

Reforming the Evangelical Pulpit, Part 2

John 21

What does Christ point us to in this encounter with Peter? We see point number two that the man must not only be a man of Christ, he must be a man of the canon. C-A-N-O-N. A man of the book of God. A man of the Word of God. As Jesus restores Peter, he points him to the content of what Peter is to do. He points him to what Peter is to focus on now going forward.

Peter, now that it's been established that you love me, here's what I want you to do. And so look there in verse 15 with me again. He says, "Simon, do you love me more than these?" He said, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus gives him a command in response to that love. He says, "You tend my lamb." English Standard Version, "Feed my lambs."

Verse 16, "Simon, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said, "Shepherd my sheep." Verse 17, "Do

you love me?" Peter said to him, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." And so using the New American Standard translation here, "Tend my sheep," "Shepherd them," "Tend them." Peter, I have a people. The Lord has a people that belongs to him. And they need men to lead them, to feed them, to care for them. And the idea that Jesus is imposing upon Peter is, your responsibility is to take my people, have them in mind and you are to do something with them. You are to tend them and take care of them.

Well, what is it that a pastor has to feed people? I mean, we're talking in metaphors here. They're not literal sheep and it's not literal food that we're talking about. What is it that they are to do? Well the verb tenses in the Greek show that this is an ongoing responsibility that is to be done. And obviously, lambs and sheep, they need to be fed if they are to grow and to be healthy. They need to be taken care of.

And the food for the flock of the God is the Word of God. The food for the flock of Christ is the Word of God. Jesus is telling Peter, I want you to go and feed my people. We can see how Peter understood this. We can see exactly what Jesus meant

by this when we examine the subsequent course of Peter's life and ministry. What was it that Peter did?

Well, when the occasion came up in Acts chapter 6 and there were men needed to feed the widows that were not being taken care of, they said, "We cannot forsake the word of God and prayer for the sake of tending the tables." The Word of God and prayer is our priority. As you read through his ministry in the book of Acts, what is it that he's preaching? He's preaching Scripture. He is not preaching to people and telling them how to have a better sex life. He is not preaching and telling them how to find material prosperity.

He is telling them how to find forgiveness of sins. Acts 4:12, "There is no one under heaven, given among men by whom we must be saved." Loose paraphrase there. He is preaching Scripture. He is preaching Christ. And in his letters, Peter calls believers to the Word of God. He said in 1 Peter chapter 2, "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word so that by it you may grow and respect the salvation."

Chapter 4, "Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God." 2 Peter chapter 1, "No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." In 2 Peter chapter 3, he says, "You should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your Apostles." It's the Word of God. It's the Word of God. It's the Word of God.

Peter took that instruction about "tend my sheep," and he went out and spent the rest of his life preaching the Word of God in his ministry. And so a man who would serve Christ in an evangelical pulpit is to be a man who is exclusively about the Scriptures. The evangelical pulpit feeds people the Word of God.

It is not an entertainment venue. This is not a comedy club. It is not a psychologist's couch that we engage in when we come up here. This is not a political rally on the left or on the right. The Word of God, the teaching of the Word of God is to be preached. And Scripture could not be more clear about

this. Jesus' instructions, his commission to the church was utterly clear on this.

He said at the end of Matthew 28. He said, "Go and make disciples, teaching them all that I commanded you." As Phil alluded to in Luke 24, at the end of that Gospel, repentance for the forgiveness of sins shall be proclaimed to all of the nations. Look at 2 Timothy chapter 3 with me and what you find if you were to trace this out in the progress of revelation from the time of Christ through the ministry of the Apostles to the close of the Apostolic age if you were to trace it out chronologically through the progress of revelation you would find this point being made from the beginning to the end.

In 2 Timothy chapter 3 in verse 15, Paul tells Timothy that "from childhood you have known the sacred writing, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate equipped for every good work."

And then immediately after that, there is no break in thought here at all. Paul therefore says to Timothy in chapter 4, verse 1. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing in his kingdom," what? "Preach the word: be ready in season and out of season: reproof, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

He sets forth the sufficiency of the Word for evangelism. He sets forth the sufficiency of the Word for edification and then he invokes the presence of God. He invokes the presence of Christ. He invokes future judgment upon Timothy for his response to this information, to this exhortation. He says, "Timothy in light of all these things, here's what you're to do." Three words in English, "Preach the Word. Timothy, you are to be a man of the canon. You are to be a man of the Word."

Because it is the Word that sanctifies the saints. It's the Word that equips us. It is the Word, it is through believing in the Word, it is the preached Word that brings sinners to Christ.

