

Behold our Shepherd

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Preacher: Rev Dr Colin Dow

[0 : 00] It's my pleasure today to welcome Reverend Colin Dow to preach to us at both this morning and this evening service. Colin is minister at Crow Road Free Church in Glasgow.

Thank you. Thank you very much, Colin. My legs are kind of sore, has to be said. Wonderful to be here. I always feel like I'm coming home when I'm coming up to Lewis and I never knew why that was until my wife bought me a subscription to an ancestry website for my Christmas present. And it turns out that I am a direct descendant of Summer Edma Gilbride, the first Lord of the Isles. So that must be why I feel I'm coming home. Behold, the Lord God comes with might and his arm rules for him. Behold, his reward is with him and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd.

He will gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those with young. Let us worship God. Let us sing to his praise in Psalm 93. Psalm 93 on page 123. The Lord is King, his throne endures, majestic in its height. Let us stand as we sing to God's praise.

[1 : 52] Let us sing to God's praise.

The Lord is King, his throne endures, majestic in its height.

The world is found firm and sure, Rebooteth cannot be, Rebooteth cannot be.

Your throne is strong, Now you are God. From all eternity, From all eternity, But these the Lord have lifted up, They lifted up their voice, They lifted up their voice, But these the Lord have lifted up their weight, And made a mighty noise, And made a mighty noise, And made a mighty noise.

The Lord have grown on high, Is strong, For powerful is he, For powerful is he, And thunder of the ocean's waves, Are breakers of the sea, Are breakers of the sea, Are breakers of the sea, Are breakers of the sea, Are breakers of the sea.

[4 : 33] Your voice is not a true source and firm, Unchanging is your word, Unchanging is your word, Unchanging is your word, And holiness adorns your eyes, For endless days, For endless days, For endless days, For endless days, For endless days, For endless days, Let us pray.

Indeed, O Lord Almighty, had we a thousand tongues, they would not be enough to sing your praises, for you are King.

You have always been King, you have always reigned, since before the sun was set in the sky, and you flung the stars into space. You were King, and you are King today.

You are in sovereign control of all things that come to pass, and you will always be King. You reign in splendor and glory, and we bow before you, our Sovereign God.

You are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one true and living God. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

[6 : 10] And yet we have seen you in the face of Jesus Christ. We thank you for your great love for us. You demonstrated your love for us in this. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Surely, O Lord, by nature we were conceived in sin. We sinned daily in thought, word, and deed, both by the wrong things we do, and the right things we fail to do.

How we thank you, O Lord, that you have laid all our sins on the shoulders of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who bore them on Calvary's tree for us. How we thank you that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

How we thank you that the blood of Jesus Christ is enough to forgive all our sins. But more so, the blood of Jesus Christ covers us with his righteousness.

So that even as you look upon us, as we are united in Christ, you say of us, you are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter, in you I am well pleased.

[7 : 21] What a great message the gospel of Jesus Christ is. And we pray this morning that you would send your Holy Spirit that we may focus our minds on Jesus Christ and him crucified, the Son

of God who loved me and gave himself for me, the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

We ask all these things with the forgiveness of all our sin, in Jesus' name. Amen. It is so wonderful to see all you boys and girls here today.

Did any of you run yesterday? We have two down here. Anyone else? Are your legs as sore as mine today? Yeah?

I want to help you understand what ministers do for a living. Okay? Because lots of people come to me and say, what do ministers do?

And sometimes I find it quite hard to explain to someone who doesn't go to church what a minister does. How would you answer that question, what does a minister do?

[8 : 31] Well, I want to help try and explain to you what a minister does. So, I here have a pencil case.

And I know that there's a young man in this congregation whose father has bought him this pencil case. Who's that young man? Uh-huh.

But because it couldn't be delivered here, it had to be delivered to my house in Glasgow. But it wasn't me who bought the pencil case for this young man.

It was his father. This young man's father who loves him very much and wants him to have the coolest pencil case in the whole of the world.

It's got Mr. Beast written in the front. And it's got a picture of Callum. Right in the front of it. And I wonder whether Callum Angi, would you mind walking up here because I certainly can't walk down there.

[9 : 35] Would you come and get this from me? Would you mind? Tell you what, I'll meet you halfway. Well, there we go.

It's come all the way from China without a 254% cut. Good boy, Callum Angi. So, I came all the way up here to do three things.

