

Our Shepherd King

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- [0 : 0 0] You know you should be in bed, or at least I know I should be in bed. And yet here we all are, waiting for Christmas morning. But I have to say that this Christmas, I'm particularly looking forward to the day after Christmas.
- And that's because I can finally watch the last Star Wars movie. I've bought my tickets. It's Saturday afternoon, 3.30 p.m. My family has been patiently waiting for me.
- I didn't want to get distracted in the lead up to Christmas, so I told them we'll have to do it after Christmas. But there we are. I can't wait to watch Star Wars.
- Now for me, this 42-year saga that is Star Wars will come to an end on Saturday. And unlike some of you, I'm actually old enough to have been there from the start.
- I was a mere young boy then, just like Luke Skywalker. So I'm sorry to say, for some of you who have been coming to church, you've had to put up with me and my illustrations of Star Wars.
- [1 : 0 5] So here's one more, just to complete the set. Now you may ask, how is this related to Christmas? Well, just like the Star Wars saga, by the time Jesus comes, this Christmas story has already been many years in the making.
- Not merely 42 years, but thousands of years. And like with all good storytelling, the plot has been thickening and developing over many episodes.
- It's rather like a painting. Often the painter starts with a faint pencil sketch. Then he or she progresses to paint the outline before adding a layer upon layer of color.
- Until the final painting is vibrant and rich and realistic. And then you step back and you appreciate the depth and richness of this painting.
- How everything hangs together. How every brushstroke contributes to the whole. Well, one of the rich images that we've seen develop in the Christmas story, and Jeff's mentioned it already, is that of the shepherd.
- [2 : 1 2] Not referring, of course, to the ones in the field, but Jesus himself as the shepherd king. And in our reading today, it ended on verse 6 of chapter 2.
- And that's what we're promised. A ruler that will shepherd his people. And in this image of a shepherd ruler, we find all the way back in the Old Testament. So the famous 23rd Psalm, which was read again, is a prime example.
- Many of you will probably know it by heart. It's often read at funerals because it's a favorite of many, isn't it? In it, we find God as the model shepherd.
- And so on the slide, the verses read, The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters.
- He's the good shepherd because we are provided for all that we need. We, his creatures, are secure. So much so that we can lie carefree in pastures green.
- [3 : 1 6] Just like a lazy picnic in the park without a care in the world. There is complete trust in the shepherd. So much so that King David, who himself was a shepherd, who writes the psalm, can claim in verse 3, He refreshes my soul.

And summer and Christmas are ideal times for that, aren't they? A time to slow down, recharge, get away from work, and spend time with loved ones.

It doesn't always happen, of course, but we try to do it. But here, in this psalm, this refreshment is for all seasons. For verse 3 goes on to say, He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. We're not taken away from the problems of life so much as given God's presence and guidance through them.

There is rest even in the darkest moments of life, even when evil threatens. That's why the psalmist goes on to confidently declare, verse 5, that goodness and love will follow him all his life.

[4 : 36] You prepare a table before me, he says, in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Now, as we read more of the Old Testament, we find this picture of God as the good shepherd and his people as his sheep, painted more and more vividly, given more brushstrokes, as it were.

So, Isaiah 40 is another example. Verse 10, See, the sovereign Lord comes with power and he rules with a mighty arm. But verse 11, He tends his flock like a shepherd.

He gathers the lamb in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that are half young. Again, we are sure that God uses his power not to strike fear, but to protect and nurture.

Now, unfortunately, many of the earthly rulers in Israel failed to live up to God's own character and standard of the shepherd. They were appointed to represent God, but often, instead of guiding the people along right paths, they used the sheep for their own goals instead.

[5 : 52] They exposed them to danger, namely through idle worship and false teaching. But then along comes this little prophecy in Micah, which we read at the heart of Matthew today, in verse 6.

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

And so in this town of the original shepherd king, David, will come the ultimate shepherd king. There is an expectation that this shepherd king would live up to God's promise.

He will shepherd Israel. He will gather the lamb in his arms, carry them close to his heart, gently lead those who are with young. Now, it's rather a lot to place on a baby's shoulder, isn't it?

I mean, we all have hopes and dreams for our children. Perhaps they might win gold at the Olympics, become the prime minister one day, find a cure for cancer.

