

1 Peter Chapter 5 v 1 - 4

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[0 : 0 0] And I'd like us to read the first three verses as we come to worship. It's always good for us to remind ourselves of who it is that we are worshipping. We're not simply singing songs, are we? We're not simply, if I can put it that way, having a good time. We are worshipping the Lord and therefore we need to remind ourselves who it is that we're worshipping. What is this God like? What is this Saviour like, this Lord Jesus Christ? And the first three verses of chapter one of Hebrews are wonderfully illuminating concerning both God and his Son. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways. That's a wonderful description of the whole of the Old Testament, isn't it? The Old Testament in a nutshell. What's it all about? There we are. God's speaking to us through prophets and in various ways at many times. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. The last days are the days now. I mean, the writer is there, obviously saying now, in these recent times, God has spoken to us by his Son. Not through a prophet, not just through the events and the occasions of history, but by his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he appointed heir of all things. In other words, the one to whom all things belong, rightfully are his, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he also made the universe. Here's the incredible declaration of the truth that at creation, the Trinity were involved. God the Father, the Son and the Spirit were engaged in creation.

Read what John chapter one, first 18 verses, to speak about all things made through the Lord Jesus. through whom all things were met. He, through also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory, the outshining of his glory. You want to know what God is like? Then we look at Jesus. He's the shining. He's God's glory shining and the exact representation of his being. In other words, he is one and the same in being. That's one of the great mysteries, isn't it, of the Trinity. God is one being, three persons. One God, three persons. So the Son is exactly the same in every way as the Father, sustaining all things by his powerful word. Everything in the universe is held together by the very word of Christ himself. Yes, God has put into place these amazing things that we call the law of gravity and thermodynamics and all these things, but ultimately the very hand of God is upon the universe, upon our world, upon our lives, upon our situation. So taking all that into account, taking into account that this God, who is so great and communicates with us and has spoken to us by his

Son, who is this incredible creator and sustainer of the universe. When we come to the second part of verse three, it's awesome. After he'd provided purification for sins. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one who's provided for the universe, who is provided for the universe, who is provided for the universe, everything it needs, but has provided especially for us, purification, forgiveness of sins. And we know how he did that, by the cross, by his suffering and by his death. And now he sits at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. What a wonderful Savior we have. Awesome in power. Awesome in provision.

Awesome in salvation. Awesome in salvation. Glorious in authority. Well, let's come to this wonderful God and our Savior, the Lord Jesus, in prayer together. Let's be open in prayer. As a few of us lead, I'll briefly pray and then, as many as feel able, let's come with worship and adoration before this Jesus, who we've had something of a glimpse of in the Word. Let us pray.

Truly, O Lord, our God in heaven, we bow before you this evening once more with astonishment, with amazement, with wonder, with awe, that you, this great, awesome, mighty, eternal, everlasting, and infinite God, should ever send your Son into the world for sinners like us, that we might receive the purification of our sins. O, we thank you, our God, that you are not a God who hides himself, not a God who stands aloof, even from a wicked and sinful generation like ours, but a God who, throughout the ages, throughout the whole of history, has made himself known and sought to reveal himself again and again. Not that he might bring judgment, but he might bring salvation. We thank you for the great gift of Jesus, the wonderful illuminator of the very person of God. We pray that even this evening, Lord Jesus, our eyes may be opened some more to see you in your splendor and glory, your majesty and grace, that we may worship you all the more, that we might serve you even day by day, as you give us strength. Help us and be with us and send your Holy Spirit amongst us now, we ask it in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

[5 : 25] We come on with God's Word from 1 Peter in chapter 5. We've been journeying through the first letter of Peter these last months, and we've come to the very final chapter, chapter 5, and we're going to, hopefully, God willing, the next three weeks, cover chapter 5, the first four verses particularly tonight, and then other verses in the weeks ahead. And that should lead us up to the time when United Beach Mission will be here, and we're hoping and planning to have our evening services in the open air for July and part of August as well, up on the clifftop as we've done in past years. So hopefully, we'll be able to bring 1 Peter to a close, and then into the summer, and then, God willing, we'll see where the Lord leads us in his Word after that. So 1 Peter chapter 5, beginning at verse 1. We'll read together through 2 verse 11. But as I say, it's the first four verses particularly that we're concerned about.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings, who also will share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

Not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve. Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders, all of you. Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind.

Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you've suffered a little while, will himself restore you, make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

[8 : 15] Well, let's turn together back to 1 Peter in chapter 5, and to the passage that we read just a little while ago. Sometimes when we sing the hymns of folk like Wesley and others as well, concerning the unity of the church, they can sound a little bit twee. Some of the things that are said, some of the things that we sang even there, sweetly may we all agree, touched with softest sympathy. But those things are real. Those things are important. Those things are necessary. Those things are vital to the life of every church. There are so many potential divisions to be found in the church, if we go looking for them. So many reasons why we shouldn't get on, why we should fight and argue, reasons why we shouldn't love one another. The same reasons that are in the world, in every circumstance, whether it be a political party, whether it be a government, whether it be a club, whether it be a social gathering, whether it be a family. There always have been and always will be reasons to divide.

Increasingly, in our own generation, it seems that age is becoming a noticeable cause of separation between people both inside and outside the church. One of the things that has been said concerning the recent referendum was that the young people of the nation all voted to stay in and the old people of the nation voted to stay out. A vast chasm of inability to understand another generation has grown up over the past decades, much more than perhaps when many of you were younger, barely apparent, barely younger, barely apparent, really. The old, it seems, are often unwilling to understand the technology, the interests, the values of the young. And the young themselves fail to accept that those who are older than themselves have a valid contribution to this world today.

Their stubbornness to reject another generation's viewpoint has damaged many churches in our nation. Many splits have taken place, many fellowships have been destroyed because the young are drawn one way and the old another. The young always wanting change and the young, sorry, old never wanting change and the young always wanting change. But it's not a modern phenomena, phenomena, even like learning to speak, isn't it?

Because here we have in verse 5 a hint that there is a struggle and a problem in the church in Peter's day. In the same way, you who are younger submit yourselves to your elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility towards one another. We read in Corinthians of the great divisions that occurred there. In fact, in every church, every letter, there are those potential divisions. There are potential divisions here in our fellowship as well.

We know that. We know that we all have that tendency, if we're not careful, to be divisive and to look for reasons not to get on. But Peter writes in his letter here, he writes to the elders among you. Now, he could simply mean the old people when he says that, that phrase, that title, elders, means mostly someone who is of advancing years.

[12:00] But that's not really the meaning here. Certainly, when we read through the New Testament, we find that here and elsewhere, Peter is writing to the spiritually mature rather than just simply the physically mature, those who have a particular role in the leadership of a local church.

So, if we go back to Acts, we find in chapter 14, verse 23, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church. In chapter 20, verse 17, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.

We read in Timothy and Titus how Paul gives instruction about the raising up of elders to take a role of leadership in the church. So, likewise, we see that age is not the only area of aggravation within the church of the world.

It's not just age that creates a problem. Another big problem, of course, is authority. If we wanted to, perhaps again, sum up what was the referendum all about, mainly it was about authority.

Who's in charge? We're witnessing at the moment, even not just concerning Europe, but concerning our own prime minister, the leader of the opposition as well, a struggle. Who is in charge? Who's at the helm? Who's going to take the lead?

[13:18] And this vital matter of leadership within the church is now in Peter's sights as he comes to the close of his letter, as he comes to these closing instructions to the church in the early first century.

He's addressing one group of believers within the church. He's done that before, of course, we've seen. He's addressed those who are slaves. Back in chapter 2, verse 18, he's spoken directly to wives.

In chapter 3, directly to husbands in chapter 3 as well. He has done that all the way through, picking up particular groups. And so that's what he's doing here. He's writing to the elders.

And so we need to just think for a moment about what he writes to them, and then, more importantly, what that means to us. There's several things I want us to notice in his opening remarks as he speaks to the elders, which are very, very relevant and important for us.

Notice how he introduces them, to the elders among you. Now, that's very important. He's talking to the elders that are among, within the church membership.

[14 : 35] He's not speaking to them as elders in some way that are separate from the church members. He says, among you, in your midst, part of the body of Christ.

One of the sad things that we see when it comes to authority in many places is a them and us attitude. And that can creep into the church.

It's the way that it is often in the workplace. There's the shop floor workers, and then there's the management, them and us. In school, there's the parents, and then there's the teachers, them and us.

There's the government, and there's us. But that mustn't be the case in the church. It mustn't be a them or us attitude.

The elders who are among you. The elders are part of the body of Jesus Christ, just as much as the wives are part of the body of Jesus Christ, as much as the slaves are part of the body of Jesus Christ, and so on. That's very important.

[15 : 35] I want to make that and stress that. The elders among you. The elders that serve in this church are simply part of the body of Christ. They're not separated.

