

Sermon 3, Benefitting from your Elders, 1 Peter 5:5-11

Proposition: Elders teach humility, lead resistance to Satan, and help you endure suffering.

Read Daniel 4

- I. Humble Submission Vanquishes Anxious Cares, vv. 5-7
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this morning we saw God's word to elders. Peter was not afraid to exhort elders to shepherd the flock and to oversee the church. Nor, as we are about to see, was he afraid to exhort the members of the flock to submit to their shepherds. Shepherds are not to lord it over the flock, but they nonetheless exercise real authority over us for our good.

Our passage might appear to move on from the theme of elders after v. 5, but there is a reason that Peter first exhorts the elders, then tells young men to submit to the elders, and then tells the church to resist the Devil and to endure temporary suffering. Clearly, these topics are associated with each other in the apostle's mind. We can benefit from the leadership of the elders not just by having them stand up front and serve the Lord's Supper, but even more by learning to submit to their leadership, to follow them in resisting Satan, and to follow them in receiving perfection from the God of all grace. The bottom line is that elders teach humility, lead resistance to the wicked one, and help us endure suffering by looking to the God of all grace.

I. Humble Submission Vanquishes Anxious Cares, vv. 5-7

The apostle Peter has been talking to the elders in the presence of the whole church. If you were listening and saying "Yeah, let those elders have it. They need to shape up!" you'd better start sweating, because the fisherman is looking at you now. And he's got that glint in his eye. When he was young, it meant that he was about to shoot off his mouth. Now that he's a seasoned church planter, someone who has been taken down several notches in public by his whip-smart colleague Paul, he gets that glint when he is going to share a spiritual secret or three. So listen up, to the apostle who definitely has the most to be humble about.

A. Humbling Yourself, vv. 5-6

That, of course, is where he begins. In the next letter, he'll say that he was an eyewitness of the Lord's majesty at the Transfiguration. But here, he has only claimed to be a witness of Christ's sufferings. He is the apostle who cut and ran, who denied Christ three times with oaths. He is the one who said stupid things while watching the Transfiguration. He is the one who fell foul of Paul for making yet another moral error, this time with regard to table fellowship. He is a

fisherman, not a scholar. No one looks to a fisherman to be a brainiac. Peter is someone with a lot to be humble about. And rather than bragging about his humility, he tells it to us straight: Humility is absolutely necessary. If you want to benefit at all from the leadership of your elders, who serve eagerly in a position of suffering and glory, then you have got to humble yourself.

What do you mean, Peter? Specifically, he says, you have to be humble enough to submit to your elders. If they say “Eat with the Gentiles” I need to eat with the Gentiles. If they say “Stop talking to your wife like that” I need to stop talking to my wife like that. If they say “Teach your family about the mighty works of the LORD” I need to teach my family about the mighty works of the LORD. If they say “No, we cannot support you going to seminary right now” then you need to stay out of seminary. If they say “Don’t marry that guy” you need to not marry that guy.

That’s what being subject to the elders means. Obviously Peter means “in the Lord.” If the elders say “Fall down and worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world,” don’t do it. If the elders say “Give me, I mean the church, your money or God will judge you” don’t do it. If the elders say “Sign your home and car title over to the church” don’t do it. If they tell you “Never eat pork again” you can still have bacon for breakfast. Their lawful authority ends at a place clearly marked by the word of God. They have the right to tell you to obey the Ten Commandments, and they have authority over you in matters of spiritual decision-making. But they do not have the right to tell you what to eat, drink, or wear; they do not have the right to extort money from you.

What does it take to say “I won’t go to seminary right now because my elders said no”? It takes humility. It takes the ability to accurately judge your own case, and how important your opinions really are, and just who you are in God’s kingdom. Elder or not, pastor or not, you are one of the sheep of God’s pasture, and you have to submit to the elders. And lest you think elders have it easy, we elders have to submit to the elders far more often than you do. Every time there’s a vote, every time there’s a decision, we have to agree with one another. The vote may be divided, but the results are the results and we have vowed before God and you to abide by them.

As a pastor, for instance, it is entirely possible that you might be asked by your elders to resign. How easy is it to submit to that? If you’re not a pastor, the elders are highly unlikely to ask you to quit your job if it is a lawful occupation. But if you are a pastor, the elders have every right to ask you to move on, or even to ask you to demit the ministry entirely. They may ask you to take a sabbatical and recharge — or ask you not to take a sabbatical because the church needs your care at this time. And so on.

