

Good Shepherd

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[0:00] So the title of the sermon is, now let me get this straight. You think we're a bunch of lost sheep? Seriously? This is Good Shepherd Sunday. It's an annual day of remembrance that we are sheep and we are lost and Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

This motif was built by Jesus himself as he called himself the Good Shepherd. So let's look today at the scriptures to see what they have to say to us about following the shepherd. We're going to use both the psalm and the gospel lesson.

So the first is Psalm 23, called by clergy the Funeral Psalm. Everybody asked that Psalm 23 be read at their funeral. Well, right and good. It is perfect for a funeral, but it goes quite a bit beyond that, doesn't it?

Psalm 23, probably the most loved psalm, tells us who we are and who the shepherd is. Now, if we look at this Psalm 23, it's broken into two pieces. Verses 1 through 4 and then 5 and 6.

The first section describes God is the Good Shepherd. Look at this. It says, The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. 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 namesake.

[1:53] Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

If you're a sheep, just pretend you're a sheep. Green pastures are a lot better than rocky hills.

The good shepherd leads us. The good shepherd leads us to green pastures. Still waters are a lot easier to drink from than roaring streams.

The shepherd leads us in comfort. Refreshing times. Even when we go into the valley of the shadow of death, And in some of those valleys in Israel, the sun never shines. They're just steep, gorgeous.

Wolves hang out in those valleys, in the caves. Even though the shepherd sometimes has to lead the sheep through these dangerous valleys, they're safe.

[3:08] We understand that, looking at the scripture, although very few of us ever... Anybody ever been a shepherd?

You've been a shepherd, yes. Well, we understand from the Bible about a shepherd. We understand what that meant then. But what does it mean today?

What are these wonderful things that come to us? The green pastures, the slow, beautiful, cool streams, the refreshing times.

Often we see them right here in church on Sunday morning, where we gather together to love God. To give Him comfort as He gives us comfort.

Today, these wolves are still hanging around, except they're not in caves in valleys. The wolves are in society. Random shootings.

[4:16] Almost every... Not to frighten you. Almost every day, there's a random shooting in America. Almost every day. Riots in cities.

What in the world is going on? The mayor of Portland has said, enough of this. Guess what? He had enough of it last year.

Riotings. Clearing out stores. Government corruption. The wolves are grabbing at our ankles.

And Satan is pulling the passion strings of America. These are the wolves. And you and I can get lost in this new reality of America.

America. We need a shepherd. But not only do we need a shepherd, we need a protector. Verse 5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

[5:28] Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Back when Psalm 23 was written, there was a sense of protectorship. If you received a guest in your home, you protected that guest with your life.

You protected. Today, that's a little bit lost in our society. Sometimes when we have a guest, it seems like an encumbrance, doesn't it?

We're going to feed them food with the hope that they'll leave in an hour. There's no protection in that thought. But this is what we need in a society today.

We need a protector. We need a shepherd and a protector. Well, that could be the end of the sermon. Everybody ready to go on? But wait, there's more.

[6:40] In the gospel lesson, Jesus weighs in as the good shepherd. The good protector. We're going to move to John chapter 10.

And you can look in your pew Bibles at John chapter 10. We're going to go through 11 through 16 verse by verse to see how Jesus is the good shepherd.

It says in verse 11, Jesus said, I am the good shepherd. Now, that I am, you've known if you studied scripture, is the same word for Jehovah.

Yahweh. Yahweh. Yahweh. The I am sayings of Jesus broadcast who he really is.

This is God in the flesh. I am the door. I am the bread of life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the good shepherd. God in our midst.

[7:45] God, the shepherd. I am the good shepherd. And then what does he say about the good shepherd? The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

We've just come out of Lent and celebrated Easter where we once again reviewed in our mind that God has saved us from eternal damnation.

That we are lost on our own. We are lost sheep with no hope. But God sends his son to give up his life for the sheep.

You and me. He dies on a cross. And then he defeats death for us. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

And then it says, He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

[8:50] He flees because he's a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. That's kind of tough on hired hands. Now, I grew up on a farm.

Hired hands were all about, and they were pretty good guys. They did the early morning milking. They did the scud work.

They didn't complain. But they didn't own the cows. If the cows got sick, they told the owner, you got a sick cow.

Sheep are the same way. Today, in the secular world, we have much to make us sick. Today, in the world in which we live, there is everything going against our way of life.

You may not have noticed that. But if you're a serious Christian, it's happening. The secular world wants to eat our biblical values.

[10:04] Name it. Education, social media, entertainment, politics, even liberal religion. They all want to eat the biblical values that we know are true.

They look to chew us up as wolves. So who are these hired hands that don't stand for us, that flee? Well, here we go. You ready? Government officials who promise hope but deliver death. Let's just take marijuana.

Okay, so marijuana is a big thing today where it's becoming legal. It promises such freedom. But we know it produces death.

Why are we legalizing this? Issues of life. When does life begin and when does it end? It used to be quite evident and scientific.

[11:09] Today it's blurred. We live, as one pope said, in a culture of death. But not only that, but we live in a culture of narcissistic comfort.

We vote for those who will make it easy for us. Now, here's a depressive point. We're going to get to hope here in a minute.

Do you know what the national debt is today in America? \$28 trillion. \$28 trillion. And probably before the end of the year, it's going to be \$30 trillion.

Someone did the math and determined that to get to \$30 trillion, each one of you and me, each one of us, would have to spend \$40 a second for a thousand years.

\$30 trillion. \$30 trillion. Sometimes I'd like to try that. Point. Don't stake your life on politicians to be your shepherds.