They're not elevated, if I can put it that way. Peter doesn't say those who are above you, but those who are among you. Notice as well that he says, I appeal. He appeals to the elders.

He doesn't command. Peter, we know, is an apostle. Peter has apostolic authority, something which was unique in the New Testament. The apostles were unique in their ministry in the New Testament.

We do not have apostles in this way now. But Peter does not command. He recognizes the authority of the local church. He appeals. This church, like many other churches, is an independent church, which means it is self-governing.

That is, we seek together as God's people the mind of Christ. Next, we need to recognize that we are those under Christ's headship. Not under the headship of any bishop, authority, government, or power, or even FIEC.

[16 : 45] We are to be appealed to. Peter appeals. He doesn't command. There's independency there. Then notice as well how he says, I appeal as a fellow elder.

Now, again, we know that Peter is an apostle. He introduces himself as such. The very start of his letter, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. But here he says, I'm a fellow elder.

What does he mean? Well, there's certainly a display of his humility. He's not saying, again, as an apostle, I command you. But he says, I'm a fellow elder with you. It's a statement of sympathy, isn't it?

I understand what you're going through. I'm one with you. I know how hard it can be. I'm walking the same path as you. One with you, a fellow elder.

Let me assure you and say to you, which I know you're well aware of, leadership in the church of Jesus Christ, as well as elsewhere in the world, can be very lonely. It can be carrying a great deal of pressure, a great deal of expectation from others.

[17 : 52] And those who have a place of leadership, whatever it may be, as an elder or something else, need to be understood in that way, that it can be an onerous, hard, difficult walk.

Peter wants to assure the elders there that he is not someone who is aloof from these things, but understands them all too well. And then we have his final description of himself, a witness of Christ's sufferings.

And then says, who also will share in the glory to be revealed. He's reminding the elders here what he's been saying to us all the way through the letter, that the pathway to glory is the way of suffering.

There is no other way to live the Christian life. There is no way to get to heaven apart from the pathway of suffering. It's there in chapter 3 and verse 18, where he's reminded the slaves.

Is that the one I wanted? 2.18. No, it was 3.18 I wanted, not 2.18. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

[19 : 02] He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the spirit. Death and suffering, life, spirit, glory to follow. Chapter 3.18, sorry.

And chapter 4.13, rejoice in as much as you participate. Share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. Suffering first, glory later.

And so it is with those who lead in the church. The glory is not now, the way of suffering is now. Along with the whole church, local and universal.

They are those who experience the fellowship, the participation in the sufferings. Peter saw firsthand the sufferings of Christ. He shared in that sense, in the suffering of Christ.

They haven't seen that, but they share in the sufferings of Christ as they seek to walk with him. Now, as I said, there seems to be some division, some concern, a note of problems between the elders and those who are younger in the faith.

[20 : 08] Those who may be younger in age as well, in verse 5. In the same way you are younger, submit to your elders. And so Peter sets out the standards for those who are elders.

He says, what is it that qualifies a person, a man, to be in this role? It may have been, as it can be at times, sadly, that the younger believers in the church considered the elders were out of touch with what was going on in the real world.

That can be the accusation between those who are young now and those who are older. You're out of touch. You don't know what's happening. It may have been, of course, that those who are younger in the faith felt that the elders were too heavy-handed, that they were too strong.

No doubt there were those who were critical of their leadership. One of the things that you see all the way through the New Testament, with Paul as well, is that there are those who are quick to criticize those who are in leadership.

The truth is, and we know it ourselves, that sadly this is a besetting sin of all of God's people throughout the ages. You can go all the way back to Moses and find that even there, there were those who had to battle against this desire to rebel against those in leadership.

[21 : 23] Back in Numbers in chapter 16, Korah and those who followed him said to Moses, Why do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly? It's a problem of our hearts.

We rebel against authority. We thought about this this morning. We rebel against those who tell us to do something, and it's a problem within the church and a problem in the world. So how do we deal with it?

How does Peter deal with it? Because what he does is this. He points out the motivation that must be at the heart of those who are leading the church of Jesus Christ. He points out the motivation of all those who are in service within the church of Jesus Christ.

That's why I want us to think that this is not simply about elders within this church or any other church. But it's to do with all those who desire to serve the Lord in the local church.

And it deals with, again, motivation. What's at the heart? See, the problem often we have is that we become divided from one another because we do not understand one another.

[22 : 24] We misrepresent one another or misinterpret one another or misunderstand one another. And so when somebody does something within the life of the church, we jump.

