

The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Well, it's good to be back. It's been quite a while since I saw your lovely faces.

And I give you an apology for coming inappropriately dressed. In fact, I don't even own a t-shirt. That's not a hint that you buy me one before the next visit, but I suppose I'm feeling my age. Since I was last with you, I celebrated my 80th birthday. So, yeah, I feel a bit out of place in these days amongst the young people.

I don't sport a beard, and I haven't got one tattoo. And when I look around, I see beards and tattoos everywhere. But anyway, I apologize, but I'll do my best.

We're going to read the Scriptures. We're going to read, first of all, from Psalm 78, just a couple of verses. And then Psalm 23, which you probably don't even need to turn your Bible to.

[1 : 11] But Psalm 78, and the last two verses of the Psalm. Psalm 79, verse 70. Psalm 79, God chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens.

From tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people, Jacob, of Israel, his inheritance.

And David shepherded them with integrity of heart. With skillful hands he led them.

Now, then Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his namesake.

[2 : 19] Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely, goodness, love, and love will follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen. So we're going to sing now a song that reflects some of the thoughts of that psalm.

The king of love, my shepherd, is who's... I had an interesting experience just a few weeks ago when I turned up at the prayer meeting.

And before the meeting started, I had a chat with four people around me. Four men. They were all called David.

[3 : 39] Every one of them. Which is rather strange. And it's David I want to speak about this morning. But how many people love his name?

My two best friends at school were David Moyes and David Owen. My favorite preacher and mentor is David Gooding.

And so David's everywhere. I have a sister called Mary. I have an aunt called Mary. I live next door to a lady called Mary.

And there are Marys everywhere. And as for John, we just lose count, don't we? But why should it be that names like that are so popular?

Does it have something to do with the character, the characters of the people we find possessing those names in the Bible? David was a man after God's own heart.

[4 : 47] And why wouldn't we want to call our child David? Have you ever, in all my life, I've never heard anyone call their child Judas?

I think it'd be safe to say that no one would call their child Judas. Mary, that name that is popular. What about Mary? She was fully devoted to the Lord Jesus and showed her affection for him and the sacrifices she made and spending time with the Lord.

And that's for John, at least one of the Johns. It says, of those born of women, none was greater than John the Baptist. Humble John.

Jesus must increase. I must decrease. So, the names are popular. Not surely unconnected with the fact of their characters.

[5 : 49] David was the psalmist king. He was the boy from the lonely sheepfolds of Bethlehem. He was neglected.

He was neglected. Let's watch the time. Neglected by his aging parents. He was mocked and trampled on by his brothers. He was of little account to anyone in his childhood and early youth. He was just the boy who kept the sheep. His family were regarded as complete without him. He was the youngest and he was the least important in their eyes. Jesse, his father, Jesse, his father, even thought it unnecessary to bring him to appear before Samuel when Samuel came looking for a future king of Israel.

Samuel saw all the boys. Not one of them was right. He said to Jesse, Is this all your sons? Well, we don't have another little boy.

[7 : 02] He's looking after the sheep. But David, David, even though he faced this adversity in his youth and childhood, developed his character.

And in the obscurity of the Judean hills, this insignificant young boy was being schooled to be a king.

Regarding Jesse, I wonder how much you know about Jesse. The most notable thing said of him in the Bible is that he was David's father.

David was his son. God said, I have provided me a king among Jesse's sons. What do you know about Jesse?

Very little. Because very little is said. I came across a passage in Pilgrim's Progress about David.

[8 : 07] As we read, as Christian and faithful and their guide were going along, they espied a boy feeding his father's sheep.

The boy was in very mean clothes, but of a very fresh and well-favored countenance. And as he sat by himself, he sang.

Then said the guide to Christian and faithful, Do you know him? I will dare to say, this boy lives a merrier life and wears more of the herb heartsees in his bosom than he who is clad in silk and velvet.

So then they hearkened as the boy sang, The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not... It wasn't crimmied, I'm sure, but he sang the 23rd Psalm, according to John Bunyan.

David remembered his creator in the days of his youth. He was devoted to doing God's will, even as a youngster.

[9 : 21] He enjoyed fellowship with the Lord under open skies while faithfully guarding sheep. He was meditating day and night on the Lord.

And his wonderful works were noticed, God's wonderful works were noticed by David. He worshipped God. And as we learn from him in the Psalms, for example, Psalm 8, O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

You have set your glory above the heavens. And then Psalm 19, can you hear him saying this in the open air? The heavens declare the glory of God.

The skies proclaim his handiwork. He looked up and he praised God. He looked within, searched his own heart, and then he said, Lord, you have searched me.

You have searched me and you have known me. You know when I sit down, you know when I rise up, you perceive my thoughts from afar. And David, neglected though he was, became an accomplished harpist.