I came up here to run the half marathon. I came up here to preach today. And I came up here to give a present from a father to his son.

because, well, Gordon loves Callum Angi and Gordon loves to buy Callum Angi lovely things. So, what do you think a minister does? And what is me giving that pencil case to you got to do with being a minister?

Huh? Ministers give what our loving heavenly father has bought for his children.

[10 : 40] So, our loving heavenly father, God, has bought salvation through the blood of Jesus for us if we have faith in Jesus.

And what the minister does is to tell God's children, us, that God has bought a present for us.

And the minister stands up every single Sunday morning and evening. this is what Callum does every Sunday morning and evening to give that gift to God's children. To give that gift to you and to me.

That's what he does. So, as he preaches from the word, he is listening to God the Father saying, tell my children I have wonderful gifts for them.

I have forgiveness for them from Jesus. I have peace for them from the Holy Spirit. I have comfort when they're sad.

[11 : 40] I have joy for them. I have hope for them when they can't see the way ahead. I have all these things for them. And through the preaching of the word, the minister gives these gifts to God's children.

So, when next time someone asks you, what does a minister do? This is a bit old for you, but I often get told that a minister's job is six days to be invisible and one day to be incomprehensible.

But don't use that. Say, it's the minister's job to give the gift a father has bought to his children. And then when they say, what does that mean?

Explain to them, God has bought salvation for his children through the blood of his son, Jesus, and it's the minister's job to offer that salvation to God's children.

So, next time you're playing with your pencil case, Calabangi, and fill it up and take it to school and show your teacher, isn't this cool? Or next time you're using your pencil case in school, children, could you remember my story about what a minister does?

[12 : 52] Giving gifts a loving father has bought for his child to them. We're now going to say the Lord's Prayer together. Our Father, Jordan, heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

We're going to sing a song now, a psalm now, that talks about our sin and how God forgives our sin. This is a great gift the Father gives us. He blocks out our sin because of the death of Jesus. Psalm 51 from verse 5 to verse 15 in St. Psalms, page 68. 8. Psalm 51, page 68.

[14:01] From my birth I have been sinful. Such the nature I received, sinful from my first beginning, in my mother's womb concede. Again, let's stand to sing as we sing Psalm 51 to God's praise.

For my heart I have been sinful, Such the nature I receive, Sent to God from my first beginning, And my mother's womb concede, Truth, you look for in my heart, Wisdom to me you enviars.

And with this of beautify me, I'll be whiter than the snow.

Let the bones you must be joyful, May I joy and gladness know.

From my failure hide your face, Lord, and all my wickedness.

[15:35] Lord, create a pure heart in me, and a steadfast mind renew.

Do not take your spirit from me, cast me not away from you.

Give me back the joy I have, Keep my will in spirit blood.

Then I'll teach your ways to sinners, Rebels will turn back to you.

free me from the guilt, my Savior, for those merciful and true.

[16:42] Then I'll praise your righteousness, teach my lips your name to bless.

Amen. We're going to read now from Isaiah chapter 40.

Isaiah chapter 40. And we're going to read from verse 1 to verse 17.

This is on page 724 of the Bible I have here. Isaiah 40.

This is the word of God. Comfort. Comfort, my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare has ended.

[17:50] That her iniquity is pardoned. That she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries. In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord.

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low. The uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain.

and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. And all flesh shall see it together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. A voice says, cry.

And I said, what shall I cry? All flesh is grass and its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers.

The flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers. The flower fades. But the word of our God will stand forever.

[18:58] Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news. Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news. Lift it up. Fear not. Say to the cities of Judah, behold your God.

Behold the Lord God comes with might and his arm rules for him. Behold his reward is with him and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd.

He will gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young. who has measured the water in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

Who has measured the spirit of the Lord or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice and taught him knowledge and showed him the way of understanding?

Behold the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as the dust on the scales.

Behold he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.

[20:12] Lebanon would not suffice for fuel nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before him. They are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

Amen. May God bless this reading of his word. Let us pray. We thank you Lord for your word.

We thank you that it is your living breath. That just as you breathed into the nostrils of the first man Adam and he became a living being so you breathe through your word into our hearts and we spiritually live.

we thank you that your word is living and active sharper than any two-edged sword. We thank you that your word is like honey honey from the comb and more precious than gold.

