

The Compassionate Love Of Our Shepherd.

Text: Eze 34:12-16

1) Seeks the lost sheep

Suggested Hymns:

2) Feeds His flock

391, 387, 604, 326, 617

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ezekiel 34:12-16, *¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.*

¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

¹⁵ I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Of all the titles which God claims for Himself, undoubtedly *“The Good Shepherd”* is one of the most revealing and comforting for the Christian. The day on the church calendar on which this particular relationship between the risen Saviour and His people is emphasised is known as *“The Sunday of the Good Shepherd.”* It is also known as *“Misericordias Domini”* which means *“The Lord’s Compassion.”*

A real shepherd has love, concern, and compassion for his sheep, and certainly sheep who sense these qualities in a shepherd will follow him wherever he leads them. Against the background of the Gospel and Epistle for today and

on the basis of the words of our text, let us consider *The Compassionate Love of Our Shepherd*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Compassionate Shepherd Seeks The Lost Sheep

A sheep is perhaps the most helpless of all creatures when left to itself. It cannot find green pasture; it cannot, like the camel, scent water from afar; nor can it find its way back home like a dog or a dove. It is not prepared to fight in self-defence, and in flight it is an easy prey for the pack.

This is the picture of man by nature. Separated from his Creator by sin, he, too, is helpless and hopeless. Left to himself he will end up in hell and damnation. We read in Isaiah 53:6, *⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way.*

The hymnist was right when he wrote:¹

I was a wandering 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.

But thanks be to God, the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, is not easily discouraged with our stubbornness or depravity. Our text says, *¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.*

Jesus came into the world to *“seek and to save that which was lost.”*² When God saw mankind in its lost and wandering condition, He was moved with compassion. Compassion and love are the keynotes of God's personality and of all His impulses and activities toward us.

*¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*³ It was this love and compassion that

moved Jesus to leave His throne of glory and majesty and to come into this world of sin and death.

He Redeemed Them

A traveller in Europe once saw a carving of a lamb high up on a stone near the top of a church tower. He had seen such carvings of a lamb before, but never before in such a place.

Asking for an explanation, he was told that in the days when the church was being built, one of the workmen lost his footing and fell from the scaffolding just when this particular stone was being laid. His fellow workmen hurried to the ground and were shocked to see the man standing there brushing the dust from his clothes.

When asked to explain his miraculous escape from death, he stated that a flock of sheep was passing the church just when he fell. He had fallen into the midst of the flock, and pointing to a lamb at his feet, he said, *“That lamb was crushed, but I live.”*

The workmen made a carving of a lamb on that stone so that all would remember the miraculous escape of that workman. But more than that, it also points everyone to *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”*⁴

In the Garden of Eden, sin started man on a fall that ends only in the bottom of hell, but Christ, our Good Shepherd, placed Himself between man and the bottom of that fall. He was crushed so that you and I might live. He laid down His own life in order to give life, eternal life, to His sheep.

Having paid the price for His sheep, He is now “searching” and “seeking” for them. In John 10 Jesus said: *“other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring.”*⁵ Our compassionate Shepherd’s heart goes out to the multitudes of Gentiles who do not know God and are living and dying as heathens.

He Still Seeks Them Through His Church

And Jesus is still mindful of them today. Through His church on earth He is still mediating the blessings gained for men on Calvary’s hill. He is still busy seeking and saving that which was lost. For this purpose His church was born on earth, and for this cause it is still in this world.

All other aspects of its work are but secondary and complementary to this great purpose of “searching” and “seeking” the lost. This above all else must mark the ministry of the church in any community.

Are we as mindful of this privilege and obligation as we should be? Do we share His compassion for the “other sheep”? Some of them live next door to us. Some of them are in “the regions beyond.” Does our Christianity leap over the boundaries of nationality, colour, and race?