[10 : 41] He became an expert with a sling. He became a writer. He became a poet. Later on in life, he became a courageous soldier with sword and other implements.

He was just gifted. God gifted him and he became a sovereign king. David's poems became the main source of praise sung in the Old Testament temple.

Along with those of Asaph. At a time of spiritual renewal, King Hezekiah, who promoted the great revival under his reign, commanded worship, commanded worshipers to make use of David's songs.

Much is written about him. There's a huge supply of material for the preacher with regard to his life. His life is chronicled from 1 Samuel chapter 16 right through 2 Samuel into 1 Kings chapter 2. Now there's a lesson there for us in so far of what we've learned about David. If we are to live purposeful, worthwhile lives, God may well start early with us.

[12:05] I came from a non-Christian background, but the Lord laid hold of me when I was 14. And I was glad about that. Ecclesiastes 12 is in verse 1 says, Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

Well, David did just that. David is one of the few godly young people in the Bible. And I say to the young people this morning, start early with the Lord.

You won't regret it. Give him your life while the opportunity is there. David became such, from the obscurity of, as I've described, his life in the past, became no less than honored when the Lord Jesus Christ came.

We read that Jesus was the son of David. And that is repeated many, many times in the Bible. Jesus, Romans 1 verse 2, is a descendant of David.

David. How significant David was even on the last page of the Bible. The end of Revelation. Jesus speaking, I am Jesus, root and offspring of David, greatest of Israel's kings.

[13:32] And all kings of Judah were compared to David. if they were like David, good. If they were unlike David, bad.

The man after God's own heart. Now, I'm not saying he's perfect. Don't think I've forgotten that he let the Lord down at times, but which human being doesn't.

But remember your creator in the days of your youth. As well as being a man after God's own heart, he was a boy after God's own heart. And at least 73 Psalms bear his name.

And Christians love the Psalms of David. I'm assuming you do. We resort to the Psalter. At least I do. I'm sure you do.

When our faith is tried, when our spirits are low, when anxiety overwhelms, when depression comes, Psalm 42 and 43, when we're weighed down, there's a Psalm for every situation that you're facing at this moment.

[14:42] Seek it out. My brother and my sister value the Psalms. Make good use of them. The old Saint Athanasius said, most Scripture speaks to us, but the Psalms speak for us.

For years now, 30, 35 years, I've read a Psalm or part of a Psalm every morning. I find that it helps me to worship, helps me to pray in my quiet time.

John Calvin said of the Psalms, they are the anatomy of the soul. They're the beating heart of the Bible.

And I thought, how appropriate. If I was to tell someone unfamiliar with the Bible how to find the Psalms, I would say, go to the middle and slightly to the left.

Where's your heart? It's in the middle and slightly to the left. So, the value of the Psalms cannot be overestimated. The Gospels record what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, all four of them.

[16:07] But, if you turn to the Psalms, if you, for example, read Psalm 22, it is revealed to you the thoughts of the Lord Jesus prophetically.

how he was feeling his emotions, even what he would say on the cross. It opens, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

The very words that he spoke on the cross. Now then, we'll take a, a bit of a quieter, a longer look at Psalm 23.

It's being called the Psalm of Psalms appropriately. The Lord is my pastor, shepherd, I have everything I need.

Yahweh rohi in the Hebrew. The Lord is my shepherd. And this Psalm was written 3,000 years ago. The original circumstances are unknown to us, yet as fresh and as relevant as if it had just been written this morning and the ink wasn't dry.

[17:14] We never tire of singing Psalm 23. I love to sing Arlington to Psalm 23. Do you know Arlington? The Lord's my shepherd.

Do you know that one? Scots. It takes a big congregation. We couldn't do justice to it. But it lifts your soul. Psalm 23.

And as I say, we love to sing it at anniversaries. Weddings. So many weddings I've taken. Had funerals.

Regular church services. And just to summarize what we learn of God in the Psalms. Three things, first of all. That he's a faithful creator.

A lot of the Psalms have to do with God's faithfulness in creation. Who cares for his creatures and his creation. Secondly, you'll discover that he's our heavenly Father who loves his children.

[18:16] That is another theme of the Psalms. And thirdly, he's the good shepherd who knows his sheep. Why is a good shepherd called a good shepherd?

Because he cares for his sheep. Being a pastor for 45 years, I was often told it in induction services that the role of the pastor is to feed the sheep.

That's number one job for him to do. Feed the sheep. Care for the sheep. Look after the sheep.

Yes, he's to perform the role of an evangelist and he's to visit and do all the rest.

But primary cause, primary purpose, primary role of the pastor is to feed the sheep. So, a good shepherd is one who cares for the sheep.

