitions and give God only a second thought. Humility means to reverse this and acknowledge that God knows what's best and to pursue his plans for our lives.

During his time in a Japanese prison camp, Eric Liddell wrote a little devotional book which is a really fantastic read and in it he describes the power of authentic Christian humility like this. He says, humility is powerful for it is based in the sense of being absolutely dependent on the grace of God. That is why a Christian has such a serene and confident spirit combined with the utmost humility.

He aims very high, attempts great things and yet without proud looks or thoughts because he is not thinking of himself but of God. Would it not be wonderful if we were known as people who demonstrated this kind of humility as we live our lives in the world?

[18 : 51] Peter says in verse 6 that we are to be humble so that God may lift you up in due time. That means that we don't need to promote ourselves now even when we are unfairly ignored or put down because we know that God's timing is perfect.

And that doesn't mean that we'll necessarily gain recognition or success in this life. It means so much more that we will ultimately be united with our God in heaven.

And truly believing this liberates us to serve God more fully in the midst of a hostile culture which encourages and demands incessant self-promotion.

I was looking at a statistic the other day and it said that 86% of people aged between 13 to 38 would like to become a social media influencer.

Now I don't know if how many of you know what a social media influencer is. I'm certainly not one. But they're basically people who want to earn their money by promoting their wonderful lives, wonderful products, holidays, and take photographs and all that kind of stuff.

[20 : 09] Now there's not many in here that probably want to pursue that as a career but often as Christians we do put a mask on on a Sunday to demonstrate that we've got our lives together, that we are sorted.

Trusting in God frees us to be open and honest with others about the fact that we're still works in progress. And we can be confidently humble before God because we're told in verse 7 that he cares for you so we can cast all our anxiety on him.

Just think for a moment how amazing that is. The almighty God of the universe wants to know about the things that matter to you. We live in a world where Christians and non-Christians alike

struggle on a daily basis with worry, stress and anxiety and it seems to be getting worse all the time. How reassuring it is to know that our God is compassionate and invites us to throw the weight of all our anxieties onto him. And we're not to trust and depend on God in some abstract sense.

We're to trust in God in a real and concrete way in our lives day by day. What specific concerns do you have on your heart this evening? A difficult relationship?

[21 : 33] Health concerns? Finances? Loneliness? Job worries? Tiredness? God wants you to cast these onto him because he cares for you.

And there's also to be humility amongst God's flock because we know that our status before God matters infinitely more than our status before men. But what would it look like to actually live like that?

In my work as a commercial lawyer, time is quite literally money. Every six minutes is more money. So there's always a pressure on productivity, efficiency, and all that kind of thing.

So for me, humility can sometimes be as simple as taking the time to help someone fix the printer or taking the time to help a more junior colleague who is struggling with something that I think is blindingly obvious.

And there are countless opportunities for me to display God's care to the people I come into contact with each day. But without reminding myself every day that I belong to God and that I'm to live for his glory, it's so easy to forget the importance of caring for people as I rush around trying to meet deadlines.

[22 : 55] humility will look different for each of us in our different situations, maybe at home, at university, or at work, or just with your friends and family.

But Peter commands all Christians in verse 5 to clothe ourselves with humility towards one another. Again, my work recently introduced a dress-for-your-day policy.

It means we're moving away from a strict dress code of suits, shirts, and ties to a flexible dress code that lets you decide every day what to wear depending on what you're doing.

I prefer just wearing suits and ties, but there you go. So every day I now have to get up and make a conscious decision about what I'm going to wear depending on what I'm doing. I don't always get it right, but that's the theory.

In the same way, Christians need to make a deliberate choice about what attitude we're going to clothe ourselves with each day.

[23 : 57] But Christians don't have a flexible dress code. We're always to clothe ourselves with humility because we know that we are to live for God's glory and not our own. And that means consciously investing our time, resources, and skills to build up God's kingdom rather than establishing our own little fiefdoms.

We do this not in our own power, but in reliance on the grace that God gives to the humble. And perhaps you need God's strength this week to show humility to a colleague at work whose opinion always seems to be at odds with yours.

Or perhaps you need to admit to someone that you were wrong in the way that you treated them and ask them for forgiveness. God wants you to pray about these specific situations and ask for the strength and wisdom to show humility in them.

And the church should be recognized as a place where people interact with one another in a genuinely humble manner. And I think we all see good examples of this.

We see people who are perhaps regarded in the world as very successful, high-powered jobs, but then you see them doing some of the most menial tasks in the church and taking a genuine interest in those that others might avoid.

[25 : 10] Christians and churches aren't perfect and things do go wrong. Where pride creeps in unaddressed in a church, it causes division, disruption and heartbreak.