We pray for every organization engaged in spreading your word in translating it into the languages of the peoples of the world.

[21 : 24] world. We thank you for Wycliffe Bible Translators for the work of the Bible Societies for the work of the Langham Partnership. We thank you for the growing church all over our world.

We thank you especially for the growth of the church in nations which previously had been closed to the gospel. We think of the nation of Mongolia a nation which up until the fall of the Iron Curtain we knew little or nothing about and yet now there is a growing church with 60,000 believers sending missionaries all over that part of Asia even into China.

Lord we thank you that your spirit is doing amazing things is raising the spiritual temperature of entire nations. Lord we pray that you would send revival on our own beloved Scotland.

Will you not O Lord rend the heavens in wrath remember mercy O Lord and do the things you did at first here. We pray that you would fill our churches to overflowing with eager worshippers and lifelong disciples.

We pray Lord that you would thrust men into the harvest field for the harvest is white. We thank you for this church which has for so long been a bastion of the preaching of the word and the praising of your name.

[22 : 58] And we pray Lord that you would call a man of your own choosing here. We thank you for the thoughts of Gordon on Wednesday evening and for this little note in our orders of service which reminds us of the things for which we are to pray regarding this vacancy.

We pray for unanimity of spirit among us. We pray that you would help us to be guided and led to a man who is word focused in his ministry.

We pray that you would give us insight. We thank you for the promise that if any lacks wisdom we should ask it of you. We pray that you would help us to trust in your timing.

and we pray Lord that you would help us to yield our hearts to your choice. Father our great desire is just as it is for Glasgow.

May Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the word and the praising of your name may Stornoway flourish in the same way. Lord we pray for our nation the nation once known as the land of the book.

[24 : 09] We pray for the great unreached parts of our nation for Argyle and for Maryshire for increasingly parts of the inner and outer Hebrides.

Lord we ask and pray that you would send your spirit in new power. We pray Lord for our own denomination the free church of Scotland we recognise that we are a tiny little branch of a worldwide tree which keeps growing.

We pray Lord that you would bless however our tiny branch. I selfishly pray for our two church plants from our own connegation in Glasgow for Hope Community Church in Helensburgh and for Crossbridge Church in Merced Den Will Guy.

We give you thanks for their growth over these last months when they have first begun to worship you publicly and yet have both doubled in size.

Lord we pray for such a growth and movement all over Scotland. We pray for any who are sick and struggling in our connegation here. We pray for those who are physically ill.

[25 : 19] We pray for those who are mentally challenged. We pray for those who are discouraged. We also pray Lord for who were born baptized and brought up in our connegation but have backslidden have left the faith behind them.

We remember the promises made at baptism. Promises not so much made by parents to you but made by you to parents.

Lord we pray that you would remember the covenant promises you made and bring our people back. Now Lord we commit ourselves to you asking that you would make war cease to the ends of the earth and that the gospel of Jesus Christ would reign.

We ask these things in his name. Amen. once more we're going to sing in Psalm number 119 and we're going to sing from verse 9 to verse 16 you'll find this on page number 400 I should say thank you very much to Elizabeth for her emails this week and for arranging things so well by what means

shall a young man learn his way to purify if he according to thy word there to attentive be Psalm 119 from verse 9 to 16 to God's praise groan this way to purify if he according to thy word then do attentive me groan

Let me be, he have I sought, with all my soul and heart.

[27 : 47] O let me not from the right path of thy commands depart.

Thy word I in my heart have lived, but I offend not thee.

O Lord, the weather blessed are thy status teach the me.

But judgment so thy mouth each one, my lips decreed how.

For joy thy testimonies plead, the righteous, O only name.

[29 : 13] Thy will thy holy present make, my meditation.

And carefully I'll have respect, but to thy ways each one.

Among thy statutes my delight shall constantly be set.

And by thy grace I never will, my holy word forget.

Amen. It really is a great privilege to preach to you today and to share this time with you.

[30 : 35] Some of you may remember that I did a placement as a student here 24 years ago. Back then I had far more hair, far more energy and far less children.

So it's lovely to bring with me this weekend my wife, who won first prize in the over 50s female half marathon yesterday. I'm very proud of her. And then son number two, Aidan.