David David really did protect them. You know, when he was called to go into battle with Goliath, he reminded Saul that he'd killed lions and bears with his bare hands.

[19:36] David knew the Lord to be the shepherd of his people and under God's power he cared for the sheep. note the familiar psalms on either side of Psalm 23.

I've already mentioned Psalm 22. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And then Psalm 24. You gates lift up your heads, you doors, you doors that last for a.

Spurgeon was a help here when I read what he had to say. He said Psalm 23 is the psalm of the crook, the shepherd's crook, the staff, a very useful instrument for the shepherd when handled wisely.

Psalm 22 is the psalm of the cross. The shepherd dies for the sheep, for those who, we all like sheep have gone astray, but he died.

His hands and his feet, Psalm 22, tell us were pierced and describe graphically the cruelty of the crucifixion. And then there's Psalm 24, the psalm of the crown.

[20:55] So the psalm of the crook, the psalm of the cross, the psalm of the crown. In other words, he's coming in the future as the king.

Ye gates lift up your doors. the parousia. Jesus, he, Jesus shall reign wherever the sun doth his successive journeys run.

He's coming as the king of kings and the lord of lords. So, you get this image of the lord being the divine shepherd and exemplified so much in the life of David.

Isaiah, for example, Isaiah 40, verse 11, he tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart and gently leads those that have young.

A lovely insight into the character of God, the tenderness of our God. Ezekiel, he adds his contribution here, 34, 11, and 12, I will search for my sheep and look after them as a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them.

[22:17] I will call them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. Just think of the most familiar parable in the New Testament.

there's a chance that it might be the story of the lost sheep and the shepherd who left the 99 going looking for the one.

Preached on it many times. It's a lovely, lovely story. It's being called one of the greatest short stories in all of literature, secular or religious.

preachers have told it and retold it on countless occasions for 2,000 years as an effective way of communicating the gospel of God's grace to human beings, of Christ's love, God's love for the sinner and for his individual and personal love.

Human hearts have been many times and still are challenged by the message of God's love, the love of a heavenly shepherd.

[23:35] I was but one of many that was found. I came to believe in the good shepherd who went to such a length to find me and save me, leaving the ninety and nine to rescue one stray at great personal cost.

We have heard and strayed from his ways like lost sheep and he came to seek and to save that which was lost. And the Bible says in John 10, he knows the sheep by name.

I find that encouraging. The Lord had my name in mind when he told that parable of the lost sheep. My natural condition, the hymn writer says, I was lost but Jesus found me, found the sheep that went astray.

I was lost. And many are still lost. The hymn writer, I used to sing a lot in my church where I was converted, Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet.

Why do they roam? Love only waits to forgive and forget. Home, weary wanderers, home. you were straying, you were like sheep going astray.

[25 : 06] This is Peter, the apostle, but you have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. I think of the worst thing that Jesus will say to some when at last they stand before him. There are words found in Matthew chapter 7 verse 21, in that day I will tell them plainly, I never knew you.

I can't think of more devastating a position to be in to have the Lord say that to you. I never knew you.

In contrast, John 14, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep, and my sheep know me.

Is that where you are this morning? You are known and you know. John 10 verse 3, he calls his own sheep by name and leads them.

[26 : 26] Jesus said, fear not little flock, it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. So the Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.

The Lord's sheep are nevertheless vulnerable. people. Jesus said to his disciples, I send you out as sheep among wolves.

Just turning to Acts chapter 20, and let me get the right verse, verse 28. keep watch over yourselves.

This is to the elders, pastors. Keep watch over yourselves, and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. You know, it's not a kind world for Christians.

[27 : 44] I get a lot of information from the Barnabas Fund about how Christians are treated in North Korea.

North Korea, let me read it. I typed it out. North Korea is routinely ranked as the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian.

Believers are known to have been executed for simply owning a Bible. Did you see the program with Michael Palin when he went to North Korea recently?

And he went into a very difficult, it was a miracle that he got in, but when he got into the no man's land before he was allowed in, can you remember what they asked him? they asked him if he had a Bible.

And he thought, well, that's, they're checking on me, did I leave it a good moral upright life? But he whispered, I later found out the true reason. If I'd had a Bible, it would have allowed me in the country.

[28 : 53] They would have thrown them out. North Korea. for simply owning a Bible, they can be executed, a North Korean Christian.

Many must keep their faiths completely secret, even from their own families. As children, their children are encouraged at school to report on their parents if they see them praying or reading the Bible, those who do gather to pray and worship together, risk death or life imprisonment.

Tens of thousands of Christians, sometimes entire families, have been incarcerated in political labor camps where they are horrifically abused, tortured, and literally worked to death.