That is our mission. That is what our Lord is after. This is the building up of the Lord's kingdom. And we are not to misappropriate the platform and the authority of the Word of God. To misappropriate this for everything that is passing for evangelicalism in, in the modern approach to this. It is, it is a terrible travesty and I legitimately fear for these men, of the accountability that is going to be theirs before the throne of a holy God. Having stood up in his name and done something other than preach the Word. I can't imagine what's going to happen to them. It is frightening to contemplate.

Now, let's just take a little practical look at it. Let's take a little breath here. And just take a practical look, wh, how can you know if the man's really preaching the Word or not. I think that there are seven questions, that you could ask to determine whether a man was a man of God, a man of the canon or not? Let me just run through these real quickly. They're in somewhat of an order. Not exhaustive, but representative. When does this man teach you about the inerrancy, the authority, and the sufficiency of Scripture? When does he do that? If he's been in ministry any time at all, that ought to be pretty prominent in something that he has said from the outset.

Here's another question: When does this man speak to you about the holiness and the wrath of God? When does this man speak to you about eternal judgment? And hell? When does he speak to you about sin and repentance? When has he articulated those doctrines? When has he warned sinners that things are not all well, that Jesus might have a different plan for you than just making you feel good and fixing your problems?

When does this man speak to you about the doctrine of justification by faith alone? When does he sp, talk about reconciliation with God? When does he talk about redemption? When does he speak about the person and work of Christ? When does he talk about the substitutionary atonement? When does he speak about sanctification? I know I've kind of blended a lot of question together there. In general, there's seven. When are these biblical doctrines set forth in his ministry?

These are the themes of the canon. These men have been given a platform in order to exposit these things and let the



world come and go as it may. Their silence on such issues is deafening. If a man does not speak about these issues, but instead prefers to tell you stories about his children and his grandchildren, and what he did on his latest vacation, and that's the mark of what he says, that's the pattern of what he says, beloved, he's not a man of the canon. I don't care how big his church is. I don't care what his denominational affiliation is. He's not a man of the canon.

That brings us to our third point. He must be a man of the church. Jesus said, "Feed them, feed them, feed them." Who are the they? What's the antecedent of the pronoun here? Well go back to John chapter 21. What's the focus? Who is it that Jesus entrusts to Peter in the ap, apostolic circle and those of us that follow in their biblical steps? Verse 15, "Peter, tend my lambs." Verse 16, "Shepherd my sheep." Verse 17, "Tend my sheep." Beloved, a true pastor, the true evangelical pulpit is given for the sake of the church, not the community. It's given for the sake of the people of God, not preeminently. First among, this may surprise some of you to hear me say this, not first and foremost to the lost. Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep, not the goats.

The true evangelical pulpit, the pulpit that rests within a local church has as its first goal to edify and feed the sheep of God. The pastor is called to the church, not to the community. Look over at Ephesians chapter 4. In Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11, Paul is explaining the gifts that the risen Christ has given to the church for its benefit. Christ not only died a substitutionary death for our sins, he not only rose for our justification, he not only ascended into heaven in order to intercede for us before the Father, he also appointed men to be a blessing to the church and to provide a physical presence and a physical care in his physical absence. Men who would represent him in his stead while we walk on this earth.

And so in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11, our point that we're making here is that the evangelical pulpit is filled by a man who is a man of the church, not a parachurch. Verse 11, "He gave some as Apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers." Why did he do that? For what purpose? What's the object of that gift? "For the equipping of the saints for the work of the service, to the building up of the body of Christ." His lambs, his sheep. "Until

we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Beloved, the purpose of the evangelical pulpit is not to build the widest possible following in the world and to try to have some kind of measure of influence on unsaved people who are unregenerate and don't even care about the things of God. The preeminent priority of an evangelical pulpit is to build up people like you. God has given pastors to build you up. And to build you up by teaching you the Word of God, the doctrines of God. This is what the evangelical pulpit is to do. It sobers us. In one sense it frightens us to realize how far astray things are. And then there's a sense of righteous indignation drawn out of love for God and the fear of God that says, This aint right! This belongs to God. This belongs to Christ. These, this is his Word. These are his people!

And the men who have been entrusted with the opportunity are proving themselves to be faithless shepherds. This is not okay. This is a greater crisis than anything politically happening in the secular world. The purposes of Christ are being

betrayed. And there ought to be a sense of indignation against that. So repentance would look like men coming back and saying, You know what? Let me delete my Twitter account. Let me delete my Facebook page. Let me withdraw my books from circulation. I need time to just focus on the people who are in front of me and minister to them because I've obviously neglected that.