And some of you may have experienced that yourself. So it is really important that a culture of authentic humility is actively promoted within the church. So what can we be doing practically to contribute to cultivating a culture of humility here at Brunfield?

Do we show humility in the way we express our opinions about how things are done or how we would like them to be done? Do we make the effort to speak to those who are on the margins of our church?

A church community that is founded on genuine humble fellowship is a powerful example to a world that is increasingly founded on the pride of the individual. And we all need to actively play our part in

creating that culture.

And enduring hardship. Peter is very clear that living together as God's flock requires all Christians to endure hardship for the sake of Christ. He reminds us that we are in a fierce spiritual battle.

[26 : 24] Peter describes the devil in verse 8 as our enemy, who is like a prowling and roaring lion that is looking for someone to destroy, to devour. The devil wants us to doubt that our God is powerful, glorious, gracious and caring by attacking us through temptation and suffering.

And this is how the devil has always tried to tempt humans. If you've been here for some of the Genesis talks, you might want to think back to Genesis 3 where the serpent asks Eve, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

It's the same today. The devil wants us to make us doubt who God really is and what his word really says. And we can't be complacent about sin because it has devastating consequences.

We need to be self-controlled and alert and active in our resistance to evil. We need to be on our guard or we will let Satan get his foot in the door and when he does, he will seek to steal, kill and destroy.

But our resistance isn't to be founded in our own strength. It's ultimately to be founded on us standing firm in the faith. As Peter says in verse 9, on our own we're defenseless against the devil.

[27 : 39] The devil is described as a lion in the context of us being described as sheep. In any normal situation, there's only going to be one winner in a fight between a lion and a sheep.

But with our chief shepherd, we are able to stand firm because Jesus is not just like a lion. He is the lion of Judah who is all powerful. Throughout his letter, Peter's made it clear that there is an inescapable link between sharing in God's glory and enduring hardship for the sake of Christ.

In verse 9, we're reminded that our brothers and sisters across the world are also suffering for their faith. We're not alone. Others are also suffering for Christ just as Christ suffered for us.

And we need to remember them in prayer. But the important thing Peter wants us to realize here is that the suffering of a Christian is temporary.

Verse 10 says that God will restore us after we have suffered a little while. Peter wants us to view our suffering in the context of God's eternal glory.

[28 : 50] God's eternal glory. And he wants us to remember that our certain hope that we will ultimately be restored and made strong, firm and steadfast by God will motivate us to resist evil and endure hardship in the present.

And Peter here isn't trying to ignore or diminish the present reality, pain and difficulty of suffering. But it does mean that we can always have a certain hope in the God that cares for us.

And so just as we finish, after winning his gold medal at the Paris Olympics, as we heard, Eric Liddell turned his back on his athletics career and walked away for a life of obscurity in China as a missionary.

And he was asked if he regretted exchanging this glory, this athletic glory for life as an obscure missionary. And it was very interesting how he replied.

He said, oh well, of course it's natural for a chap to think over all that sometimes. But I'm glad at the work I'm engaged in now. A fellow's life counts for far more for this than the other.

[30 : 05] Not a corruptible crown, but an incorruptible one. Liddell was imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp during the Second World War.

And he was separated from his wife and his children who were back in Canada. And rather than him sitting around moping, he busied himself by helping the sick and the elderly.

He taught Bible classes at the camp school, he arranged games, and he taught science to the children. And if you read any of the books about his life, you'll find that his fellow prisoners universally described him as a man who had displayed incredible faith, humility, and care for others in the most difficult of circumstances.

So Eric Liddell is a famous example of a remarkable Christian who lived humbly through his temporary suffering because he fully believed that the glory of gold was nothing in this world compared to the glory of God.

But we have a greater example than Eric Liddell. We've got the example of our chief shepherd, Jesus. And Jesus invites us to join God's flock and to share in God's eternal glory as our motivation for living humbly together through temporary suffering.

[31 : 29] In verse 12, Peter tells us that he wrote the letter of 1 Peter to encourage his readers and to testify to the true grace of God. And he challenged his readers who were about to experience

real suffering under Nero to stand fast in the true grace of God.

And that really remains our challenge here today in Edinburgh in 2020. We're not called to run away from the challenges of our society, but we're called to stand firm in Christ and face them together.

We'll just pray to close. Our gracious God and Father, we thank you for the privilege it is to be able to call you our chief shepherd.

Lord, I pray that as we go out into our different weeks, we would do so with a renewed focus on you and your glory, and that the world would be more, and that we would be motivated to live more dependently on you.

In Jesus' name, amen.