A city missionary was speaking to a group of criminals when he was interrupted with the question: *“Do you really believe that a sinner who dies in his sins must suffer eternally in hell, while the sinner who accepts Christ shall have eternal joy in heaven?”* “Yes,” answered the missionary, *“you have stated exactly what I believe.”*

To this came the reply: *“If I believed what you Christians say you believe, though I had neither hands nor feet, I would crawl across the continent on my bleeding stumps in order to tell poor sinners about Christ. But I don’t believe that you Christians believe that either. You don’t act like it.”*

When the love which Christ has for souls becomes our love for them, then we will love souls with a willingness to spend and be spent for their sake. The Gospel of the bleeding heart demands the ministry of bleeding hearts.

He Restores The Straying

But this “searching” and “seeking” is to be done not only among the unregenerate. Our text says, ¹⁶ ***“I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away.”*** We are also to search and seek out those who have been in the fold but are wandering away and are coming perilously close to the jagged cliffs of destruction.

Unfortunately many flocks have people failing in duty within them. There are many, many allurements in this world which can tempt the sheep from the paths of the Shepherd. We should be thankful that the Good Shepherd does not just let them go their own way to destruction!

God impresses upon us the necessity of being our “brother’s keeper.” As congregations grow, people have a tendency to become more and more impersonal. It is so easy for one or the other to fall by the wayside unnoticed.

The Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep, and every one of them is precious to Him. We read in Galatians 6:1, ***¹ Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.***

A drummer boy in Napoleon's army lost his footing and slipped into a chasm in the Alps as the army was marching. He was not seriously hurt, but he was unable to loose himself without help. He began to beat on his drums to attract attention. His comrades heard him, but they could not break rank without orders from the commander. Such orders never came.

The drummer boy finally began beating out his own death march. Hardened soldiers could not keep from sobbing as they passed by, but Napoleon was not moved. He was too busy conquering the world to remember an insignificant boy who had been clumsy enough to lose his footing.

Thank God, Jesus is not like that. He does not forget the person who has lost his footing nor the sheep that has gone astray. Our text says, ****I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.****

As Christians we dare not get the feeling that the individual does not count. We must be concerned about one another. Each one is his brother's keeper. We must, as followers of the compassionate Christ, have a spirit of concern, of love, and of helpfulness, because the individual does count. There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.⁶

Not only does our compassionate Shepherd seek and deliver the lost and straying, but He also feeds and cares for them.

2. He Feeds His Flock

Our text continues, ****I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.****

It is indeed a comforting thought that our Shepherd is not a mere human being who himself might be bankrupt and helpless before the day is done. The

Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation, is fully able to look after our needs both temporal and spiritual. He knows His sheep. He understands our needs and our dangers. He knows all about our heart hungers and our sorrows.

¹⁴ I will feed them in good pasture. Pasture is essential for raising sheep. God provides food for the body and also for the soul. The green pasture which our Good Shepherd provides is first of all His Word of truth. We read in Jeremiah 15:16, *¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.*

The Word of God is always fresh, never fading or failing. Sweet and full are its doctrines. Remember that the Word of God is written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit; it is God-breathed; and whenever this Word is devoutly read, God still breathes through it into our souls.

Another part of the good pasture is the holy sacraments. When we stand at the table of our Lord and receive the blessed Sacrament, we are partaking of the most intimate communion with Him this side of heaven.

And when we bring our children to the baptismal font and apply the water that is comprehended in God's command and connected with His Word, there once again God, the Good Shepherd, is present to enter the heart of the child and to bring it into the kingdom of heaven.

In His Word and sacraments God offers us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Through these He imparts peace and rest to the soul. We Christians ought to feast and thrive on this bounteous fare!

God also at times leads His sheep into pastures of trials and tribulations. This He does, not to harm His sheep, but to strengthen and protect them. Often we are reluctant to enter these pastures, but if we always remember that ours is a good, wise, and loving Shepherd, we shall also realise that all pastures into which He leads us are *“good”* pastures, full of grace and truth.