But we don't know the motivation. We don't know what's at the heart of it. And so Peter comes to the heart. Look at the motivation of those elders. Look at the motivation of those who serve you in the church and see why they do what they do.

It comes to each one of us. As I say, I want us to pick these things up because this applies, yes, to those who are elders, but it applies to those who are deacons. It applies to those who are church members.

It applies to every single one of us if we are involved in some service in the life of the church. So what does he say, first of all, verse 2? He says, be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care.

Interestingly enough, Peter actually uses Jesus' own words to himself here when he says, be shepherds of God's flock.

[23 : 26] It's the same words that Jesus spoke to Peter when he restored him in John 21. Do you remember three times he asked him? On the second occasion that he asks him, he uses a different word, and in the NIV it's translated, take care of my sheep.

But it's simply this, shepherd. Shepherd. Shepherd. Just one word in the Greek. To tend the sheep. Look after the sheep. Do the work of a shepherd.

And we understand a little bit more of what that means when he says that are under your care. It shows that there's a loving role of provision, of care, of help, of support.

As Jesus said to Peter, feed my sheep. And Paul to the Ephesian elders says to them, keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

A job of a shepherd is multifaceted. It's not a simple, straightforward, nine-to-five everyday job. It's a job that includes all of your time.

[24 : 29] So an elder is someone who is an elder all the time. But it's multifaceted in the sense that part of the shepherd's work is to protect the flock from those attacks or those dangers that would harm them.

Part of the work he has to do is to make sure they are well fed and that they have all the nourishment they need to sustain strength. Part of his work is to bandage up the wounds of those animals that are hurt, to restore them to health if they fall ill.

It's all sorts of things. And so the elder is a man whose motivation in all things is for the good of every believer in the church.

That's the first motivation. For the good of every single sheep, every single part of the flock. Now sheep may not always think the shepherd has their best interests at heart.

I don't know what sheep think, apart from... But I'm pretty sure there are times when they think, why is the shepherd doing that? Why has he got his crook around my neck and dragging me away from this cliff?

[25 : 35] Why is it that he's applying this horrible medicine to me, which tastes so vile, so I don't get worms? So it is with us.

It's vital that all of us understand, and all elders and each one of us understand that the primary motivation, the primary reason for anyone to serve in the church of Jesus Christ is because they have a love for every member of it.

Peter goes on to explain this a little more, doesn't he? Watching over them. It's a verb which directly relates to the title overseer. Oversee them, he's saying.

It's what Paul speaks about in 1 Timothy 3.1. He says, whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. It's the Greek word episkopos, from which we get episkopal churches, such as Church of England and so on.

But the word actually comes from the workplace. To be an overseer is someone who's a foreman of a factory floor, someone who's a site manager. Oversee, watch over them.

[26 : 44] It has to include some leadership, doesn't it? It has to include some instruction being given. The foreman and the site manager tells the other workers where to work, what to do, so that together there is a gelling, so that they're not all making the tea all at the same time, even if they would like to do that.

There must be some trust that's involved as well, isn't it? There must be a trust by the foreman, the overseer, to entrust work to someone, but that person must also trust the one who's given them that work to do.

It's mutual. So Peter says here, be shepherds, that's caring, overseers, watching, guiding.

Then we come to these three sort of pairs of motivations. One negative, one positive. One negative, one positive. One negative, one positive. And these again, I say to your friends, must apply to all of us who are serving God in whatever way that may be.

Not just elders, not just pastors, but all of us. So what are these motivations? The wrong motivation and the good motivation. They are the yin and the yang, as it were, of motivations.

[28 : 05] Not because you must, end of verse 2, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be. Not because you must. To some of us, that might seem very strange.

Not because you must. Who wouldn't want to be an elder in the church? Who wouldn't want to be promoted? Hey? Who wouldn't want to have that position, that privilege, that honour, where everybody says, wow, you're an elder in the church, you're a pastor of the church, or whatever it may be.

In the world, of course, it's quite natural to want to get up the ladder, isn't it? In your club, you want to become the golf club secretary, or the chairman, or the president, or whatever it may be.

In the workplace, as a teacher, you want to become head of a department, and then from head of the department, assistant head, and then ultimately, head and principal.

But that isn't the case in the church. Not because you must. The sort of person who thinks that being an elder is a promotion, a privilege, it's getting to the top of the ladder in your local church, can never be an elder.

[29 : 23] Never. That's the mentality of the ungodly. That's the mentality of the world. It's not the mentality of the follower of Jesus, who says in Luke 9, it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.

