

Shepherding With His Voice & His Person

The most impressive quality of a good shepherd (short of dying to save them) is how much he can accomplish with just His voice. A comical example can be seen in the movie *Babe*, where a pig is able to lead a flock of sheep with only a quiet voice and a “thank you.” In the same way, a skillful and knowledgeable shepherd knows how to speak *just the right word* of direction and encouragement to bring his flock safely through danger. My, how such a pastoral description fits our Savior, as we will see this week.

Monday: Read John 10:1-5 & Isaiah 50:4

The Sustaining Word

Our Lord draws a distinction between His true shepherding and the false shepherding of the thief by emphasizing His ability to speak the right word of command at just the right time. When *He* speaks, His words are so timely; so welcome; so comforting and so true that the sheep are drawn to trust that voice and follow where He leads (John 10:4). After all, this is what Isaiah prophesies about our Suffering Servant:

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain *with a word* him who is weary.
Isaiah 50:4 (emphasis added)

Meditate and Pray: No wonder Psalm 23 celebrates our Good Shepherd’s ability to “make us lie down in green pastures.” Our Savior knows just when we need to lie down, just when we can’t go one step further, just when to speak the word which will flood our lives with His peace. Sing about Christ’s shepherding ability to speak into our hearts, using the words of hymn # 383 in our *Trinity Hymnal*:

1 Almighty God, your word is cast
like seed into the ground;
now let the dew of heav'n descend,
and righteous fruits abound.

2 Let not the foe of Christ and man
this holy seed remove,
but give it root in ev'ry heart
to bring forth fruits of love.

3 Let not the world's deceitful cares
the rising plant destroy,
but let it yield a hundredfold
the fruits of peace and joy.

4 Oft as the precious seed is sown,
your quick'ning grace bestow,
that all those souls the truth receive
its saving pow'r may know.

Tuesday: Read Genesis 41:53-57 & Matthew 13:51-52

The Storehouse

Christ speaks His word into our specific life situation. This is why He sent the prophets -- to speak with power to save His elect, even in the worst of times. In fact, at every point of human history, and especially in every moment of His own people’s trials, He is able to insert His Word to savingly stop us in our sins – as well as to comfort us in the way of faith - by a Word spoken from heaven in the Scriptures which He has given us.

Jesus illustrates His wisdom and saving power as a mighty Supply, catalogued and stored up in His kingdom granaries (Matthew 13:51-52). Just as Joseph stored up physical grain to feed the whole world (Genesis 41:57), so there is enough life-changing truth to save *any and all who come by faith to embrace that Word* – because our Savior is mighty enough to feed us on that Word, nourishing us by His Holy Spirit.

Meditate and Pray: Lord Jesus, please feed and satisfy each of your needy sheep on the nourishing Word from your Scriptures. More than that, by your Word please speak into our life situations. Please calm us under your Word; revive us under your Word; chasten us under your Word; redirect our lives into hoping in You through your Word; humble us under your Word and remind us that you care for us and that you will carry our burdens, as promised in your Word. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Exodus 3:11-18 and Exodus 20:1-2

Extreme Danger

When situations are truly dire and the walls are falling down all around us, we can be like sheep that are frozen in panic before the snapping jaws of a terrible predator. The Puritans say there are some heart-breaking, terrifying situations that simply will not respond to the normal medicine of God's promises or commands. What then can God do for us in such distresses, "which refuse all relief that you can tender them" (John Owen, Volume 9 p. 249).

In extreme danger, the Lord gives comfort directly *from who He is* in His Word. For example, when Moses saw no possibility of success in being sent to the enslaved Hebrews, the Lord revealed *His Name* to Moses: "The I Am." The unchanging and faithful Jehovah, who is faithful to each successive generation (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), does not forget His people four hundred years later when in bondage in Egypt.

