

Why We Need The Shepherd

Isaiah 53.1-6

The Psalm we all know and love begins with the words, “*The Lord is my shepherd.*” And we really love that image of Jesus as our Shepherd. But the problem comes when we realize what *else* that means—that we are sheep! David Roper, in a sermon on Psalm 23, observed that if Jesus is our Shepherd, we must recognize that we are sheep. Then he said that he doesn’t like that particular analogy, because he doesn’t like sheep. He said, “I used to raise sheep. In high school I was in the 4-H club, and I had a herd of sheep and goats. Now goats I can abide, because they may be obnoxious, but at least they’re smart. Sheep are, beyond question, the most stupid animals on the face of the earth. They are dumb and they are dirty and they are timid and defenseless and helpless. Mine were always getting lost and hurt and snake-bitten. They literally do not know enough to come in out of the rain. I look back on my shepherding days with a great deal of disgust. Sheep are miserable creatures.”

He continued, “And then to have God tell me that I am one! That hurts my feelings. But if I am really honest with myself I know it is true. I know that I lack wisdom and strength. I’m inclined to be self-destructive. ... I know my tendency toward self-indulgent individualism, going my own way and doing my own thing. That’s me. I’m a sheep. And if Jesus Christ is to be my shepherd, I have to admit that I need one. It is difficult, but that is where we must start.”

<http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/3748/0399.html>

The truth be told, the Bible *often* uses the image of lost and wandering sheep to symbolize our separation from God. Because of our sins, we soon know that we are hopelessly lost. Sheep need a shepherd, but especially so when they are lost. The Bible also speaks of Jesus as being not only our Shepherd, but our Good Shepherd.

If we are sheep, then we need the Shepherd. Why is that so?

1 **We need the Shepherd because we are prone to wander, v. 6a**
It is said that if sheep can stray, if they have the opportunity, they will. But there is no animal which is more hopeless and helpless than a sheep which has wandered away from the sheepfold. It can become entrapped among the rocks, or devoured by predators, or it can fall from a precipice.

It is not true that only certain ones of the sheep will wander. ALL of them will wander if given the chance. If the shepherd did not watch over them and protect them, any of them would stray. And once they do wander, they have a tendency to wander farther and farther away from the fold, rather than to return to it.

It's that way with you and me in our relationship with our Shepherd, Jesus Christ. ALL of us have wandered; "*All we like sheep have gone astray,*" the Scripture tells us here in our text. Psalm 119.176 agrees: "*I have gone astray like a lost sheep.*"

It is implied here that the fold from which we have wandered is the fold of God. It is the fold of righteousness, of obedience, of submission and peace and joy. We are simply prone to wander away from God! We are prone to do those things which are not pleasing to Him, are we not? We are prone to lead our lives in ways that will take us farther and farther from God, rather than closer to Him.

And this is something which has happened to ALL of us. We have ALL strayed. To put it in other words, we have all sinned. We've all wandered. We have not all gone in the same direction, and some have wandered farther away from God than others. Some have gone in a direction opposite to that of others, but ***all of us*** have preferred our own way to the ways of God.

This was what Jesus encountered. In Matthew 9.36 we read that when Jesus "*saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*" And it is true in our day as well. The Scriptures are just as true today as they have ever been, and the Scripture that we've heard so often that we probably don't pay any attention to it any more—"*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3.23)—is just as true now as it was when Paul was first inspired by the Holy Spirit to write it. ***All of us have sinned,*** and ***all of us are prone to wander*** away from what we know to be God's will and command for our lives.

Let me illustrate by talking about our dog, Gabi. Inside the house, Gabi will come when we call her. Whether she thinks it's time to eat, or play or go outside, she will come when we call. But we don't dare open the door and let her outside without a leash! She is so easily distracted once she is outside, and she will chase the cat (though just to play with him!), pounce on a leaf that may be blowing past, or eat an acorn. She's just a little thing, but if she sees another dog, she will growl and bark as if she is a big, bad dog. But of course, she is on a leash! And she is constantly straining at it, almost choking herself in the process. Though she comes

when we call while she is inside, if she were to go out without her leash, we would have no hope of getting her attention.

In the same way, you and I are prone to wander away from God's Way, and we are so easily distracted! Almost anything that comes along in front of us will garner some type of attention and energy from us, and before we know it, we have strayed. This is certainly true when it comes to our own private quiet times before God, and it's true of our attendance at Bible Study and Worship and other services of the church. We really intend to do better and spend more time in prayer and reading our Bibles or attendance at worship and Bible Study, because we already know that we need those things to maintain a healthy relationship with our Heavenly Father. But then comes bad weather, or a headache, or company from out of town (oh, don't get me started on that one!), or maybe one day we are just so busy that we completely forget about praying that day, and before we know it, weeks have gone by and we haven't cracked open the Bible, nor have we attended worship.

