

**Jeremiah 23: 1-8; “The Good Shepherds of Christ’s Flock”, Sermon # 23 in the series – “Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”,  
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016,  
in the Morning Worship Service.**

The Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is made up of individual believers in Him. They believe that He died and rose again on their behalf. They are those who have repented of all of their past sins, and then in connection with the truth of His word, they are gathered into flocks, into churches, by Christ Himself. And the intent is, that they will be shepherded by pastors after His own heart. Pastors are under-shepherds to a local expression of the flock of Christ. They are those who have a delegated responsibility to care for the flock under Christ’s direction in accordance with His word, and by His Spirit. The shepherds referred to in verse 1 of our text, were the negligent rulers in both church and state in Judah and Israel, in the days of Jeremiah. The Lord God describes them for us as those who had destroyed and scattered the sheep of His pasture. And, He tells them what He intends to do about it. He is going to attend to the evil of their doings, He says. But He also says that in the future that He would give them a Good Shepherd.

This glorious Personage who is referred to here, in this passage, would be none other than the Second Person of the Divine Trinity. He would become Incarnate, and He would become the Chief Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd over Israel. Because He would be a righteous King and a Faithful Spiritual Shepherd, other shepherds would eventually be given to Israel who would truly care for God’s sheep. These would be known as the Apostles of our Lord. And through their being faithful in their office of teaching and pastoring Christ’s Church, there would also be raised up, in all the generations of this Church age, pastor-teachers who would be given as the gifts of Christ to His Church. They can be good shepherds as well, if they will respond to the grace and truth which the Chief Shepherd will give to them.

The Lord Jesus Christ, we should understand, is the Good Shepherd of all of God’s saints, both Old Testament and New. He is the One who was prophesied of, in verse 6 of our text, where it says: “In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: The Lord our Righteousness. Let me give you this proposition of truth which I will build upon in the rest of this sermon: Pastors will always be wise and good if they follow the lead and example of their Shepherd-King, in being righteous men in accordance with the truth of the word of God. Let us ask ourselves this question: How does the pastor of a church, an under-shepherd, care for Christ’s sheep? I believe that there are 4 ways which are shown to us in this text which will answer that question. 1<sup>st</sup> – He attends to them. (verse 2) 2<sup>nd</sup> – He helps to gather them. (verse 3) 3<sup>rd</sup> – He will feed them. (verse 4) And 4<sup>th</sup> – He will always be pointing them to the righteousness of Christ. Let us consider together the holy responsibilities of the shepherds of Christ’s sheep.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – The pastor of a local church has the responsibility to attend to the needs of the flock over which he has been placed.**

This is the major complaint which God had against the shepherds of Israel in Jeremiah’s day. They had scattered them, driven them away, and not attended to them. A good pastor does not do this; he attends to Christ’s flock. To attend is to accompany, and to be present with; to pay attention to, to take care of, and to watch over for good. An attendant is one who accompanies you as a friend or as a servant. A good pastor is all of these things. He will attend to you, as one of Christ’s sheep, in these 5 ways:

A) He will, according to the example and leading of Christ, accompany you and be present with you at those times when you do not understand what He is doing in your life. Turn with me over

to John chapter 10, verses 1-14. Here Jesus is speaking not only to His own disciples, but he is also speaking these words which I am about to read to you, to the Pharisees, as well. In chapter 9, verses 40 and 41, Jesus had told them that they were blind spiritually speaking. Indeed, because they did not know Christ as their Messiah, because they refused to believe in Him, they were blind guides of the blind. But when we think of the apostles and how they did not understand why He was telling them that He was going to the cross, and they did not understand what Jesus was calling them to become and to do as apostles, we see why Jesus had to give to them the following words.

Listen to what Jesus says here. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." "But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep." "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." "Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." "Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them." "Then Jesus said to them again, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.' "All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them." "I am the door." "If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." "I am the good shepherd." "The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." "But he who is hireling and not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them." "The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep."