In short, it is the unchangeability of God which proves to be our rock in the heaving waves of trial and unknown dangers in this fallen world. Though the clouds of our storms in life obscure the sun (Owen's illustration) we know that there will come a time when the clouds will part, and we will find the Lord's grace to be unchanged, shining His grace down upon us. The Sun of His love will not move! Sing about this wonderful, unchanging, faithful God in the words of hymn # 32 in our *Trinity Hymnal*:

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.
Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided -
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Thurs/Fri: Read Exodus 20:1-2 and Genesis 28:10-17**The Shepherd's Company**

When we, like sheep, are simply frozen in fear and our feet can't seem to find a way forward, it is a wonderful comfort to realize that God does not change in His loving commitment to us. He is still, "the God of our fathers" and does not forget us, no matter how lengthy our trial or our apparent separation from Him. The Hebrews waited four hundred years for the Lord to demonstrate that he remembered them in Egypt, but He had faithfully cared for them in their difficulty.

But of course, we need a God who will come to seek and find us, not just stay in heaven, sending angels down to us from His lofty throne. A mistranslation of Genesis 28:13 perpetuates this misunderstanding as it pictures God "above the ladder" from heaven, looking down on the sleeping Jacob. With this inaccurate view, only the angels have any direct contact with the fugitive Jacob, while the Lord stays in heaven and only speaks to him.

Scholars will tell you that the exact same Hebrew phrase is used in Genesis 35:13 to describe how the Lord, standing over Jacob, conveyed His covenant reassurances to the patriarch as he journeyed back to the place where the Lord first had appeared to him. Genesis 35:13 describes the Lord standing before Jacob as the exalted but ever-present God, so that after their interview, the Lord "goes up from Jacob" and back to heaven. In the same way, Genesis 28:13 describes God "standing above him" (Jacob) and not above the ladder.

Picture this scene in reference to the angels. They are "ascending up" the stairway to heaven in Genesis 28:12. But how could earth be their starting point? They don't naturally hang out on earth. We would expect Jacob's vision to describe the angels *coming down first!* But surprisingly, the angels are described as grounded on earth, though they are heavenly beings. Why is that important? Because these angels always accompany the Son of God when He comes down to earth – even in his pre-incarnate state in the Old Testament. So the angels being "down with Jacob" means that they have come down with their Lord, the Son of God – when *HE* sets up His operations center on earth. As throne creatures, the angels travel wherever the Son of God in the Old Testament takes the throne of God. Thus Jacob is right to confess in Genesis 28:16 that the Lord was in that lonely place in the desert where Jacob put his head down on whatever boulders he could find.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that God's commitment to us as His sheep really describes Christ's mission to come down and live with us, walk with us, and protect us by His own presence. Sing about this reality in all our wanderings and trials, using *Trinity Hymnal* #196:

1 Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.

2 Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child, and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

Sat/Sun: Read Psalm 61:1-4 & John 1:14; John 1:51**The Shepherd's Tent**

The greatest discovery in the New Testament is the revelation that Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament hunger for the near presence of God. Since the banishment from the Garden, all believers have longed for this. Christ has come down to “tabernacle” or “dwell” with us in His incarnation (John 1:14). Because He has come down and become man, God’s Son is now the vehicle by which heaven is opened and angels and believers by faith (and then one day at their death) can ascend into heaven itself – given strength and safe passage by the very angels who serve the ascended Christ. That is the glorious message of John 1:51. Heaven is opened now, and access through “a new and living way” has been opened.

Let’s describe this truth in terms of Psalm 61:1-4 --We can now dwell in God’s tent forever (verse 4) because by faith we are joined with the One who came down to “tent” with us in a human body – Jesus Christ. We find that Divine rock “that is higher than I” (v. 2) because the Son of God has brought Himself down into the desert of our sins to be our “Rock” and refuge. Sing about the refuge we have now, down here, even as weak and wounded sheep, using *Trinity Hymnal* # 464:

1 I was a wand'ring sheep,
I did not love the fold;
I did not love my Shepherd's voice,
I would not be controlled.
I was a wayward child,
I did not love my home;
I did not love my Father's voice,
I loved afar to roam.

2 The Shepherd sought his sheep,
the Father sought his child;
they followed me o'er vale and hill,
o'er deserts waste and wild:
they found me nigh to death,
famished and faint and lone;
they bound me with the bands of love,
they saved the wand'ring one.

3 Jesus my Shepherd is;
'twas he that loved my soul,
'twas he that washed me in his blood,
'twas he that made me whole;
'twas he that sought the lost,
that found the wand'ring sheep,
'twas he that brought me to the fold,
'tis he that still doth keep.