You know what it takes to submit to the elders? Humility. A recognition that they are the living voice of Christ in your life. I had a pastor tell me recently “Yes, the committee asked me questions for ten hours, and I see that what I did was not wise, but I still don’t think I did anything wrong. They disagreed and defrocked me.” Is that the voice of humility? No. It’s not. The phrase “I know better” is the opposite of humility. Humility defers to your lawful authorities. Humility recognizes that God is big, I am small, and therefore it is by far the wisest thing for me to do it His way, no matter how little I like it.

Peter doubles down on this humility thing. Not only do you have to submit to your elders, of whom there are unlikely to be more than six or a dozen in your local church. Now you have to be humble to everyone! Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 5, only he actually says “Submitting to one another.” What does this mutual submission mean? Does it mean that the elders have to submit to you just as much as you have to submit to them? No. It means that, in general, you are willing to go along with your brother’s way of doing things for the sake of Jesus. If he says “Would you please not eat so noisily?” you don’t say “It’s a free country. I’ll make as much noise as I want.” You say, “Sorry about that. I will eat more quietly.”

Being humble to everyone means that you do not stand on your rights, that you do not argue for yourself and try to make the others recognize how slighted and neglected you’ve been. It means that if at all possible, you take it rather than raising a stink and demanding that you be treated just so.

Yes, abusers can and do take advantage of Christian teaching here. But I don’t want you looking to Hollywood or pop culture and its vision of the battered, abused victim. I want you looking to Christ. What sort of humility did He show? Well, He let Judas arrest Him. He let Pilate and Herod interrogate Him. He let the crowds follow Him and bother Him. Let me ask this: How often did He say to someone “Do you know who I am?” or “You have to treat me better”? That’s right: never.

You are supposed to be looking more like Him. We all have the vision of the rider on the white horse, robe dipped in blood, slaughtering enemies. That’s the Christ to whom I want to be conformed! But it’s “If we suffer, we will also reign with Him,” not “If we reign with Him, we will never have to suffer.”

You will hear things you don’t like. You will be told things you don’t appreciate. Your kids will be blamed unfairly. Your hospitality will be abused or even despised. All of these things happen in the church, even in our church. The proud say “I won’t put up with this!” and decamp. The humble accept it as part of following in the footsteps of the most humble man on the face of the earth.

Why is humility the best policy? Because God resists the proud! If you say “I don’t deserve to be treated like this?” the Almighty mutters “Oh yeah?”

You don’t want the Almighty muttering “Oh yeah.” You don’t want to dare God to cut you down to size. We just read about how God humbled Nebuchadnezzar for saying “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built?” The king of the mightiest empire earth had ever seen was forced to eat grass like a cow. God can take your sanity in a second. He can take your health. He can humiliate and embarrass you with medical treatments and so on. I would point you to Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr. The most powerful man on earth was humiliated and ashamed by the office he occupied. The ceremony only made him look more ridiculous. He was wearing a tie and sunglasses, but still managed to give the impression that he would be more appropriately clad in a dressing gown and slippers. God resists the proud!

But He gives grace to the humble. I would refer this to two things in particular. God gives grace to those who are humble enough to submit to their authorities. Wives, even if you think

your man is wrong, submit to him and you will see more of God's grace than if you fight your man. Church members, even if you think your elders are wrong, submit to them and you will see more of God's grace than if you fought them. The other thing to which I would refer "grace to the humble" is prayer. Prayer is the ultimate sign of humility. Prayer is a way of saying "God, I need your help." Prayerlessness, by contrast, is a way of saying "I'm good. I don't need you, God." Which one of those is the humble approach?

When you are walking in prayer, submitting to your lawful authorities, you can expect to receive the grace of God. If you sit in the seat of the scornful, scorning your God and His appointed shepherds, good luck. He will scorn you right back. But He will give unlimited grace to those who humbly ask for it.

B. Fearing God's Mighty Hand, v. 6

So if you want to benefit from your elders, humble yourself under God's mighty hand. Peter knew the might of that hand. He had seen Jesus walking on the water; he himself had been able to walk on water as long as he looked to Jesus. He had seen Jesus heal and calm the storm. He knew firsthand what that hand could do. And he says "Don't you rise up in scorn against God's mighty hand. Be afraid of what that hand can do."