Son number three, Jonathan. And his girlfriend, Ailey. So thank you for your very kind welcome. It really is lovely, lovely to be here and to see old friends. We're going to turn in our Bibles now to Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 11.

Isaiah 40 and verse 11. Where we read of God, he will tend his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms.

He will carry them in his bosom. And gently lead those that are with young. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern.

[31 : 46] Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. There are few more indeeding images that you may have in your minds of God than that of him being our shepherd.

Perhaps the most famous line of any song in any language is the first line of Psalm 23. The Lord's my shepherd. One of Jesus' most famous parables is that of the shepherd.

Who having left the 99 sheep in safety, searches for that one lost sheep. And when he finds it, he lays that one lost sheep across his shoulders.

And joyfully brings it home. Our Lord said to himself, I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. There's something about the image of God as our shepherd which comforts us.

And whatever our circumstances makes us feel safe. This chapter, Isaiah 40, tells the story of how God will rescue his people from their exile in Babylon.

[32 : 52] Having spiraled downwards through their unfaithfulness to him, the Israelites were forcibly relocated all across the vast Babylonian empire. For 70 years they were exiled from their homeland because of their unfaithfulness to God.

These were terrifying years of exile and pain. But a time will come when God will lead them back from Babylon and bring them back to Israel.

When their sins shall be forgiven and they shall once again be established in Jerusalem. The rescue from Babylon is pictured in verse 11 here as that of the Lord.

Like a shepherd. Tending his flock. Gathering the lambs in his arms. Carrying them in his bosom. And gently leading those who have young.

After all, these returning people of Israel will have hundreds of miles to travel back to their homeland from Babylon.

[34 : 00] But the Lord shall be their shepherd. He shall lead them like a flock of sheep. He shall provide for them. He shall protect them every step of the way. Now, although it may be a bit fanciful, the homeward journey of the exiles from Babylon was compared by many of the early church fathers to the lifelong journey of the Christian.

Like Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, we leave behind us the city of destruction when we become Christians and we make our way to the celestial city of heaven.

But we do not travel alone in life. Unkept. Unloved. Unprotected. Rather, as we make our way through life, the Lord tends to us, gathers us, carries us, and gently leads us to himself.

We may experience many hardships on the journey. We may be attacked by all kinds of enemies. But the Lord will be our shepherd and he will lead us home. Picture this. In all of life's ups and downs, in all of our pleasures, in all of our pains, in all of our joys, and in all of our sorrows, our Lord is tender, loving.

[35 : 20] He's our powerful shepherd. And he will hold us fast, nearer to his heart. I want us to explore this image of the Lord as our shepherd from this verse in Isaiah 40, under three headings, our glorious shepherd, our gracious shepherd, our gentle shepherd.

For any today who feel as though they're lost and alone, take comfort. Take comfort. The Lord is your shepherd.

He will never leave you. He will never forsake you. He will carry you. He will be with you always. First of all then, we have our glorious shepherd.

Our glorious shepherd. When I was a child, and I'd get into verbal spat with another boy in my class, the argument would always end up with him saying to me, my dad's bigger than your dad. And then I'd say to him, no, no, no, no, no, no. My dad's bigger than your dad. Truth be told, both dads were the same size. In Isaiah 40, there's no doubt who's the bigger.

[36 : 30] One of the reasons that we love Isaiah 40 is because of the picture that it paints of the sheer immensity, glory, and power of the Lord who is our shepherd.

It all begins in verse 9 with the announcement, Behold your God. Behold your God. Behold him indeed. See him in the limitless sovereignty of his kingly reign.

There follows from verse 12 a series of rhetorical questions. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? Who has measured the spirit of the Lord? The might and power of Babylon can be counted and measured.

But the immensity of God is beyond all calculation. Behold, Isaiah cries out, the nations are like drops from a bucket and are accounted as dust on the scales.

Drops of water. Dust indeed. The greatest of all the human empires is but dust in the scales to God. On one side is the weight of God.

[37 : 37] On the other a fleck of dust. All the nations there is nothing before him. Who does this puny king of Babylon suppose himself to be compared to the immensity of the glory of the God of heaven and earth?

The God who cannot be likened to any image? The limitless infinity of his essence and character going beyond the limited finite mind any of us can ever imagine?

And then come the three great questions of this chapter. Do you not know? Have you not heard? He sits above the circle of the earth and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers.