In these camps, Christians are often singled out for the very worst treatment. The state ideology defies, deifies, rather, the despotic leader, Kim Jong-un, who has erected a huge statue of himself on the country's highest mountain.

Christians are seen as a threat to the state. I send you out as sheep among wolves. We need his protection in this world.

[30 : 19] David was also well acquainted with the failings of the sheep themselves. How much like a sheep he himself went on to prove at times in his life.

Isaiah 53 verse 6 says, all we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. You know, being compared to a sheep is not the most flattering of images.

They're generally regarded as stupid animals. They really are. Their stupidity is revealed not least in their general aptitude for getting lost.

A sheep has only to spy a hole in the fence. And that inbuilt spirit of waywardness takes over.

And they forget the plentiful lush green grass around them. Their eyes are drawn to the tempting gap in the fence.

[31 : 33] What happens? One goes through. What do the others do? The others blindly follow them. If sheep were naturally wise, which they are not, they would admit that last move we made

there was a mistake.

Life was much better before we went through that hole in the fence. Hey fellas, let's return to the green pasture and those still waters to that loving shepherd that cared so much for us, that we've abandoned.

Sheep behavior and human behavior, often compared in the Bible, they have much in common. And people like you and I have a propensity to desert what is best for us.

The hymn writer says, Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God, he to rescue me from danger interposed his precious blood, prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love, take my heart, take and seal it, seal it from your courts above.

Have you noted how many men in the Bible were working shepherds? A few in the New Testament of the Lord's followers caught fish.

[33 : 15] There were shepherds and there were fishermen. The jewel rolls where we broadly lie, pastors and evangelists, shepherds and fishermen.

I will make you fishes of men, he said to the disciples. But he also made Peter a shepherd. Abel, going right to the beginning, was a sacrificing shepherd.

Cain wasn't a shepherd. Jacob was a hard-working shepherd. Joseph was a rejected shepherd. Moses looked after his father-in-law's flock in the desert was a delivering shepherd.

David was the royal shepherd, the shepherd of his people. Amos, the prophet, was a shepherd from Tekoa until God called him.

David was called to be a king. Aaron was appointed a priest. Prophet, priest, king, all once shepherds.

[34 : 32] And God promised in Ezekiel 34, I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them and be their shepherd, the Lord will be their God, and my servant will be prince among them.

Of course, typifying the role the Lord Jesus would occupy. David knew better than anyone else that the quality of life of the sheep was affected by the character of their owner.

Their state of health had much to do with the level of care and protection they were given. My son always has a dog or a cat around there somewhere, and when he goes on holiday, my wife and I have the job looking after the animal, whichever it was.

My wife's such a sucker for animals. She would have given the cat three meals a day with coffee and biscuits if necessary. She's just got a heart.

I'm a dog lover too. good. I couldn't be cruel to an animal, could you? It's just something built into one's character, but I thank God for the RSPCA.

[35 : 56] They're called in to deal with problems caused by heartless owners. They find animals enduring appalling condition, and it reduces me to tears.

thank God for the RSPCA. A Christian teaches animals with kindness. If you're a Christian, you'll teach your animal kindly.

Listen to what Proverbs 12.10 says about kindness, gentleness, consideration, and respect.

Proverbs 12.10, the righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.

Of course, they need a bit of loving discipline too. Don't forget that. Proverbs 27.23, be sure you know the condition of your flocks.

Give your herd careful attention, the Bible says. God takes account of how we treat animals, would you believe? Yeah? The cruelty of unloving, and uncaring owners to animals is a sin.

[37 : 10] But those who can say in life, the Lord is my shepherd. I am at peace.

Jesus lamented, do you remember when he was facing the crowds? And I'll finish with this. Jesus lamented as he saw sheep without a shepherd.

When God is your shepherd, it shows we are satisfied with his management, the management of our lives, meeting our needs, and his concern, concern for us is his pleasure.

Peter, in John chapter 21, Jesus appointed him to be a shepherd. Peter, do you love me?

Yes, Lord, I love you. Feed my lambs. A second time, Peter, do you love me? Yes, Lord.

[38 : 21] Take care of my sheep. three times. Peter, do you love me? Feed my sheep. That was his role, to be a shepherd, as well as an apostle, as well as an evangelist.

So, that's where we are with David, a character study that I hope has been an encouragement to all concerned. Let's pray together. God's word said, let us bow down and worship and kneel before the

Lord our maker, for he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture.
We are the flock under his care. So, Father, we say hallelujah for this. We thank you for your grace towards your people, for all your love and sanctifying work in our hearts, your patience with us. Unworthy as we are, we praise you for your transforming power to make even of us trophies of grace as we depend on the work of your Holy Spirit in our hearts.
So, thank you, Father, for loving us so much and giving us such a tender shepherd in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.
[39 : 51] Amen. Amen.