To take on any role of leadership within the local church, whether that's an elder, a Sunday school teacher, mums and toddlers group leader, catering manager, or whatever it may be, should always be something we consider daunting.

Not something that we should consider as being, I'm suitably qualified for that. I don't see why other people can't see that I'm eldership quality. They should be able to recognize that I should be a leader.

I've got all the gifts. It should be something that we find overwhelming, a responsibility that we do not take lightly. Not because you must.

And that also means, of course, we shouldn't do it simply because we feel pressurized to do it by others. Well, there's nobody else who'll do it, so you've got to do it. There's nobody else who can take on this task, and we feel strong-armed.

[30 : 32] We're forced against our will. Now, dear friends, whatever role we have in serving the Lord in eldership, or whatever it may be, it must be, as Peter writes here, as willingly as God wants us to be.

Not a sense of, I'm good for the job, and I'll do a great job of it, but, yeah, I believe this is what God would have me to do. And I want to do it willingly because I love the church of God, and I want to serve the church of God, and I want to do good for those that I love and care for.

So, yes, I'm going to do it, Lord, because I believe it's what you've called me to do. You've got to do it willingly with faith that the Lord will equip us to do that work, to equip us to overcome the difficulties that come, must come, with any form of leadership, any form of service.

There will always be, sadly, as we know, criticism, opposition, difficulty, awkwardness, because we're human.

We need the Lord's help. So he says, first of all then, not because you must, but because you are willing. Then he says, not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve.

[31 : 44] The way that any of us handles our money betrays whether we love it or not. The way we handle money is a very, very powerful sign of really where our heart is.

If we will bend the rules to get more money, fiddling our taxes or whatever it may be, or if we serve in the church or even in the community only to increase our possession of money, then surely our motivation is wrong for the things that we do.

That doesn't mean that people shouldn't be properly recompensed for their time or their labor or their efforts. Not saying that. But if it's what we do, if we do those things for that reason, if we're motivated by greed, if we're motivated by the desire to have more money, then we can never serve.

And in places of leadership in the church, there are opportunities for us to do that. Just as it was for Judas, wasn't it? He looked after the money within what we might call the church of the disciples. It's easy for him to fiddle the books.

It's easy for him to take a few quid here and there for himself. No, we ought to do that. We ought to be motivated because of our expenses account that we can have as a member of parliament or whatever it may be.

[32 : 57] No, it must be something else. We need to serve with an eagerness that comes from love. Love for others rather than love for ourselves. Not pursuing dishonest gain but eager to serve.

Is that how we are? Eager to serve. Where can I serve, Lord? Have you asked yourself that within the local church? Lord, where do you want me to serve here in Whitby?

What is it you want me to do? Where are there opportunities? Perhaps that's the opportunity for me. What is it that I can give of my gifts and talents that you've given me, Lord? Perhaps it may be an elder.

Perhaps it may be in a position of preaching or teaching. Perhaps it may be in many other things. But the first question is this. Lord, what do you want me to do? I'm eager to serve.

That's a challenge to my heart and to yours, dear friends. It's a real challenge. Am I always eager to serve? Am I always eager to get down in the study and open God's word and get on with it and work at it?

[34 : 02] Am I always eager on a Sunday morning to stand up and preach? Are you always eager to go down and make the tea and coffee after a service? Always eager on a Tuesday to finish work and come and do 6.10 or 7.11?

If we're honest, there are times we're not eager, are we? Sometimes it's a burden. Sometimes it's hard. Sometimes it's difficult. Sometimes we wish somebody else would do it for a bit.

And then thirdly, in these couples that we have here, we have the challenge there. Not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock. Remember, I'm talking to elders here and about elders here but we've seen if their motivation is to shepherd and love and care for the flock.

If their motivation to do these things is because they willingly do them, not because they get anything out of it financially and they certainly don't but because they long to serve.

And of course, it's imperative that this final motivation is recognized as well. I have to say, in all honesty, that verse 3 is probably the most challenging of all of us, to all of us and probably the most common problem.

[35 : 19] Not many people serve in the church of Jesus Christ because they get money out of it. Certainly not within evangelical circles. Not many of the people do it because they must in that sense as we've been thinking about.

But dear friends, let us ask the question, do I do it so I can lord it over others? Serving so that I can rule. See, the saying goes, doesn't it, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Do I view my sphere of service as my kingdom? Whatever that may be. Do I see myself as being the lord of that particular area of the life of the church?

