

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 24 July 2005

No. T0376

Speaker: Mr. Douglas Pettman

Peter - the growth of a soul: The Pastor - 1 Peter 5:7

Most of us can remember the stories the Lord told in Luke 15. The Pharisees and scribes had complained that the Lord Jesus received sinners and ate with them (Luke 15:2). Surely, no self-regarding man would do a thing like that! So the Lord told them three stories you will recall, concerning the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7), the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10) and the lost son (Luke 15:11-32). These demonstrate the great love that God had in desiring to recover what is lost to Him. The Holy Spirit is at work, in connection with the lost coin, until it is found. The Father's longing has always been for His child to return and when He sees the boy coming, He runs to him and showers him with blessing. So is demonstrated the love of God for each one of us. The first parable is that of the sheep that went astray. This demonstrates the care and lengths to which the Lord Jesus, the Shepherd, was prepared to go to find just one spiritually lost sheep. The Bible speaks of the Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd, John 10:11; the Great Shepherd, Hebrews 13:20; and the Chief Shepherd, 1 Peter 5:4. To show the fact behind the parable we referred to of the lost sheep, Peter says to the believers, "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls", 1 Peter 2:25.

The context of the scriptural pastor

Perhaps you wonder what this has to do with our subject today of "Peter the pastor". So we must start by looking at the context of the scriptural pastor.

In both Old and New Testaments the general word used for pastor is the same as that for shepherd. In the New Testament the Greek word is "*poimeen*" and is used both of shepherds who care for animals and the pastor in his relationship to the assembly or church.

It is an interesting fact that we have the word "pastor" only used once in the New Testament. This is in Ephesians 4:11. In this great epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul gives some of the great blessings provided for the church through the work of the cross. When we reach Ephesians 4 the subject has moved on to the vocation or calling of believers. The Apostle sees every believer as having a function, and certainly we do not all have the same one. This is explained more fully in 1 Corinthians 12. In Ephesians 4 the apostle is describing individuals and their different callings. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ", Ephesians 4:7. So what is your function in your local church? There is a function for every member and you and I must seek out what that function is, each person for himself or herself.

In Ephesians 4:11-12, we find more specific language, "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..." How thankful we can be that the Lord has provided all these varying persons for the building up of the members of the assembly. Let us note another thing. Although the verse separates into the individual calling the first group of these responsibilities, the pastor and teacher are put together. So the pastor needs to be ready to teach and the teacher needs the knowledge which pastoral experience gives. These responsibilities are given by the Lord and we have the great privilege of undertaking them for Him.

The characteristics of the pastor or shepherd

Let us now consider the characteristics of the pastor or shepherd. There are various things we note about a shepherd.

He feeds his sheep

He is always seeking to bring his sheep into good pastures. He wants his sheep to enjoy the best food if he expects the best results from the sheep. Feeding is essential to the wellbeing of the sheep. Many parents know how to seek the best for their children. It is just as vital for the sheep of the spiritual flock. The pastor, or shepherd, will want the best food for the flock and this is found in the Word of God. So we immediately see the connection between the work of pastor and teacher. If the Lord calls you to work as a "shepherd", be sure you are able to supply good food from the Word of God. What are all these gifts for but, in the words of Ephesians 4:12, "for the perfecting [or maturing] of the saints ... for the edifying [or building up] of the body of Christ". Perhaps we meet a believer who is quite uncertain

of the future in God's plan. So the pastor refers to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, speaking of the great moment when the Lord Himself will come and take every believer to Himself. This brings comfort from the Word of God, maturing and building up for that believer.

The term 'pastor' or 'shepherd' has a fuller meaning than that of only bringing food. He tends the flock or the church where he is and this tending includes various needs.

