

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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The Greatness of the Lord Jesus: A Great Shepherd

Welcome to our first talk in the series "The Greatness of the Lord Jesus". In this series we will consider the Lord Jesus as A Great Shepherd, A Great High Priest and A Great God. We will commence with A Great Shepherd as found in Hebrews 13:20. I think every Christian will agree that in whatever situation the Lord Jesus is portrayed, He will be great.

To deal effectively with the subject of the "Great Shepherd", we need to look at other scriptures that focus upon other features of our Lord Jesus Christ as "the Shepherd". These will be considered as follows:

1. The LORD is my Shepherd (Psalm 23:1-6);
2. The Good Shepherd (John 10:11);
3. The Compassionate Shepherd (Mark 6:34);
4. The Slain Shepherd (Mathew 26:30-32);
5. The Rewarding Shepherd: (1 Peter 5:1-4); and
6. The Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20-21).

1. The LORD is my Shepherd (Psalm 23:1-6)

Let us read this psalm: *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever"* (Psalm 23:1-6).

Psalm 23 is probably the most well-known scripture that brings to our attention the shepherd character of the Lord. It is a very personal psalm as it commences with the opening words, *"The LORD is my Shepherd."* David, the writer of this psalm, opens with important words that describes the relationship that he has with the LORD his God.

Psalm 23:1-3 describe both the provision and the guidance of the greatest of Shepherds, the LORD Himself. It is a major milestone in our lives when we come to a decision where we can say, *"The LORD is my shepherd."* A psalm such as Psalm 23 has given comfort to many believers over the years. Each verse in the psalm is worthy of meditation and indeed serious study as it will yield abundant spiritual fruitfulness.

Psalm 23:4-6 highlight the care and companionship that the LORD provides not simply in good times, but also in the difficult times. This is described as *"the valley of the shadow of death."* Enemies might need to be faced but the Lord provides provision - a prepared table. Then the joyous culmination of life's experiences is expressed in the last verse, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."* This is a psalm of confidence and it is all because David, the psalmist, knows the LORD as his shepherd. Can we say that the Lord is my shepherd?

2. The Good Shepherd (John 10:11)

Let us read John 10:11. *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."*

In John 10:1-10, we are told that the shepherd comes. The sheep have a bond with the shepherd; they know His voice (John 10:4) and He has come to lead them out (John 10:3). Now the challenge is, do we know His voice? Just as in Psalm 23, there must be a personal relationship with the Shepherd. All four Gospels have a basic theme: the Lord Jesus has come to call out to Himself people from every nation, whether Jew or Gentile. Have we responded to the Gospel message?

In John 10:11 the Lord Jesus is described as the *"good shepherd."* Every quality that was necessary in a shepherd, was found in the Lord Jesus. He has an eternal interest in His sheep. The Lord Jesus wants the best for His sheep

both now and into eternity with Himself. But John 10:11 also mentions, “*The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.*” Now the Lord’s goodness has a depth and quality to it that goes beyond anything a normal shepherd might have. This includes His sacrificial love when He was willing to lay down His life for His sheep. In doing so He claims the sheep for Himself forever.

When the Lord Jesus lived in Palestine about 2,000 years ago, shepherds knew that they might have to put their life on the line to protect their sheep. Wild animals, natural disasters and sometimes thieves would seek to rob them of their flock. The Lord Jesus uses shepherd terms that the people in those days would understand. In our own country, only going back about a hundred years, it was not uncommon for shepherds to perish in winter storms as they ventured onto the hills searching for their sheep.

This reminds me of an old hymn which I quote as follows:

*There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold;
But one was out on the hills away
Far off from the gates of gold,
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd’s care.*

*“Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?”
But the Shepherd made answer,
“This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me;
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep.”*

*But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found the sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert He heard its cry,
Sick, and helpless, and ready to die.*

*“Lord whence are those blood drops all the way
That mark out the mountain track?”
“They were shed for the one who had gone astray,
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.”
“Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?”
“They are pierced to-night by many a thorn.”*

*And all through the mountains, thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There arose a cry to the gate of heaven,
“Rejoice, I have found My sheep.”
And the angels echoed around the throne,
“Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!”*

Elizabeth C Clephane (1830-1869)

This hymn is based on the lost sheep parable as found in Luke 15:1-7. The hymn writer clearly points to the Lord Jesus and the darkness of Calvary.

3. The Compassionate Shepherd (Mark 6:34)

Let us read Mark 6:34. “*And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.*”

As we read the Gospels about the life of the Lord Jesus, we see that He demonstrated a care and concern for the people time and again.

This is illustrated for us in Mark 6:30-44 when He fed the 5,000 people. Before the Lord Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000 the Lord felt deeply about the crowd who came to Him - He was moved with compassion. Why? Because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. The Lord observed the poverty of their spiritual state. From the Gospels we see that the leaders of the people, which included the priests, had neglected their spiritual responsibilities towards the people. The Lord Jesus immediately began to teach the crowd. How many hours they listened to Jesus we are not told, but, as the day was ending, the Lord instructs the disciples to provide food for the thousands. This becomes an opportunity for the Lord to demonstrate His power to feed them all, from five loaves and two fish, and with plenty left over!

In Psalm 86:15 we have this wonderful description of God. *"But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth."* This verse is seen to the full in the life of the Lord Jesus as the true compassionate Shepherd. The God of compassion in Psalm 86 is the same God who came into this world about 2,000 years ago demonstrating the same qualities of care and concern. As we considered earlier, He was also willing to give His life on dark Calvary's cross.