But this is much, much more than merely going to church and reading the Bible. We're talking about a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and relationships need to be nurtured and cared for and cultivated. You want to be stronger in your walk with Christ? Great! But it doesn't happen automatically. No one has ever been able to run his Christian walk on autopilot! Left to ourselves our tendency is to go farther and farther away from God, not closer and closer. We need the Shepherd because we are prone to wander.

2 We need the Shepherd because we cannot find our way back again, v. 6b

In the middle of verse six, we read "*each of us has turned to his own way.*"

It is a rare thing when the lost sheep returns home by itself. Usually the shepherd must go looking for the sheep if it is to be brought back. The sheep needs the shepherd because it cannot find its way home again.

And we find this to be true in human experience as well. As hard as we try, we find ourselves, not getting closer and closer to God, but farther and farther away. Our best efforts just aren't good enough.

God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah and said "*My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray, turning them away on the mountains; from mountain to hill they have forgotten their fold*" (50.6). We are like that—we

wander from one thing to another, from one pleasure to another, from one diversion in life to another, always looking for something in our lives that can give permanent peace and rest, always looking for something to make us feel safe again. We try, but we fail miserably. We simply cannot find our way back again. Think about that for a minute: do what you will, can you stop sinning? The Scriptures say “*Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin?’*” (Proverbs 20.9).

A few years ago Paul Harvey observed that it has been more than 500 years since Columbus discovered America. He was looking for a route to the Indies—and men have been refusing to stop and ask for directions ever since!

But when it comes to spiritual things, it’s not just men who don’t ask for directions. We have all gone astray, and once that happens, we cannot find our way back again.

A singing group by the name of *Kansas* many years ago came out with a song entitled *Dust in the Wind*. Here are the very thought-provoking words:

*I close my eyes only for a moment, and the moment’s gone.
All my dreams pass before my eyes a curiosity.
Dust in the wind—all they are is dust in the wind.*

*Same old song—just a drop of water in an endless sea.
All we do crumbles to the ground though we refuse to see.
Dust in the wind—all we do is dust in the wind.*

*Don’t hang on—nothing lasts forever but the earth and sky.
It slips away, and all your money won’t another minute buy.
Dust in the wind—all we do is dust in the wind.
Everything is dust in the wind.*

Now I don’t know what those guys believed about God, but I do know that there is a verse in the Bible that says something similar. It’s Isaiah 64.6—“*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*” Isaiah is saying that everything we do to become righteous is like a filthy rag that we would wear for a garment. Everything we do to become righteous is like dust in the wind.

And even our best, even our very best, is just not good enough to measure up to God's standard of righteousness. There is nothing we have done or can do to earn the grace of God. In our sins, we are like sheep who have wandered away from the fold of God, and we cannot find our way back again. That's the second reason we need the shepherd.

3 We need the Shepherd because He knows the way, v. 6c

It is part of the shepherd's business to know the surrounding countryside, to know where the water is, to know the dangers, to know the terrain, to know where the best pasture is. And no matter how far he has to go to recover one of his lost sheep, he always knows the way back to the fold.

Jesus sought us and brought us back to the fold of God! The end of verse six tells us that *"the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* God has laid on Him the work of delivering men and women from their iniquity, from their sin. Jesus bore the grief of our sin, He carried our sorrows, He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. In taking the punishment for our sins, Jesus has provided a way for us to return to God, but more than that—He shows us the way. Peter recognized this when late in his life he wrote, *"For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*

Jesus sees us struggling in our sin, sees us wandering in the wilderness of a life without God, without Christ. And He goes in search of that soul that has turned away from Him, that has wandered away from the fold of God. He restores us to God by having suffered in *our* place. That is how He provided salvation for us!

It is an interesting thing to note that the key word in the book of Isaiah, where we are today, is the word "salvation." In fact, the name "Isaiah" means "salvation of Yahweh." Isaiah speaks of the wells of salvation, the joy of salvation, the arm of salvation, the day of salvation, the helmet of salvation, the garments of salvation, the light of salvation. You see, Jesus the Shepherd knows the way.

Isaiah portrays Christ as the Judge, the Liberator, the Burden-bearer, the Sin-bearer, the Intercessor, our Only Savior. *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness"* (1 Peter 2.24). He said also *"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God"* (1 Peter 3.18).

Too many times we trust everything else to give us security and rest, when God offers to us eternal security and eternal rest. We struggle in our own efforts to return to God, to be better, to live better lives, but the only way is the Way of the Cross. Jesus knows the way, and that's the third reason we the sheep need Jesus the Shepherd.

Yes, we need the Shepherd because we are prone to wander. But Jesus leads us back into the fold.

We need the Shepherd because we cannot find our way back again. But Jesus restores us into full fellowship with God.

We need the Shepherd because He knows the way. And Jesus can show us the way to forgiveness.

An old man once remarked that it took him forty years to learn three things. The first was that he could do absolutely nothing to save himself.

The second was that Christ did not expect him to do anything to save himself.

And the third was that Christ had already paid the price necessary for him to be saved.

These three are reasons why we, the sheep, need Christ the Shepherd.

Won't you trust Christ to save you...right now?