Now you can see that our Lord Jesus was speaking in picture language here. And using this allegorical (parabolic language; see William Hendricksen and R.C.H. Lenski's commentaries on this) He was declaring to everyone who was listening to Him that day, the difference between the true shepherds and the false shepherds of Israel. The true shepherd of sheep comes through the door of the sheepfold. He does not enter in any other way, legitimately, into the office of an apostle or a pastor. Jesus is the door to the sheepfold of the Church, but He is also the Good Shepherd. He comes to possess and care for the flock of His Father's elect people by coming through the door of fulfilling all of His Father's righteous law with a perfect and loving obedience. He, as the Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. He, as the Great Shepherd cared for each one of His sheep by protecting them from thieves and wolves. He knows His own sheep, and He is known by His own sheep.

Any person, therefore, who would become a true and faithful shepherd of Christ's sheep, must come through Him into the sheepfold, and be appointed by the Father (who is the Porter in this parable) to the work of a shepherd. To this kind of a man, the doorkeeper opens, and gives that man permission to shepherd Christ's sheep. The Pharisees and rulers of Israel of Jesus' day were the thieves and robbers that went before Him. Most of them were in the positions of authority that they held, because they were hirelings and did not care for the sheep of God. But the person who would be a pastor not only cannot be a person looking at his position as simply a job in which he makes money; he must also have the earnest desire to attempt to faithfully represent Christ to the people that he pastors. He knows, or he should know, that the only way that he can be faithful in this regard, is to pray to be able by the grace of Christ, to attend to the true and real spiritual and physical needs of the people in the church. He must have a sincere love for their persons, to attend to their needs.

You will remember the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ to His apostles and disciples in Matthew 28: 18-20. He said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” This is what pastors are charged with doing; making disciples, and teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded. And how will he personally go about to fulfill such a great task? It will be by his remembering that Christ is with him always; attending to his needs, and then in turn, he believes that he will be receiving grace to attend to the needs of the flock.

B) Another way that a pastor attends to the needs of the flock is that he will pay attention to them. Proverbs 27: 23 says – “Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds; for riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations.” “When the hay is removed, and the tender grass shows itself, and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in, the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field.” The man who would be a faithful pastor must realize the importance of studying the state of his flock, and attending to the state of the church that he pastors. When they are well-cared for, and are in a healthy spiritual state, the church will prosper, and in the years that lie ahead, he shall know the benefits of the Lord providing for his own needs through those whom he has paid such attention to.

C) A further way that a pastor attends to the needs of the flock is that he will have a care and concern for your highest spiritual welfare. In 3<sup>rd</sup> John 1-4, the apostle John says: “The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” “For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.” “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth.” This was a beautiful way for John to express his love for this brother Gaius. He says: I love you in truth. I pray that you will prosper in all things, even be in health. But he is especially pleased that he knew that Gaius’ soul prospered; that he was walking in the truth. So, any pastor’s heart is gladdened when he sees the people that he shepherds for Christ, walking in the truth of the word of God, and not walking according to the ways of the world.

D) Another way that a pastor attends to your needs as one of Christ’s sheep, is that he will be a kind and faithful friend and your servant for Christ’s sake. Proverbs 27: 6 says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2: 24 says, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle (or kind) to all...” And Colossians 4: 12 tells us this about Epaphras. “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” This is a great part of the Christian ministry; learning to pray and to labor fervently in prayer for all the flock that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

E) The pastor will watch over you for your good. Hebrews 13: 17 – “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give an account.” “Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” This is why a pastor has been given to you dear Christian. It is so that you would have one who will be watching out for the strength and well-being of your soul. If he is a faithful pastor, he will not be doing this with a critical eye; he will be watching over you, even to do you good, to comfort and edify you, to feed you with knowledge and understanding so that you might come to have great assurance of the reality of your faith.

