

THE CHIEF SHEPHERD

1 Peter 5:1-4

Intro: For the last six Sunday nights we have been considering the six verses of Psalm 23. I had planned, when I started that series, to go on to the NT to speak on the shepherd passages that are found there. In the meantime, I have come to John 10 in the Tuesday Bible Class. That is the chapter where we have the record that the Lord called Himself "the good shepherd." Last Sunday night Tom Matthews spoke on Heb. 13:20, 21 at our Communion Service. Verse 20 is where we have our Lord called "the great shepherd of the sheep." So I have decided to conclude this present series with a message based on 1 Peter 5:1-4 where Peter spoke of our Lord as "the chief shepherd." In that same epistle, chapter 2, verse 25, he called the Lord "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." I will be referring to that tonight.

One thing is clear from all of the passages that I have mentioned just now. It is this: Our Lord Jesus Christ is the One Who is our Shepherd. He is the good Shepherd, the great Shepherd, the chief Shepherd. But those titles will not mean anything to us unless we, like David, can say, "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psa. 23:1). We have been learning in John 10 on Tuesdays that the way the Lord becomes our Shepherd is when He brings us to Himself. Those who are His sheep, follow Him, "for they know his voice" (John 10:4).

I know that I have seen more clearly than ever before in teaching John 10 again, how much the Lord cares for those of us who are His sheep. He is "good" because He is sufficient in Himself for all of the needs of all of His sheep. We do not have to look to anyone else. He is not only "the good shepherd," but He is the only good Shepherd! If He is our Shepherd, we have no need for any other. Psalm 23 teaches this same truth.

Our Lord is "the **great** shepherd of the sheep" because it is through His blood that "the everlasting covenant" of our salvation has been ratified. As great as our need was before God, He was great enough to meet that need. He did meet the need of every person who has ever been saved, or who will ever be saved. And, since the death of Christ is infinite in its value, our Lord's death is great enough to save every person who has ever lived! When we place the sins of the world on one side, and the death of Christ on the other, and you measure the one against the other, it seems that the word "great," as great as it is, is not really adequate to tell the story.

But that is not all.

John Owen has pointed out that these two verses in Hebrews 13 indicate that the Lord is "the great shepherd of the sheep," not only because He saves us initially, but because His death also guarantees the final perfection of every true believer.

Now we are ready to say that Christ is "the great shepherd of the sheep" because He saves all of His people from all of their sins for all eternity! This makes Him greater than all other shepherds combined.

But our text for this evening speaks of the Lord as "the chief shepherd." What does this mean?

#### I. "THE CHIEF SHEPHERD."

In the Greek the words "chief shepherd" are translated from one word. It is the word shepherd with the same prefix that is used in the Greek word (not words), "high priest." The prefix means that there are other shepherds, but the Lord is the Shepherd with the highest rank. He is the Shepherd who is sovereign over all of the other shepherds. He is the Commander-in-Chief, to use a term that we are familiar with. No Shepherd has greater authority than He does. "Chief Shepherd" is an excellent translation. Neither the NASB, nor the NIV, nor the NKJV tries to improve on that translation.

Now the title given by Peter to our Lord means that there are other shepherds, lesser shepherds. Some have spoken of them as under shepherds because they are under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, and totally responsible to Him.

Who are they?

#### II. THE LESSER SHEPHERDS.

John Brown in his commentary on 1 Peter calls them junior shepherds, with no prospect of ever becoming the Senior Shepherd. Only our Lord deserves that title.

But who are they?

Verse 1 of 1 Peter 5 tells that Peter was speaking to the elders of the churches. He claimed that he himself was an elder. They are the men in the churches who serve under "the Chief Shepherd."

What is their responsibility? Verse 2: "Feed the flock which is among you."

If you were to consult the meaning of that verb, "feed," you would find that it means to shepherd the flock--not all of the people of God, but "the flock of God which is among you."

So those who are serving in elders in the church are the junior shepherds, the lesser shepherds, the under shepherds, serving under the Chief Shepherd, responsible to care for the people of God in the same way that the Lord Himself would care for them if He were visibly present in any church.

Paul has given us two passages dealing with "elders," or "bishops" (which is another name for an elder). The first is in 1 Timothy 3; the second is in Titus 1. We also have his message to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20. These give the qualifications for an elder, and also tell us something of what his work is. But Peter has put the work of the elder on the highest possible level when here in 1 Peter 5 he indicated that an elder is a junior shepherd, serving under and as the personal representative of the Chief Shepherd.

Just think of this for a moment, especially in the light of what we learn about our Lord as the Good Shepherd in John 10. The Father is the One Who has given each sheep to the Son. The Son died for the sheep--DIED FOR THEM! The Lord Jesus is said in John 10 to have brought His sheep to Himself. Throughout all of time the main concern of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, has not been the functioning of the universe, but the safety and welfare of the sheep. The sheep are unspeakably precious to the Shepherd. And, think of it, He has committed the care of His beloved sheep to those whose work is that of junior shepherds.

So it behooves every junior shepherd, every elder, to study carefully the shepherding work of the Chief Shepherd so that he will understand what his work is.

We learn a little about it from the passage here.

### III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE JUNIOR SHEPHERD.

We see this in verse 2, "Taking the oversight thereof."

This means that he is to look out for them. He is to protect them. He is to help them. He is to feed them. He is to do exactly as the Chief Shepherd does, only it cannot be on the same level.

This does not mean that any elder has the right to meddle in the lives of the people of God. He is a teacher. He is to be a pray-er. He helps when he can. His concern is always for the spiritual needs of the people of God.

Peter than gave some instructions as to:

IV. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE JUNIOR SHEPHERDS.

They are to be:

- A. Serving because they want to, not because they have to.
- B. Serving with "a ready mind," not because they get any reward for it.

A man who is covetous for a position, or for money, or for authority, is disqualified until his heart is changed. Think of the Lord Jesus with regard to these statements.

"A ready mind" describes the person who is eager to do all that he can to help the sheep.

And then in verse 3 we have a third qualification which is also, like the others, stated negatively, and then positively:

- C. Serving not as "lords," but as "ensamples," or examples. The elder is not the Lord, not even an under lord, nor a junior lord, but a type of what every child of God should be.

The junior shepherd, like the Chief Shepherd, is to be characterized by humility, not pride.

There really can be no greater responsibility than this. And it is only by the grace of God that anyone qualifies.

Why would Peter and Paul say so much about the leadership of the church when only a few in each assembly of believers would have this responsibility?

It is because they were to be patterns of what every child of God should be--especially men who are parents and who have the spiritual oversight of their families.

One final word:

V. THE REWARD.

It is stated in verse 5.

I do not know what that "crown of glory" is, except I know that it is the crown of a victor, like an athlete or a warrior who has excelled either in sports or in war.

If we are not interested in rewards, we certainly ought to be. In fact, it is a sin not to be. We know very little about the eternal state. Perhaps all we will use our crowns for is to cast them at the feet of our beloved Chief Shepherd. But whatever purpose they may serve, they will mark out those who have made it their business to be faithful in whatever they have had to do to serve the Lord.

Concl: Let us remember that the day is coming "when the chief Shepherd shall appear." Until that time comes, may we be faithful in caring for the flock of God, caring for one another. Our love for each other is best defined as seeking the spiritual welfare and blessing of those who are our brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Nothing is more important to the Lord, nor should anything be more important to us. May God help us to be faithful.