

## What If There Was No Shepherd?

A sermon based on 1 Peter 5:1-5

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

When I came home from college each summer I would pick up my summer job at Medina Golf and Country Club to help pay for next year's tuition. And it was no secret among my co-workers that I was going to school to become a pastor. They were genuinely interested in what my studies entailed. Well, one day, one of my co-workers remarked, "That's really smart of you to become a pastor. You hardly have to do any work and if you're good... well, some of those guys are worth millions." He wasn't wrong.

T.D. Jakes is a preacher in Dallas, TX. He's worth about \$18 million. He has his own jet plane, a huge mansion, and openly flaunts his wealth wherever he goes. He promises that if people give him money (not to his congregation, mind you, but to *him personally*) they will in turn be financially blessed by God. "Think of it as an investment more than an offering," he'd say. In fact, he once told his congregation that God wanted them to buy him a Rolls Royce to show the community that if they too would follow God as well as the "Reverend" Jakes, they could drive a car as nice. And, you know what? They did it. He was driving around town in his new Rolls before the week was done. He has since gone on the Oprah Winfrey show to defend his practice of amassing large amounts of wealth on the backs of his members.

And he's not the only preacher who's worth millions either. Creeflo Dollar (how ironic is that name?) also drives a Rolls Royce, flies in his own private jet, and has a \$2.5 million home. Bishop Charles Blake earns a salary of more than \$900,000 per year. Benny Hin makes just shy of \$1M per year. Joel Esteen has a \$10.5M mansion! And Ed Young gets a \$1M salary and a \$240,000 per year housing allowance.

Now we know that "***the worker deserves his wages,***" (1 Timothy 5:18) but is this what God wants? You'll notice too, that I called these men preachers, not pastors. *Pastor* means *shepherd* and is one who cares for the flock entrusted to him. But I believe these men are more interested in being worth millions than they are in feeding souls. And God has something to say to shepherds in our text this morning as he has us pondering the question, "What if there was no shepherd?"

In our text for today Peter is primarily addressing pastors. He calls them shepherds and elders. And he asks them to consider why they serve as pastors. For money? To be worth millions like T.D. Jakes and Joel Osteen? For power? Because they love to tell people what to do and watch them jump like a lord commanding his serfs? Because they feel they have to? Because their dad was a pastor, and his dad was a pastor, and, well, it's just expected that that's what I have to do too?

There are all kinds of bad motives for doing good things. Yes, the worker is worth his wages, but if someone preaches just for the cash, or for the Rolls Royce, or the private jet, what a despicable villain! Especially if they're spreading false doctrine to get there! God doesn't want people forced into the ministry or guilted into it. He wants shepherds who are willing to serve, eager to do their duty, and for the right reasons.

So God through Peter asks his shepherds to evaluate their motives for service.

Of course, you know that even though Peter is here speaking to pastors, every Christian is called to serve others. Earlier in this book Peter wrote about all believers (not just pastors), "***You... like living***

**stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood... you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**" (1 Peter 2:5,9) Every believer is called to serve (or minister to) others. Every believer is called to shepherd (or pastor) his fellow believers, feeding one another with encouragement from God's Word.

So even though this text seems to be directed toward just full time called workers, let me turn around to each one of you. How well do you serve God by serving others? Why do you serve? What's your motive?

Do you only serve others, when there's something in it for you? Someone once said everyone's favorite Radio station is WIIFM. They're eager to listen for "What's In It For Me?" Do you serve others for a possible promotion so you can be in charge of more and lord it over them? Or that you might get more money, greedy for more that it can buy? Do you serve others just so your selfish goals might be met? Or so that you feel better about yourself, thinking, "What a good person am I!" Or maybe you *don't* serve others because you don't feel compelled.

What if there were no shepherd? What if you refused to be a shepherd to your co-worker, your neighbor, to your family member who doesn't know the truth? What if you didn't tell others God's message of law and gospel? How would they hear about it? From someone else? Are you sure about that? Do you want to run that risk that someday they're in hell, wondering why you didn't care enough to have a conversation with them about eternal things?

What if there were no shepherd? What if no one told you of God's grace? Where would you be? What if there were no Chief Shepherd who paid for your sins? Where would you be?! You know the answer! We would be in hell! And that's what we all deserve.