**Now 2<sup>nd</sup> – A good pastor of a local church will care for Christ’s sheep in that He will help to gather them.**

Verse 3 of our text says, “But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.” We can further amplify upon this statement by thinking together of what Jesus says in Luke 11: 23 – “He who is not with is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.” Jesus is the One who gathers together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. (John 11:

52) Jesus was the One, who when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9: 36) And He said to His disciples: “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” “Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” The multitudes in Jesus’ day were weary and scattered. There are multitudes in our day who are the same. There is a harvest out there of the people whom the Lord intends to save. There is a harvest out there of the Lord’s elect people, His sheep, and the way that they will be gathered is through the Lord’s providentially ordering the means of their salvation. He will use the means of the labors of a pastor and the labors of the people in that church as well, to accomplish His eternal purpose.

Do you remember the words of the Lord to the apostle Paul in Acts chapter 18, verses 9 and 10? “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” God will have a people for His own possession, and they will be gathered in. He will have a people, even if they are a remnant. They shall be fruitful and increase because of the greatness of the grace of Christ exercised towards them. The pastor is the person who sets the tone for the gathering of people to Christ and their becoming members of that local church. There must be in every pastor’s messages, a note of urgency and expectancy. “Woe unto me if I do not preach the gospel,” says the apostle Paul. “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, Jesus says, in Luke 13: 34. If the pastor has a love and compassion for the lost, a desire to gather them to Christ, then the people in that church will have these same desires as well, or they will learn to have them in time.

Let us ask ourselves whether we have these desires? If a congregation has been given a pastor by the Holy Spirit’s working, it means that there is work to do. Turn with me over to John chapter 4 and verse 31. Here in this passage, Jesus has been speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well. He has been speaking to her in very direct terms, about the water of life which He could give to her; rivers of living water which could spring up in her soul, if she would repent of her sins and believe in Him. And so she did believe in Him, and then she went and told the men of the city – “Come and see a Man who told me all things that I ever did.” “Could this be the Christ?” In verse 31 it says: “In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, eat.’ “But He said to them, I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

“Therefore the disciples said to one another, ‘Has anyone brought him anything to eat?’ “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.’ “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ “Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” “And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.” “For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ “I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”

Now, I want you to think seriously with me for a minute about your responsibility to gather with Christ. Christ’s food was to do the will of God. When the disciples told him to eat the food that they had brought to Him out of the city, He made that tremendous statement – “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” Now, you and I know that food is strengthening to the body; it is nourishing and refreshing, and good for the body. But what Jesus was saying, was that His doing the will of God, in this case, His having this great desire to partake of doing the will of God in relation to His being able to speak the truth about salvation, was more important to Him than His partaking of physical food to satisfy and strengthen His body. It was through His working, in doing the will of God and by means of the grace which He could give, and did give, to this Samaritan woman, this was something that was more satisfying to Him than eating physical food.

What Jesus told the disciples to do was to lift up their eyes and look at the fields, for they were already white for harvest!” He was speaking of a spiritual harvest, and He wanted them to gather it with Him. The truth that is set before us is this; that when together we see, what the Lord has called us to, as a pastor and people; when we see that the Lord has given us this food of the word of God and doing the will of God, which others know nothing of the satisfactions of, we shall find that when we sow that word, there is a reward; there are wages to be given for working together in furthering the cause of Christ. There will be a reaping together, a gathering of people to this place, who will believe in furthering the cause of truth and righteousness. In our text in verse 3 it says: “But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.” This is what we shall see if we can comprehend what the Lord has called us to together as a pastor and people.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – The good shepherd, or pastor, will feed the sheep of the Lord’s flock.**

Verse 4 says: I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,’ says the Lord.” A pastor who preaches God’s word in all of its depths and fullness will strengthen the people’s hearts by His preaching and example so that they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking. Why is it that unbelieving people fear things? It is because they do not know our Christ. They do not know the precious promises; they do not hold fast the word of God in their hearts. But sometimes even a believer’s faith may falter; even a believer’s faith may be weak, and almost seem to be non-existent. What should they do? They should rest their soul upon the promises of God.