He cares for the sheep

He satisfies himself that his sheep are in good condition, are healthy and able for the day ahead. Sometimes the sheep need rest, or other refreshment. The shepherd care is concerned with all needs. This is what the Psalmist felt in Psalm 23, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake", Psalm 23:2-3. What power in the words "lie down" - for rest, "restoreth my soul" - much more than bodily wellbeing, "leadeth" - for careful direction to the best and pure paths, based on the authority and reliability of His name.

He disciplines with love

The longing of the shepherd is for the sheep to enjoy the pathway. He knows that going astray will cause problems. It may be a case of bringing the sheep back from straying by carrying it on his shoulders, Luke 15:4-7. It may be necessary to put a believer away from the assembly, as in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, until he seeks godly restoration. Whatever the need, the pastor seeks to maintain the members of the body of Christ in unity with their Lord. In Hebrews 12:5 we read, "My son, despise not thou the chastening [or discipline] of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him..." Discipline may be punitive or, a punishment, that is, because we have failed; preventative, in view of possible sin ahead; or promotive, to encourage progress in our lives. Discipline may come directly from the Lord; it may come through a caring pastor, as the servant of the Lord. We used to run Christian holidays for young people at one time. There was often a point during the holiday when the exuberance of the young people could have got out of hand and at that point a word was necessary, nothing more, to bring the group back to calmness. It always worked but this was discipline in its least sense, for the good of all, and their encouragement.

He acts with authority

The shepherd or pastor has a responsibility from the Lord and, as with other gifts, will use that gift with authority. "When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice", John 10:4. The under shepherd will act similarly.

He restores

There are often times when circumstances tend to cloud our joy and confuse our thinking. The shepherd or pastor should sense the difficulty. Do we face challenges we cannot handle or problems where we stand alone? Perhaps we lose the peace we enjoyed. The pastor may remind us that "the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep [like a garrison of soldiers surrounding a fortress] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus", Philippians 4:7. What restoring effect the Scripture can bring to our hearts and minds!

He encourages material assistance

The provision of help, through Social Services today, takes much of the responsibility from the Christian church for any need within its numbers. This was not so in the times of the Bible. Timothy was to make sure that the church relieves, that is materially assists, those "that are widows indeed", 1 Timothy 5:16. The active pastor, a shepherd with his flock, should become aware of such needs among them and seek to help.

The commission of Peter.

Our subject today concerns Peter; Peter the pastor. So we should now consider the commission of Peter. Following the trial of the Lord Jesus and His death on the cross of Calvary, can you imagine how Peter felt? He must have been devastated with himself. Peter, of all people, had denied the Lord he loved! (Luke 22:54-62) He could never excuse his behaviour. He had let his Lord down and there was no way to return. He did not know the Lord very well even then. When the women visited the sepulchre on the resurrection morning, they were sent away with a message, "tell His disciples *and Peter* that He goeth before you..." Mark 16:7. By the time the two returned that evening from Emmaus with the great news of seeing the risen Lord, they were told, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared *unto Simon*", Luke 24:34. How the Lord cared for this man and restored him! He showed how a pastor should work. But this was not all.

Following the visit of the Lord to some of the disciples after a frustrating night attempting to fish, (John 21:3-5) he calls Peter aside and openly confirms before the other disciples his reinstatement. He commissions him to duty as a pastor. Let us get help from these verses. Three times the Lord questions Simon Peter in John 21:15-17.

The first occasion raises the question, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these”? (John 21:15) Using the word “*agape*”, love at its deepest level, used for divine love, which values, esteems unselfishly and is ready to serve, the Lord challenges Peter. The response of a man knowing his own failure was, “Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee”, (John 21:15) using the word “*phileo*”. He could only rise to a word of lesser strength, meaning attachment, highly regarding the One in mind above others. How could Peter dare to say more? So the Lord commissions, “Feed [or using the word ‘*bosko*’, nourish] My lambs”, (John 21:15) with a special function to provide food for their need. As the Lord spoke, His thought went out to the many young who had hardly learned from where their next spiritual meal was coming from. How can we criticise “the lambs” if we leave them to search and satisfy themselves with unnourishing “junk” food? It is urgent and vital to feed young people. Will the Lord urge you today to nourish the lambs? Make sure you supply nourishment for their souls and hearts.