It's mine. My territory, my domain. You say, well, the trouble is, of course, it's one of those difficult things to discern in our lives. How do I discern if I've got that wrong attitude about I'm going to pick on people and this is, well, no, I'm not going to pick on people because if I pick on people then people feel left out.

If I pick on people I think they're getting gut at so I can't pick on anybody so I won't say anything. No, I won't say anything. I'll say something else. The most difficult thing to discern is am I controlling this sphere of the life of the church by my service either as an elder or in some other way?

[36 : 38] You say, well, how can I discern that? I want to add as a simple test, I believe, a very simple test. How do you or how do I react when someone does something in my sphere of ministry without consulting me?

How do I react when somebody does something in my sphere of ministry without consulting me? You know the answer. If my attitude is, how dare they?

That's not their dominion. That's not their place. That's not what they're meant to be doing. They're meant to consult with me. Then I've got a problem. I've got a problem. I'm controlling.

I'm lording it over others. To lord it over someone else I have to first of all think of myself as a lord.

See, I can be lord of the teapot. Lord of the dance. No, we don't do that here. Lord of the toilets. Lord of the car park.

[37 : 42] Lord of the finances. Lord of the Lord of the Lord. I can be lord of the Lord. I can be lord anywhere, can't I? Of anything. It doesn't matter how tiny or minuscule or unimportant the kingdom may be.

But if I'm lord of it, then I feel empowered. That's not how elders are to be. That's not how any of us are to be. Not lording it, but being examples.

What sort of example? There's only one example, isn't there? The Lord Jesus Christ. What was his example? Servant.

Son of man has not come to be served, but to serve. Philippians chapter 2. Though being very equal with God, did not use it to his own advantage, but made himself servant.

He washed his disciples' feet, didn't he? Peter said, don't do it. That's not your place. Yes, it was, says Jesus. It's my place to do it. And if I do it, you do it. The example of our Lord Jesus is one of service.

[38 : 43] We sang there the servant king. This is our God, the servant king. One of sacrifice. Whenever we serve the Lord and his people, it means sacrifice.

It means dying to self. It means letting go of my own wishes, will, desires. Purposes, plans, greatness, glory.

Dying to self. Not lording it, but being an example. It's a challenge to me, dear friends, and I hope a challenge to you. Am I an example to other believers?

Am I an example to the young people in the church? Am I an example to the older people in the church? Does my life show that I am one who serves as Jesus served?

Now when we come to the end of all that, the question really is, who in their right mind would want to serve in the church as an elder? Who in their right mind would want to serve the church in any sphere?

[39 : 42] Wouldn't it be so much easier? Let's just all sit back. Let's not get our hands dirty and serve because if you're going to serve, you're going to deal with all those bad attitudes in your heart and life.

You've got to deal with all those wrong motivations. You've got to put up with people being critical. You've got to put up with people opposing. You've got to put up with people disagreeing. Wouldn't it be easier just to be a nice fringy person?

Sadly, many Christians do that, don't they? In many churches. Who in their right mind would take on the role or the responsibility of serving in the church as an elder, pastor, Sunday school leader, whoever it may be?

Surely if it's not for glory, as we've seen, and if it's not for money, and it's not for power, then what possible reason could we serve? The answer's in verse 4.

When the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that never fades away. Now, everything that we do, dear friends, is not worthless. It doesn't go unnoticed.

[40 : 45] It's noticed by our heavenly shepherd. And he promises us a heavenly reward. Don't know what it's going to be. He talks here about a crown of glory. I think it's very much the same as the crown that Paul talks about concerning his own life in 2 Timothy 4.

He calls it a crown of righteousness. But I think it's the same. Paul was a man who was motivated to serve. Great cost. Great sacrifice. Great difficulty.

Great criticisms he received from the church at Corinth and many others as well. And he persevered and served all his life right to the very end. So as he writes to Timothy, he talks about being ready to be poured out as a drink offering.

The time of his departure is close to hand. He's about to die. So what does he have to say? In one sense, what does he have to say about life? What does he have to say about why he served as he did?

Let's just listen to his words. I fought the good fight. I finished the race. I've kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.

[41 : 53] And not only to me, but also all who have longed for his appearing. Paul's not going to get a bigger crown than me or you because he was an apostle.

But he assures us that whoever we are, as we fight, as we run, as we keep, as we serve, to the very end, it's worth it.

It's worth it. Because Christ is coming again. Our great, good, chief shepherd. Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, may he equip you with everything good for doing his will.

And may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[43 : 12] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.