[7 : 02] But to think that a baby will shepherd a nation, provide for them, protect them, refresh their souls, that's a lot of pressure to be putting on a baby, don't you think?

And then, of course, we have to remember what the sheep are like. We tend to think of cute sheep or lambs like this one. But actually, if you've ever been a shepherd, that's not what sheep are like, are they?

Not by nature. They're usually thick and stubborn. They're prone to wandering off and not telling their shepherds beforehand. They get lost easily and they don't even know it.

They blindly follow others even when it gets them into harm's way. And that's a description of us as humans too, especially when it comes to knowing right from wrong.

So here's another brushstroke that we have from Isaiah. We're told in chapter 53, We all have, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us turn to our own way.

[8 : 09] Bah, bah, do bah, bah. That's not in the Bible. That was put in there by Colin Buchanan. Isaiah 53, 6. Now, does this resonate with your own experience?

Do you find it hard sometimes to know the right path to take? Do you often find yourself digging yourself out of sticky situations because you've made poor choices or because you've followed the lead of the wrong people?

And then often, even when you've done that, you often still think, don't you, I can fix this. I can get out of this hole myself. I just need to keep digging harder.

It's like the gambler at the casino, isn't it? They've lost all their savings and yet, they still keep believing that with one more roll of the dice, they'll recover all their losses.

So this baby Jesus has his work cut out for him, doesn't he? It's one thing to protect your flock from external danger. It's another to protect them from their own stupid pride.

[9 : 14] But that's exactly what Jesus did in keeping with God's promise. He himself declared in John chapter 10 and verse 11. Here's another brushstroke. He says, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And so at last here, we have God's full revelation, the final painting, as it were. It's that of a shepherd hanging on the cross for his sheep.

God's ruler will shepherd his people from the cross. Or just as Isaiah 53 promised, the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all, like a lamb to the slaughter, and a sheep before its shearers is silent.

If David was the shepherd who became a king, then Jesus is the heavenly king who became a shepherd. And more than that, this shepherd became the sacrificial lamb himself.

He didn't offer up his own sheep, but himself to protect us from the evil in our very own lives, what we call sin and pride. And once he has done that, the blessings then flow to us of being able to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, having goodness and love follow us all the days of our life.

[10 : 38] Two years ago, on Christmas Day, a young homeless man walked into this church. He had just gone through a few months of hell and many years of aimless wandering.

The people at the social housing where he was living at was bullying and harassing him. He has lost contact with his family and friends. And as he told me later on, he felt like ending his life.

But on that morning in church, he heard the simple call of the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, inviting him back into his sheepfold. It was like he said, as though the Lord had specifically sought him out, that one lost sheep out of the hundred and offered to carry him back to safety.

And so having hit rock bottom and realizing how lost he was, having been on the wrong paths up to then, this young man gave his life to Jesus. Now it's not like his problems all disappeared that day, but it was a life changer for him.

Jesus was now his shepherd. He had God's free gift of salvation and forgiveness. He had the Lord as his guide. He now had an eternal home in the house of the Lord.

[12 : 03] Now, your life may not have hit the same rock bottom as he, but I wonder, do you feel lost sometimes without a shepherd? We all are, aren't we?

We can't face this life with all its challenges alone. Well, Jesus' offer to the lost is this, come, let me rule over you as your shepherd.

Let me lead you to pastures green and refresh your soul. Come, dwell in my house forever. forever. And so, if Christ is already your shepherd tonight, then this Christmas, we ought to thank God for him, shouldn't we?

For coming to lay down his life for us and the fact that he is our shepherd king. But if you've not yet made the Lord your shepherd, then why not do that this Christmas?

Hand over the reins of your life to him because he knows how to shepherd you. he knows how to care and provide for you and lead you all the days of your life.

[13 : 13] After all, he's already done that by dying on the cross for you, by laying down his life for you. So let me just pause right now in silence, give you a time for reflection, for thanksgiving, for coming to the Lord in prayer, and then I'll lead us in a prayer to conclude.

Father, thank you for sending your son Jesus to rule as a shepherd over your people. Thank you that he was the lamb who is now the shepherd king.

We submit to his rule in our lives. We long for goodness and love in our lives. We rejoice to dwell in his house forever. Father, and Father, for those who are coming to you for the very first time and to the Lord Jesus as shepherd, please welcome them and help them to walk with you from today onwards.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.