Jeremiah 17: 7-9 says: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord.” “For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.” This is what the pastor of the church must do on an on-going regular basis; he must feed the people the truths that will bring strength to their souls, and courage to their minds, so that they will be fortified in their spirit to do the will of God. He must feed them the honey and the milk, the meat and the bread of the word of God, and pray that they will taste and see that the Lord is good. When a believer finds the fear of the Lord, they shall lack nothing. They will cry and pray and seek the Lord for everything that they need. And the Lord will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly.

The man who is a good pastor will preach in such a way, and lead the people in such a way, that the people will become strong; not because he is someone great, but because the grace and truth of Christ are very great. Christ’s grace empowers the Christian to really live the Christian life. Christ’s grace really transforms. His grace really delivers from all of our fears. Psalm 34: 4 – “I sought the Lord and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.” Also verse 6 – “This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.” We will not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord our God is with us wherever we go.” (Joshua 1: 9) The pastor, if he is thinking rightly and praying rightly, will have Christ’s people to be strong and courageous by the strength of the Lord. He will not seek to have them to be dependent upon himself, but he will keep pointing them to Christ.

He would have them to tremble and be afraid of dishonoring God, continuing on in some sin, but he would not have them to be afraid of men, or afraid of difficulties. He will not promote that kind of mentality. It will not be by force that a good pastor will lead and teach. For the Lord is against such methods. Ezekiel 34: 4 says: “The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.” This was what the Lord condemned in the pastors of that day, and this He would still find fault with,

in a pastor in this day, if this was his method of getting people to do the will of God. No, it will not be by the pastor's feeding himself; his pride, or love of power. It will be by feeding the flock in the strong grace of Christ. This will take away the fear and dismay that men have brought and you will find, that that community of believers will not be lacking in wisdom, or grace, or spiritual growth in Christ.

**4<sup>th</sup> – The faithful pastor will always be pointing his congregation, the Lord's flock, to the righteousness of Christ.**

Verse 5 – “Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.” “In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: The Lord our Righteousness.” Let us always remember that this church has been, is, and shall be, built upon the righteousness of Christ. If we can remember that, then this church will continue to be built and continue to be strong. This is not the church of a man, or a pastor; this is Christ's church. Christ is our Branch of Righteousness. He is the strong and powerful One, who obeyed God's law perfectly. He is the One who wove the perfect robe of righteousness and fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law in a way that pleased God's justice perfectly. He, as the Righteous One, offered Himself a sacrifice and a substitute for sinners; for you, if you will believe it. His obedience to God's holy law went much deeper and farther than an outward obedience.

Jesus had His whole heart in His obedience, and all of the good and right things that He did, He did out of perfect love for His Father, and perfect love for you the sinner. He will give His righteousness to you as a gift if you will believe in Him. He will deliver you from all your fears if you cry to Him this morning. He is the Lord our righteousness. If you believe in Him, God will make you one of His saints, and you will begin to learn the greatness of His loving heart.

Let us pray together. Lord Jesus – May I point sinners to you this day? I have preached to this congregation Your blessed word, but it is only You who can make it effectual to the changing of their hearts. You are the only One who can bring them out of their bondage in sin and take away their fears of judgment. We would ask that you would also bring back any of your banished people from their discouragements, or from their lack of assurance, and even today, let us dwell in the Promised Land flowing with the milk and honey of Your word. Say unto our souls, “You are our salvation”. Come and convince us of your power, and let us rest our weary souls upon Your love and faithfulness. Let us work together as pastor and people for the furtherance of Your kingdom and glory, and for the salvation of the lost. May You hear us in these requests, for we pray them in Jesus name.