Some of you probably remember the gigantic handprint in the Sunday School room at the Adventist building. It was marked "Hailey," and we often joked about not wanting to meet Hailey in a back alley. A woman with hands that big would surely be an extraordinary sight. How much larger and more powerful is the hand of the Almighty?

C. Looking for Future Exaltation, v. 6b

True humility not only recognizes that God's hand is more powerful than ours, but also that He will use it to lift us up. Landing in Japan, Lemuel Gulliver (the eponymous hero of Jonathan Swift's satire) was required, like all European traders, to trample on the crucifix before he was allowed to live in that country. He refused this ceremony and presented a letter instead from the fictitious king of Luggnagg, whose seal showed a "*A king lifting up a lame beggar from the earth.*" That, brothers and sisters, is our king, the same one who suffered on the cross. We will be highly exalted alongside Him, not because we deserve it, but for the same reason that He healed the lame beggars and made the deaf to hear: for His own glory. He is showing His character by caring for the weak and sick. Lemuel Gulliver, whose conscience was not particularly sensitive, was not willing to trample on the king who humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, so that he could highly exalt us lame beggars.

You may say "Why does it take Him so long to exalt me?" If that is your question, brother, you have yet to learn humility. When does humility ask "Why does it take you so long to come and exalt me?" Humility is willing to stay low forever. Oh for more of this grace, the grace of submission, the grace of prayer, the grace of humility! Our king is humble enough to lift up lame beggars from the earth; are we humble enough to wait His good time of doing it?

D. Handing Anxiety to Him, v. 7

And here, brothers and sisters, is the piece de resistance — if you'll pardon my French. That means roughly the same thing as "the kicker" or "the good part." Everything Peter has said about

humility, about submitting to the elders, finds its payoff here. If you can learn to submit to the elders, you can learn to let go of your anxiety.

I need scarcely tell you that anxiety is a colossal problem in American society and in the American church. Stress, worry, feeling anxious, even panic attacks are experienced regularly by huge proportions of the population. Tons of people, including many among us, have cares and burdens too many to name. We lie awake at night thinking of them. We turn to them during the day in any moments of quiet or stillness, worrying about what might go wrong, fearing the worst, torturing ourselves with many sorry and painful scenarios.

But here Peter says that elders help with anxiety. If you follow the lead of the elders, being subject to them, one of the major sins you can put away is anxiety. You no longer need to walk in fear and worry. You can hand all your worries to Jesus, and He will worry about them for you because He cares for you.

For those with severe anxiety, the notion of handing worries to Jesus induces even further anxiety. Anxiety is a way of life for these brothers and sisters. They no more know how to do without it than a Chinaman would know how to do without rice. How on earth do you cast all your cares upon Him, especially if your cares are a big mountain that simultaneously flattens your chest and functions like the world's thickest security blanket?

Well, once again, go back to the context. The background to casting all your cares on Jesus Christ is to be humbly subject to your elders, to one another, and to God's mighty hand, all while looking to heaven. If you are doing these things, you will be able to control your thoughts. You will be able to reframe anxiety. Instead of thinking to yourself, *This what-if scenario is plausible, terrifying, and important for me to work through. I gotta be prepared*, you will instead think to yourself *This what-if scenario is not plausible, and the real chance of it happening to me is almost zero. Even if it were absolutely certain to happen to me in the next ten minutes, though, I refuse to look upon it as the ultimate disaster. So long as I have Christ, I have what I need. So long as I am safely within the group, submitting to the others and to my elders, I have perfect confidence in the surpassing grace of Jesus. So long as God's mighty hand is protecting me, the thing that I fear cannot ultimately harm me.*

That's casting your cares upon Him. When you are safely in the middle of the herd, flocking with the other sheep, handing over the appropriate amount of responsibility for your own spiritual welfare to Christ's undershepherds, and recognizing that God's mighty hand will humble those who proudly exempt themselves from the flock, you begin to experience some peace of mind. You begin to see that Jesus cares for you. Though you can't yet see it for yourself, you can see it in your fellow sheep. You can see that they are happy, secure, well-fed and cared for. Seeing the reality of His care for them gives you much greater confidence in the reality of His care for you. Humbling yourself to recognize that you are but a very little lamb after all, that you are not the Big Kahuna, not the Vicar of Christ or the World's Greatest Christian, also frees you from worrying about keeping up appearances. You don't have to live up to the standard of being the World's Greatest Christian. You are free to simply be a sheep who lives in the shadow of the mighty hand, a sheep who is content to flock with the flock, follow with the herd, eating

the bread of life, drinking the living water, and splashing in the fountain of grace that comes from the God who cares for the humble.