I know we say that no sin is worse than any other in eyes of God. But I would argue that pride is actually a worse sin than any other. Because pride prevents repentance. God opposes the proud. He stands against those who refuse to acknowledge their sin and repent. And no one stands whom God opposes. So humble yourselves before God. Confess your sin. And God will give you grace.

What if there were no shepherd to feed your soul? What if there were no Chief Shepherd to pay for your sin? Thank God that those "what if's" are all purely hypothetical! We know that our Good Shepherd has come to pay for our sins. We know how the Good Shepherd laid down his life, for us, his sheep! We know that he has called us by name, that he feeds us and feeds our souls, that he protects us, even in the Valley of Death!

The job may not pay well now, it may not pay millions, but rather persecution might be what we take home. But the retirement benefits are out of this world—literally! Jesus *is* alive, dear friends! Christ is risen indeed! And he *will* return! And we will receive a reward of grace that is beyond our wildest imaginations, "**when the Chief Shepherd appears, [and we] receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.**" It will only shine brighter every day!

This is our motive for serving him. We long to show our gratitude and thanks! This is our motive for serving others. We want to do what is pleasing to God. And we want them to know of his saving grace that they too may receive the crown of life. We all long to be faithful shepherds working for the Chief Shepherd, to show our thanks to him. And to do that work, we'll have to humble ourselves...

Picture this scenario: a proud man walks into the church with an air of superiority all about him. His nose is in the air. He barks orders at everyone in the room, throwing his weight around and feeling his self-importance. How would you feel about him? Would you do what he told you to do? Would you like it if you did?

Now picture this: Another man walks into the church, takes off his suit coat and rolls up his sleeves. He seeks no thanks. In fact, he'd rather get no notice at all as he first cleans the toilets, then weeds a flower bed. He cleans the dishes in the sink, stopping only to help a child tie a shoe.

Now without commentary on which kind leader you actually have in your church, which kind of leader would you rather have? And which leader are you? After all, a leader doesn't have to have a title at all. A leader is anyone who influences the thinking or behavior of others. Lead by example, dear friends. And lead with humility.

Peter tells us that we all ought to, "***Clothe [ourselves] with humility toward one another...***" But the word "clothe yourselves" is a different Greek word than the one that simply means to get dressed. It's a verb formed from a noun which means the apron that a slave would wear in service. An apron not just to keep the food from splattering your shirt while you cook, but an apron that shows the status of slave. Perhaps a loose translation of that verb might be, "apron yourself for service," "put on your maid's outfit," or "dress the part of the butler." The point is that we choose to actively put on humility as we serve others.

Just as Paul told the Philippians in Philippians 2:(3-4), "***Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.***"

Choose to serve others out of love for Christ. Choose the humble path. Choose to clear the table and do the dishes. Choose to take out the trash. Choose to change a diaper, to carry more than your fair share of the work, to go without the credit, unappreciated, and underpaid. Choose to add as much value as you can to the lives of others out of thanks to God. And even if they don't notice, he will.

And do all of this humble service to others with the end game in mind. We're not just serving them to serve, but to build relationships, to earn that right to be listened to when they come for advice, to look for opportunities to shepherd them with the Gospel, and to take advantage of every opportunity.

What if there were no shepherd? What if you didn't chose to humbly serve others? Thank God this is just a hypothetical question. You are privileged to be the shepherds that humbly serve God by serving others. You are privileged to be the shepherds that, meeting them where they're at and serving their needs, get to feed them with the truth of the Good Shepherd. You are privileged to be the shepherds that will let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven.

And even if you don't get the results that you're hoping for, even if you suffer for it, or even if no one else notices, God does. He sees your works of thanks and praise to him. And one day soon, our living Savior will return. And when he does, he'll give you a crown of glory that will never fade.

What if there were no shepherd? Thank God that this is just a hypothetical question. Thank God that you do have a Chief Shepherd who laid down his life to save you. Thank God that you do have faithful

shepherds who, serving under him, feed you with the Word and the Lord's Supper to strengthen you in your faith. Thank God that he gives you the privilege to be faithful shepherds to others as you guide them to the truth. Amen.