He brings princes to nothing and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness or vanity. Lift up your eyes on high and see who created all these.

He brings out their host by number and he calls them all by name. Astronomers will admit they haven't even begun to scratch the surface of all there is to know about the stars we can see.

[38 : 52] Never mind the stars only the Hubble can see. God created them all and he gave each one a name. It crescendos in verse 28 The Lord is the everlasting God the creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary his understanding is unsearchable. The king of Babylon he's seated on a throne of earthly glory.

He sneers at the world around him but all the time his beauty is like the flower of the field. He is less than a grain of dust. He's a grasshopper. He's a great nothing.

My dad's bigger than your dad indeed. Our great shepherd king the Lord himself he is the everlasting God the creator of the ends of the earth. He alone stands gloriously enthroned above all that he has made.

Our human minds cannot imagine the greatness of his being. Our human calculations will always fall short of measuring even the smallest movement of his power.

[39 : 58] There are no words in any human language sufficient to even begin to describe his immensity. To describe himself to us God must use baby talk so that we may understand.

All his revelations of himself are like a toddler babbling but that is what our God must do so that we may know him. Who then is your shepherd who tends you?

Who holds you close to his heart? Who is this shepherd king who gathers you like a lamb in his arms and gently leads you through life?

He is the everlasting God before whom the nations are as drops in a bucket and as grains of dust. The God who will rescue his captive people from Babylon who will lead them through the wilderness home to Israel.

This is who he is in the immensity of his power, his supremacy and his glory. What comfort this must have been to the fearful people of Israel. Nothing need they fear if God be their shepherd. [41 : 07] No hunger, no thirst, no army, no robber, no mountain or desert. As the famous St. Julian of Norwich once said, all shall be well, all shall be well.

It shall be well because of the glory of the God who is our shepherd. Our enemies may be greater than us, but there is drops from a bucket to God.

The deserts of our lives may seem empty, but the God who created water shall fill them with refreshing pools. He is the Lord, our shepherd, who will lead us beside the still waters and make us lie down in green pastures, who will lead us in paths of righteousness.

The Lord, our shepherd, who will be with us, comforting us with his rod and staff as we walk through the valleys of the shadow of death. As the Israelites make their way from Babylon to Canaan, God will prepare them banqueting tables in the wilderness, and his goodness and mercy shall follow them always.

Behold, our God, Isaiah cries. He will tend his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms.

[42 : 23] He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those who have young. him. If the church fathers were right, and the return from exile is a picture of the Christian life, then surely we too can take comfort from the immensity and glory of the Lord who is our shepherd.

Who are these enemies who stand against us, who seem so tall and strong to us? They have not seen the glory of God who stands tall over them.

What is this physical or mental illness we are enduring? This grief which gnaws at our very bones. Surely our God who sustains the innumerable stars in their heavenly positions.

Surely he can sustain us and cause our cup of joy yet to overflow. Are there any here this morning who are anxious any here this morning who are fearful?

In my Spurgeon's morning and evening readings for the 27th of March, I read some beautiful words. He wrote, this is the royal road to comfort. Great thoughts of your sin alone will drive you to despair.

[43 : 37] But listen to this. Great thoughts of Christ will pilot you into the heaven of peace. Great thoughts of Christ will pilot you into the heaven of peace.

Look not inwards at our weakness and sin but upwards at the glory and holiness and love of our shepherd. Then, surely then, we shall be at peace and all shall be well with us.

The Lord's our glorious shepherd. Well, second, the Lord is our gracious shepherd. He's our gracious shepherd. You will know that the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon because of their unfaithfulness to God.

For hundreds of years prior to their exile, ever since the days of David, they had been on a downward spiral. They had worshipped the Lord, but they had worshipped many other gods also, idols made of wood and stone, and they sacrificed to these idols.

We even read of one of the kings of Israel who sacrificed his children to one of these idols. prior to their captivity in Babylon, Israel had become a morally disgusting, socially corrupted, and religiously depraved nation.

[44 : 56] Well, God's judgment upon them was severe. He caused the Babylonian army to march in and destroy Jerusalem, to carry its best people away into exile, to scatter them to the four winds of the massive Babylonian empire.

However, his judgment upon them, to use technical terms, was not retributive as much as it was restorative. He punished them to bring them to their senses, as we may a child.