He Heals His Sheep

¹⁶ “I will ... bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick.” Faithful shepherds have been known to draw with their own mouth a serpent's poison from the sheep and thus save them. We, too, have been bitten by soul-destroying sin, but *“the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.”¹⁷* At

times we become severely torn and bruised by Satan and sin, but our Good Shepherd binds up the wounds and heals all our diseases. ***“With His stripes we are healed.”***⁸

He Comforts And Strengthens His Sheep

There are times when ***“cloudy and dark days”*** come to the sheep. This may be the times that we stray from the fold and lose our way. We read in Proverbs 16:25, ²⁵ ***There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.***

The ***“cloudy and dark days”*** may also be the times when we faint by the wayside; we lose heart and become discouraged. It is then that the Good Shepherd comes and speaks comforting words to our hearts and cheers our souls again.

Such days came to Mary Magdalene when they laid the body of our Lord away in the tomb. They became even darker when she thought the enemies had stolen the body. But suddenly and unknown to her the risen Saviour, the Good Shepherd, stood beside her and with wisdom and love healed her wounded heart and brought joy and comfort and strength to one of His own.

Again, the days were ***cloudy and dark*** for Simon Peter after he had shamefully denied His Lord in the courtyard. Oh, how he had quavered before the questions and the ridicule of a mere comment of a girl! How he had gone out into the night and wept bitterly with broken and contrite heart! How he yearned for another chance to prove his love and loyalty to his Lord!

Then came the early dawn breakfast on the seashore with Jesus and His disciples. And it was not long before the Good Shepherd gently and firmly led His wayward and fallen sheep back into the fold: ***“Peter, do you love Me? ... Feed My lambs. ... Feed My sheep.”***⁹

¹⁵ ***I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord GOD.*** First the soul is restored, then it can lie down in God’s pasture. First Peter confesses his sin, repents, and believes, and then he is commissioned to feed the lambs and the sheep. First the restored soul, then the paths of righteousness.

Jesus says in John 10:9, ⁹ ***I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*** This is God’s prescribed order:

“in and out.” “In” for faith, “out” for service; “in” to know the will of God, “out” to do the will of God; “in” to know Christ, “out” to make Him known to others.

Followers Of The Good Shepherd Will Be Compassionate

As Jesus, the Good Shepherd, cares for His sheep, so He expects the same of those who claim to be His followers. The servant is not above his master. Jesus says, ***“Love one another as I have loved you.”***¹⁰ We are to be anxious not only in the winning of new souls for the kingdom but also in conserving and strengthening those who are in the fold.

Love, compassion, and understanding are the jewels which should be shimmering in the crown of every Christian congregation. The children of the world could not help exclaiming concerning the early Christians, ***“How these Christians love one another!”*** Does the world of today say that of us?

Do we really love the lambs in the fold of Jesus? What are we doing to nurture them in the Word of God? Do we break the Bread of Life in our own family circles? Do we make it a point to see to it that our children have the best possible opportunities to grow in grace and knowledge in our congregation?

And what about our youth? Do we give them the concern and the opportunity to grow in grace and stature before God and men? Are we shepherding our youth as the Good Shepherd expects us to, or are we letting them fare for themselves?

When ***“cloudy and dark days”*** of sickness or sorrow or grief or disappointment overcome one of us, do the others in our midst comfort and assist wherever possible? Are we mindful of one another’s infirmities and troubles?

When calamity strikes a family in our community or our church, are we equipped as Christians to step in and give a helping hand? Or are we growing more and more impersonal in our relationship within God’s fold? Do we depend on “local organisations” to do what we ought to be doing ourselves? Are we gradually becoming unmindful of Jesus’ words written in Matthew 25:40, ***‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’***

In His picture of the judgement, when the truth of things is laid bare, all turns on one thing — compassion. On this “*Good Shepherd*” Sunday, let us remember that our Lord has a compassionate heart, and He expects those who are His followers to have the same. May God so help us! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Horatius Bonar, “I was a wandering sheep” verse 1

² Luke 19:10

³ 1 John 4:10

⁴ John 1:29

⁵ John 10:16

⁶ Luke 15:7

⁷ 1 John 1:7

⁸ Isa. 53:5

⁹ John 21:15-17

¹⁰ John 15:12