The Lord questions a second time to search the soul of His disciple. Again He says, “Lovest thou Me” (John 21:16) with that deep unselfish love with which I love? No longer is Peter asked to compare his love with that of the other disciples. The challenge is to Peter’s love for the Lord Himself. Again Peter replies, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love [I am attached to] Thee”. (John 21:16) What searching goes on and if Peter is really prepared to serve the Lord, he must put the Lord first. “Feed [*poimaino*] my sheep” the Lord says. (John 21:16) By changing the words, the Lord is saying “act as a shepherd to My sheep with all the care and nourishment you can muster.” The sheep needs more than food. All the care that a shepherd pastor can give needs to be available, not just for the lambs but for the sheep too.

The probing question is asked “the third time” (John 21:17) but on this occasion the Lord comes down to Peter’s level. “Simon, son of Jonas, [are you attached to] Me?” Peter has to realise, as we all do, the utter limitation he has. This grieves him. He can only reply in the same words as before but adds “Thou knowest all things”. (John 21:17) Yes the Lord knew well, as He knows us all well. But the Lord confirms, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17) with a special emphasis on the nourishment to be provided.

We live in days when the lambs and the sheep are in grave danger of not being fed or cared for properly. Junk food is the order of the day. How necessary is the “sincere milk of the word”, 1 Peter 2:2, and the strong meat, Hebrews 5:12, believers need to day. Does the company of believers with whom I gather, and with whom you meet, satisfy these needs? The Lord calls many Peters in our generation; has He called you?

Peter’s call to believers

So we come to Peter’s call to believers. Peter has experienced much in his life on this subject. In his first letter, 1 Peter, he is writing to those who have been scattered by persecution (1 Peter 1:1). At the end of the letter he speaks particularly to those older in age or experience. In 1 Peter 5:2-4 he writes, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising oversight, not by necessity, but willingly; not for base gain, but readily; not as lording it over your possessions, but being models for the flock. And when the chief shepherd is manifested ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory”, (JN Darby translation). Peter is most anxious to pass on the responsibility. It is worth reading through 1 Peter to see how the Apostle has used his responsibility as a pastor to encourage the “flock” in practical Christianity.

We can note some of the points made in these verses.

1. The flock is God’s flock, the people of God “which is among you”. They need to be fed. The right qualification for this task is experience with an ability to take up the Word of God for caring and nourishment. There are many around us today needing shepherd care. Peter encourages those with experience and age to take up the work.
2. The work needs to be done willingly and urgently. There is a regular need, not done as paid employment, but from a willing heart. This willing shepherding brings the care necessary.
3. Pastoring is not parenting. We do not try to enforce a course of control but rather to act as a model which can be followed.
4. The Chief Shepherd should have the foremost place. We work for Him from whom we will receive an unfading crown. (1 Peter 5:4) It is the Chief Shepherd who should guide what is done for Him.

As we close our consideration today, we may be impressed by the many needs around us for pastoral care. The Lord sees the needs. We remind ourselves of where we began in Ephesians 4:11, “He gave...some pastors and

teachers...” The needs of the Lord’s work are as great today as in the past. Peter adds in 1 Peter 5:7, “He careth for you”. So the Lord is the Chief Shepherd and Peter’s desire is now to stir up others for this vital work. Perhaps you say, “Not me, it’s an official position!” No, it is not so much an official position as a calling from the Lord which so many can fill. Is your Saviour not worth every effort you can put into His work? Do not delay when the Lord calls you to serve Him in building up His flock? Let us finish with the words of the hymn-writer:

*There’s a work for Jesus ready at your hand
'Tis a task the Master just for you has planned.
Haste to do His bidding, yield Him service true;
There’s a work for Jesus none but you can do.*

May it be so for His Name’s sake.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.