Because during those 70 years of exile, the people of Israel came to their senses and realized why all this had happened to them. They realized that it was because of their sin that God had judged them.

They repented and once again began to seek the Lord. And as at this point we enter Isaiah 40, where God says, Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The God who had judged them on account of their sins, now forgives and restores them to himself.

[46 : 06] His gracious love for them means that they shall never cease to be his people and he shall never cease to be their God. He announces his forgiveness, her warfare is ended, her iniquity is pardoned.

Israel has paid for its sin by being judged and exiled from God, by being cast away from his holy presence in Jerusalem. Now, having paid the price of their unfaithfulness, God announces their forgiveness and their restoration.

They have paid the price of their sin, they have borne their punishment, they have been exiled and forsaken by God, now God will bring them back and restore them to himself once again.

He shall be their God and they shall be his people. This chapter paints a picture not just of the Lord of glory but of the Lord of grace.

the grace of God and the forgiveness of his people and their reconciliation with them through the payment of a debt of faithfulness they owed him.

[47 : 19] And then we hear the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ crying out, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

And then we hear the voice of the apostle Peter saying, he himself, Jesus, bore our sins in his body upon the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. On account of our sin and unfaithfulness, our straying from God, the Lord Jesus Christ was exiled and forsaken by God on the cross.

He paid the price of our sin. He bore the punishment of our unfaithfulness. The Lord who was our shepherd bore! The Lord who was our shepherd bore The cost of our idolatry, our greed, our selfishness.

Through faith in the good shepherd Jesus Christ, our iniquity is pardoned for he has received from the Lord's hand double for all our sins.

[48 : 31] on the cross he paid the price and reconciled us to God. This is the grace of the shepherd of whom we read in verse 11.

The shepherd who tends his flock because he gave himself for his flock. The shepherd who gathered his flock in those arms he stretched out on the cross. The shepherd who carries his lambs near his heart, that heart which stopped beating for three days because he was laid in a tomb. The shepherd who gently leads those who have young because he was harshly led for them to Mount Calvary where he was crucified. In the old covenant innocent sheep were sacrificed on behalf of their sinful shepherds.

In the new covenant our innocent shepherd was sacrificed on behalf of his sinful sheep. But that grace of Christ which has brought us close to God continues throughout our lives as Christian believers to bring us closer to him still.

The story of the Christian life is the story of Christ's continued grace in forgiving our sin in strengthening us with new dissolve and giving us the inextinguishable hope of eternal life.

[49 : 48] It is grace it is whole grace and it's nothing but grace. grace. Have you failed your shepherd?

Have you strayed from your shepherd? When you return to him do not expect the harshness of a judge anticipate the grace of a shepherd.

Are you exhausted in his service falling over under the burdens you're carrying? Go to him because he is your shepherd and ask him for more grace to help you carry them.

Are you fearful and anxious for your future? Take your anxieties to Jesus and pray for his grace that he may replace your worry with his peace.

We have a gracious shepherd. Therefore all shall be well with us. we have a glorious shepherd, we have a gracious shepherd, then finally we have a gentle shepherd, a gentle shepherd.

[51 : 02] When I was a wee boy, maybe oh three or four years old and I wake up at night with fear in my heart thinking there was a monster under my bed, I would creep into my mum and dad's bed.

And my dad would put his arm around me and I'd put my head on his chest and I could hear the beating of his heart. And as a tiny wee boy I was then able to go back to sleep because no matter if the sky was falling down, no matter if really there was a monster under my bed and it wasn't just a figment of my imagination, I couldn't have been safer, more at peace, more contented than when my wee heady was on my dad's chest and I was listening to the beat of his heart.

Nearly 50 years later I can still remember how loved and safe I felt. Now we could talk about the gentleness of our glorious and gracious shepherd from each of the four clauses in verse 11 but it's the third which appeals to me most, maybe to you also.

He will carry them in his bosom, he will carry them in his bosom. Our shepherd king having gathered us in his arms draws us in those powerful arms into his chest so that we may hear the beating of his heart.

He does for us what my father used to do for me, he puts his arm around us and he draws us close. We were very much by ourselves we were alone and insecure, afraid and worried.

[52 : 50] The darkness was oppressive to us and the loneliness was complete. There seemed to be no light in our lives and no hope. But he gathered us in his arms, those arms of his which are so strong and so powerful and yet so gentle.