If you have to get to heaven alone, I can see why that would make you anxious. If you have to do it all as a super-Christian, you have something to worry about. If you can't trust your friends and leaders to protect you, yeah, that's anxiety city. But if you have solid elders, a good flock, shepherds who will lay down their life for you, and the humility to recognize that you don't deserve any of it, you can then cast your cares upon Christ. He has promised to get you to heaven. He is the ultimate survivalist. He is better than the ultimate TV action hero. He is better than the smartest rabbi or most spiritually sensitive pastor. You see the genius of Paul, the bluntness of Peter? Jesus surpasses them both. He is the chief shepherd, and He's coming back.

II. Sober Resistance Vanquishes Satanic Attack, vv. 8-9

Well, we will quickly look at the remaining verses here. Peter is still talking about the benefits that come from having elders. You can resist Satan when you are safely in the middle of the flock. The elders help you understand that there are many brethren around the world who are going through the same thing. Even within our own church, I have had the privilege of saying to more than one sufferer "You know, so-and-so in this church is going through the same thing."

It's well-known to pollsters and other call center operators that you trust people more based on geographic proximity. When you hear the voice of a local on the other end, the same accent, the same awareness of local conditions, your guard goes down a bit. Some random person in India doesn't mean much to you. But when someone from Gillette is helping you on the other end, you recognize that this person shares your community and cares about it like you do. Everyone wants safe streets; everyone wants working infrastructure.

Well, when you know that your fellow saints, people with whom you have everything in common, your brethren both here and throughout the world, are undergoing what you are from the Wicked One, it gives you the ability to say "I can resist. He didn't get the guy in the next pew; that family beat a significant temptation that could have ripped them apart. He didn't get that faithful church in Chengdu or Singapore; the same Jesus who is at work in Gillette is at work all over the world."

Let me ask you this: What odds would you give a sheep that's going up solo against a lion? Har har. You wouldn't bet five cents on the sheep winning.

But what about a sheep and five shepherds armed with clubs, torches, and stout hearts? I don't think the lion is going to win that one.

This is what Peter is implying by placing his statement about Satan as a roaring lion right after he tells us to submit to the elders. When you are the lone ranger Christian, you are trying to beat Satan with nothing more than your fuzzy wool. But when you are submitting to the elders, you have nothing to worry about because your shepherds have the weapons and the training to fight him off. That's what gives you the freedom to resist. Resistance to a lion is suicidal, if you're fighting alone. But if you and the whole herd are fighting under the leadership of armed shepherds, men carrying the sword of the Spirit and the breastplate of faith, you have every chance of emerging unscathed. It's the lion who would be suicidal to attack in that instance.

He's seeking someone to devour. You've watched the nature documentaries. You don't need me to tell you who the lion always goes for. That's right: the weak one who is separated from the herd. That's the one who gets eaten. The one who is in good condition, who is in the middle of the flock, who sticks by the shepherd? That one never gets eaten.

III. Temporary Suffering Leads to Eternal Perfection, vv. 10-11

Finally, Peter reminds us that suffering, Satanic assaults and other pains alike, is only temporary. He has reminded us about the crown of life. He has reminded us about being lifted up in due time. Now he reminds us that God has called us to eternal glory and will give us everything we need to be perfected.

Why can we let go of anxiety? Because He is at work in us! He is settling us, making us stand. To his own master he stands or falls, says Paul — and God is able to make him stand! Do you want to stand in the evil day? Then lean on Jesus. The everlasting arms will endure when the mountains crumble. How do you lean on Him? By staying with the flock, submitting to the elders, submitting to one another, humbling yourself, casting your cares on Him, resisting the devil.

He has dominion and glory forever. He is Lord, and we are not. That takes away the anxiety. It does for elders too. If you are volunteering as an elder, serving eagerly because you want to help the church and fight off the lion and the wolves, you will be perfected, confirmed, strengthened, and settled. To Him be glory forever! Amen.