And with broken, a broken heart and with tears like Peter, saying, Lord, if these men are regenerate for them to say, Lord, you know all things, you know I love you. You know I've failed. I'm canceling the next the conference in order to make a point. And yeah, I know that certain cities in the Midwest will suffer as a result. But Lord, the mo, the first thing for me is to get right vertically with you, to reestablish the purpose for which I was given this platform in the first place.

See, we can't fix this on the margins. We can't fix this by continuing business as usual. This requires a wholesale repentance and a forsaking of things that these men have built their ministries on. There's no other answer. And apart from the Spirit of God, I know that they're not going to do it. But perhaps the Spirit would have mercy on us and mercy on them. And

open their eyes. As Jesus brought Peter back to repentance, perhaps the Spirit of God would bring these men back to repentance while there's still time. The angels in heaven would rejoice. More "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 who need no repentance." Can't imagine what it would be like if one of these kinds of pastors would repent and return to biblical ministry. I can't imagine the chorus in heaven of rejoicing that would take place if that happened.

And so a man of Christ. A man of the canon. A man of the church. Fourthly and finally, he must be man of character. He must be a man of character. Go back to John chapter 21. John 21 and as I've said already, it'll make it easier if we can go through this a little bit more quickly perhaps. Jesus did not send Peter out for ministry until he addressed the man himself. He addressed Peter before he commissioned him.

And so he says, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Verse 16, "Do you love me?" Verse 17, "Do you love me?" It's a direct personal question to Peter. Peter, forget about all of these others? What about you? Who are you? What marks you? And in his

questions, Jesus led Peter out of his former denials into an expression of the heart commitment that was always there.

I love the fact, and John MacArthur points this out so well, that Peter knew at this time. He knew that there was nothing in his life that he could point to that would vindicate his claim to loving Christ. He had just denied it with oaths and cursing. And so there was nothing that Peter could point to as a point of pride to say, Lord, this proves it. Look at what I did.

Peter doesn't appeal to himself and response to that third question he says, "Lord, you know all things." He appeals to the omniscience of Christ. He says, Lord, I know that I'm here before you as a broken failure. I know that I've sinned against you. But Lord, I appeal to your knowledge. You know what's true even if I can't prove it. Lord, you know I love you. Act with me, respond to me, accept me according to what you know to be true, rather than the nature of my life.

And beloved, that's the way that we all approach Christ. You know? We don't approach him pointing to our works, to our

merit. We approach him both in our initial conversion and as we approach him subsequently, Lord, I am relying on your shed blood. I'm relying on your righteousness. I'm relying on the fact that your Father accepts you, not anything in myself. I rely on you. I rely on that which is external to me, not on anything that I can point to in my life.

You know, the best truly evangelical men are still pockmarked with failure, aren't they? You know, we're all men of clay. We all have a grace given to us to have a ministry that if the Lord took our sins into account, we would not have the opportunity. And so we appeal outside of ourselves. Lord, I appeal to you. Peter does that. And Jesus is shaping his character as he does. And this whole idea of character is emphasized in 1 Timothy 3, as you know, and in Titus 1, as you know. That a man must be above reproach if he is to be a shepherd of the sheep of God.

He is to be a man of character. And we won't take the time to look at those passages. But when you study them, you'll find as you look at those character traits, even in the character traits, you'll find phrases that, that how's he going to take

care of the church of God if he can't administer his own household? He needs to be a man of sound doctrine, teaching sound doctrine and refuting those who contradict.

Even the character requirements for elders in those two crucial chapters emphasize the things that we're talking about. He has to be a man of Christ. He has to be a man of the canon. He has to be a man of the church and that this is to be the focus of the elder. As the Bible lays out the character of the pastor, it's emphasizing the priorities that should be placed in his church and in his teaching.

So much so that we believe and teach and understand and affirm that a pastor, a genuine pastor is first and foremost on a horizontal level, his first and primary responsibility is to the sheep, not to the goats. And evangelism takes place as an overflow as the saints are built up, not as the primary first and foremost goal that the pastor has in his, in his heart.

And so our commitment today, going forward to pulpit reformation includes all four of these traits. The man in the



pulpit is to be a man of Christ and a man of the canon and a man of the church and a man of character. This is not a smorgasbord where you chose one or two that you like, and you let the others go. These four are an indivisible unit. They are, they are a single cloth. They all come together. They all must be present. Each one is indispensable and reinforces the other. This is a high calling of which no man is worthy on his own. It must be a work of God in his life.

Notice, my friends, that these four traits have nothing to say about prominence. They have nothing to say about eloquence. They come from a work of the Holy Spirit in the man. Let's pray together. We beseech you, O Lord, to send workers like these into your harvest. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.