In Sunday school we learned the chorus, my God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing that he cannot do. As children we would all do the actions, came to the strong, mighty, strike the bodybuilder's pose, show off these bicep muscles.

Well it's true, our God is so strong and so mighty but those strong and mighty arms they're so tender, they gently gather us to himself, such tender arms they hold us close to his heart.

The strong arms of our king are the gentle arms of our shepherd. In John 10, 27, Jesus says, my sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish, no one will ever snatch them from my hand. Once the strong arms of our shepherd has us, no one, no one, not even ourselves and our doubts can snatch us from his grasp and he holds us so close that we may hear the beat of his heart and every beat of his heart is for us.

[54 : 22] Every beat of the heart of God echoes with his love for us. Once we were far away from him, lost and fearful, rather like a child waking in the dark with a monster under its bed.

But now he has gathered us up in his arms, he is holding us close to himself and he lets us hear the beating of his loving heart for us. When I was a wee balach, I couldn't have felt safer, more at peace and more contented than when my dad's arms were around me and my head was on his chest.

The sky could be falling down and I wouldn't have cared he would keep me safe. I knew he would.

When our glorious, gracious and gentle shepherd has gathered us up in his arms and is holding us close to his heart, we feel so safe, so much at peace, so very contented.

When I fear my faith may fail, Christ will hold me fast. When the tempter would prevail, he will hold me fast. I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path.

For my love is often cold, he must hold me fast. Yes, he holds us fast, such beautiful words, but where he holds us fast is more beautiful still.

[55 : 40] He holds us fast close to his heart. His arms are strong, his heart beats with love for us so powerfully, so rhythmically, his grip upon us is so gentle, so tender.

Many of Glasgow's professional rugby team, the Glasgow Warriors, train at my local gym. Now, some of these rugby players are giants. in every way, well over six feet tall.

They've got muscles in places I don't have places. But sometimes you'll see one of them in the swimming pool with his young child. Now, these guys, I mean, they might be muscly giants, but they hold their little children in that swimming pool with such strength, such tenderness.

Even though that child can't swim, that young child is never as safe as when it's giant of a father is holding it close.

Neither are we safer, neither are you safer, than when you have your glorious and gracious shepherd holding you close to his heart. We might feel as if we're drowning in life's sorrows, but he's carrying us.

[56 : 54] We might feel confused and full of questions, but he's holding us. We might be tired and exhausted, but he draws us close. We might be mentally and physically dying, but he lets us hear the beat of his gentle heart.

Well, to apply this great truth of our Lord being our glorious, gracious, and gentle shepherd, let me suggest that though his hold on us is ultimate, we would do well to do everything we can to hold on to him.

We would do well to do everything we can to hold on to him. We need to abide in him, to walk closely to him, to listen carefully to the voice of our shepherd through the reading of his word, and letting him hear the bleating of our voices as we pray, daily being strengthened by the grace of his

spirit as we live in him.

God's but there may be some here this morning for whom the Lord is not your shepherd. You're still lost, well maybe you don't think you are, but you are, and you're straying in the desert, and you're dying on the inside.

The good shepherd Jesus Christ extended wide his arms on the cross to embrace a sinful world, and he invites every one of us today to enter that embrace.

[58 : 25] The shepherd who died for his sheep, he invites us to believe and to trust in him, to let him tend us, and gather us up in his gentle arms, to let us crawl into bed beside him, as he puts his arm around us, so that we may hear his heart.

So my last question for you today is this, will you, will you today let him draw you close, so that you may hear the beat of the loving heart of your loving shepherd.

Amen. We shall close now as we sing what is perhaps our favorite psalm, Psalm 23 from the Scottish Psalter, page 229, the Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.

He makes me down to lie in pastures green, he leadeth me the quiet waters by. the Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want, he makes me down to lie, the and the water and he he!

he groan The quiet waters shine And so be done, restore again And be to all the pain Within the paths of righteousness In God's own insane And though I walk in death's dark pale Yet will I fear the hill

[61 : 08] For thou art with me on thy road And shall be calm for still My table thou hast furnished In presence of my foes My heaven does With oil and light And my cup overflow To death and mercy Of my life

Shall surely follow me And in the mountains Forevermore My dwelling place shall be Receive God's blessing May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all Amen Thank you Thank you.