[12:21] We've tried that in evangelical Christianity. We crashed and burned years ago by putting our faith in political, I wouldn't say hacks.

Vote for the most righteous. Expect truth. Don't put your life in their hands. But it's even harder with church leaders.

Oh, I'm looking in the mirror. Church leaders who promise freedom, but deliver slavery.

The sexual revolution. The point today is, and a lot of religious leaders say this, you should be able to do whatever you want with your body. This is America.

Nobody can tell you what to do with your body. Right? Well, there's a part of truth to that. But the scripture is very careful on how we deal with the explosive gift called sex.

[13:33] It sets a pattern. A man and a woman in marriage. A wonderful gift of God. Religious leaders often get that confused.

Once again, they want to give freedom, but they deliver slavery. Don't stake your life on us as shepherds.

We are at best under shepherds. Watch how we speak and watch how we live. Are we following the Bible?

Or are we leading you to slavery? Pay heed to our teachings. Pay heed to our lifestyle. But don't stake your life on us as shepherds.

I had to learn that the hard way. Trusting someone I thought was a wonderful Christian leader, and then he crashed and burned. So what do we do?

[14:40] I mean, who do we trust? Do we trust anybody as a shepherd? Yes, we know who that is. Jesus is the good shepherd.

Verse 14. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me. Even though we walk through this contemporary valley of the shadow of death, Jesus is with us as the good shepherd. He's carrying us through. For those of us who are a little more seasoned in years, we remember a time when this happened in contemporary America. In the 1960s, I was a young adult, and the whole nation went berserk.

Well, except for me. I went berserk too, but not that berserk. Very strange things were happening. The church was going astray. Do you know that our presiding bishop in 1968 threw blood on the steps of the Pentagon?

[16:01] Ouch! The church went astray. Riots often led by church leaders. Doctrine changed.

The Bible was devalued. The first time we'd heard, well, you know, the Bible is just an old book. It was meant for another society. All we can take out of it is the love ethic.

The God is dead theology. Okay, Nietzsche, in the 19th century, had said God is dead. He didn't mean God was really dead. But he meant God as relevant is dead.

Well, a wonderful Episcopal priest, Paul Van Buren, pulled it out of the closet and put it up before the American public. God is dead.

That was in the 1960s. I think he almost believed it. Remember Nietzsche?

[17:04] Nietzsche, in the 19th century, said God is dead. And then in 1912, God said Nietzsche is dead. The sexual revolution really got going in the 1960s.

They forgot to tell me. I never got the memo. But it used to be, well, some of you remember, gee, you fell in love, and you got married, and you had kids.

Well, that's, very few people live that way today. The whole thing of how I expressed my sexuality got thrown into confusion.

Well, all right, I spent enough of time on that. We have been in the valley before. We're in the valley again, and the good shepherd is here.

Would someone look up Lamentations in the Bible right now? Lamentations 3. First one who gets to Lamentations 3, verse 22 and 23.

[18:17] Raise your hand. Is there any hope left? That's the question, and Lamentations answers it. And I'm waiting, and waiting, waiting for a hand to go up.

All right, we've got a hand. Yes, sir. Steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercy has never come to an end. Okay, would you read the next verse? They are new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness. That is, pin your hopes on that verse. You can depend on that verse.

Thank you for reading it so well. Have you been involved in chapel before?

This gentleman is a chaplain's assistant in the Army. He's doing a year of graduate study, and what a wonderful thing it is to have you with us. Thank you.

Appreciate your service. I can tell you haven't been in the Army for a little bit. You're taking a break. The good shepherd's brought us out of that valley before he's going to bring us out again.

[19:26] So, we get to the last verses. Verse 15. Who exactly are these sheep getting lost?

Jesus said, You're looking at one. And if you check the mirror, you may find some others. Jesus said, My own sheep know me.

We're here today because we know the shepherd. We know the good shepherd. We know that this flock is cared for by Jesus.

We are the other sheep. Jesus speaks about when he was speaking then. There was a Jewish community, and there was whatever wasn't Jewish.

And only in that framework then, only the Jews could be saved. Jesus was broadcasting, There are other sheep.

[20:39] The Gentile world. You and me. We are the other sheep. And Jesus knows each one of you by name. Some of you, he's given a nickname.

He loves each one of us. And deep down, you know his voice. He's calling. He's calling you to himself.

So, the last point. How do we hear the shepherd? How do we hear his voice? First of all, we hear him in church. That's why it's important to come to church every Sunday.

To hear the word. To hear his voice. Second, Bible studies and support groups. I think everybody ought to be in some kind of a small group that deals with God and his scriptures.

That's how we hear God's voice. Third, by personal prayer. Bible study. Bible reading. Every day, the daily personal encounter with the good shepherd touches our lives.

[21:44] We hear him speak. And then lastly, people who love us. Who throw us a lifeline when we need it. You know, a lot of little boys run away from home when they're nine years old.

You know, they put their clothes in a handkerchief and they hold it onto a pole and they go next door for an hour. Yeah, yeah. I didn't run away that way.

I ran away when I was 19. I literally ran away. I moved to New Orleans. Why did I go to New Orleans? Who knows? But it was a godly priest who talked with my parents, who taught them the prodigal son routine, who welcomed me back.

And I heard the voice of the shepherd for the first time. You see, any time you hear words of love, justice, forgiveness, and fulfillment, you're hearing God's voice to you, calling you.

So, conclusion. Are we sheep? Yep. Do we need a shepherd? You bet your bippy. Jesus offers us a place in his flock.

[23:08] Follow the good shepherd. Hear his voice. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.