4. The Slain Shepherd (Mathew 26:30-32)

Let us read Matthew 26:30-32: *"And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.'"*

At this point in Matthew 26, the Lord Jesus is at the Mount of Olives with His disciples. It is the place of His final words to them and the place where He will pray, in deep agony of soul, to His God and Father. The Lord Jesus speaks to them of their coming failure *"All of you will be made to stumble"* (Matthew 26:31). The following verses show that the disciples rejected such thought of failure. However, they did not know their own weakness in the face of the large crowd of people who came with Judas to apprehend Jesus.

The Lord Jesus goes on to show that this apparent failure, soon to occur, was in fulfilment of God's word. Zechariah 13:7 states, *"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man who is My Companion," says the LORD of hosts. 'Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'"*

In Matthew 26:32, the Lord Jesus adds words of hope, *"But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."* The Lord's own prophetic words concluded with a message of hope, *"after I have been raised..."* What was seen by the disciples and more importantly experienced by the Lord Jesus when on the cross was not the end. The Lord Jesus would be raised, and He would see the disciples again!

5. The Rewarding Shepherd: (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Let us read 1 Peter 5:1-4: *"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."*

Peter, in his first Epistle, covers many practical issues for Christians in general. Here at the commencement of 1 Peter 5, Peter specifically writes to the elders. Elders were those who had a position of responsibility in their assembly and this is still true today. We should note that "elders" is in the plural and not singular. Caring is a work for more than one person. Shepherding includes the thought of teaching. The elders were to teach the flock of God, providing the necessary instruction on how to live the Christian life. Notice that it is the *"flock of God"* (1 Peter 5:2); the believers belong to God, and the shepherds were responsible to God to discharge their duty in the assembly.

However, Peter is also concerned with the elders and their motives. He was looking for those who were eager to be in the service of the Lord and money was not to be their objective when taking up this responsibility (1 Peter 5:2). They would not seek a position of authority over fellow believers, but provide a godly example for Christians to follow (1 Peter 5:2). Rewards were not to be expected in this world but the next. Their example was to be the Lord Jesus Himself. If elders behaved well, then any reward would be given by the Chief Shepherd as the Lord Jesus is the only One who can rightly assess how well we have lived in service for Him. If this is according to His standard, then a crown of glory will be bestowed. This crown will not be subject to decay; it does not fade away. The crown of glory will be suited to the environment in which it will be seen forever.

6. The Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Let us read Hebrews 13:20-21: *“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

We now come to the Scripture which is the title of our talk, “The Greatness of the Lord Jesus - A Great Shepherd.”

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a tremendous book which shows how different is Christianity to the national religious system that God gave to the nation of Israel. Hebrews 13:20-21 come at almost the close of the epistle and outline some of the great features of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, giving words of encouragement to those who read this epistle. We will consider Hebrews 13:20-21 in some detail so as not to miss out on what is being communicated.

The first thing to say about Hebrews 13:20-21 is that they form a benediction or blessing from the writer of the Epistle to the readers. The writer of Hebrews has demonstrated in his letter that Christianity is better than the old religion that was given to the Jewish nation through Moses. They had moved from what was tangible and temporary to what was intangible, that is not seen, and eternal. From physical and earthly to that which is spiritual and heavenly.

Let us look in detail at Hebrews 13:20-21, *“The God of peace.”* God has many attributes and peace is one of them. It is fundamental to God’s nature and amazingly God is willing to communicate peace to believers. There is no real peace outside of God and peace is experienced by believers because they have come into a very special relationship with God. Believers are His children and part of the family of God. The Lord Jesus, as the Son of God, spoke of giving peace to His disciples. Hebrews 13:20 reminds us that peace has come to believers because of Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection.

Peace is intrinsically connected to God’s action as He *“brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead.”* Some translations state, *“brought up our Lord Jesus out of the dead”* (Young’s Literal Translation) or *“brought up our Lord Jesus from among the dead”* (JN Darby Translation). In each case it declares the uniqueness of God’s action in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. Why the “Great Shepherd”? As the *“Good Shepherd”* He gave His life for His sheep (see John 10:11). But as the *“Great Shepherd”* He has conquered death after His great redeeming sacrifice which dealt with the universal scourge of sin which has blighted every person since Adam and Eve sinned against God (see Genesis 3:1-7). In Romans 10:9 we have a challenging Gospel message which is in line with Hebrews 13:20: *“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from among the dead, thou shalt be saved”* (JN Darby Translation). The Christian Gospel message is based upon a living Saviour as the Lord Jesus said in Revelation 1:18, *“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.”* This is unique to Christianity.

Through the blood of the Lord’s great sacrifice, believers are now able to serve God in an acceptable way by *“every good work”* (Hebrews 13:21) in accordance with God’s will. How do we find out God’s will? It is in His Word, the Bible. That is why we need to be familiar with the Scriptures. Reading God’s word gives instruction on how to live for the Lord Jesus. Not only to live but to know the kind of activity, the good works, that we can be occupied with. We must not miss however, that God wants to work in us as well as through us. This is godly character forming, that is both spiritually and morally acceptable to God. God works through us to bring honour to His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul in Romans 12:1 describes such living as *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service”* (JN Darby Translation).

Let us summarise what we have been considering. *“The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep”* (John 10:11). There was no limit to which the shepherd would go.

We have also considered this same Shepherd showing the features of God, *“But you, O Lord, are a God full of compassion”* (Psalm 86:15). Jesus showed compassion to the crowd who were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34). Then the Shepherd being slain upon the cross, giving His life to bring blessing to His sheep (see John 10:11). This was followed by the Rewarding Shepherd who will provide a crown of glory to His servants (1 Peter 5:1-4). The Rewarding Shepherd is looking for faithfulness in acting responsibly towards fellow believers. Next, we have reminded ourselves of the Great Shepherd who has conquered death (Hebrews 13:20). He was brought up from among the dead by the God of peace. There is no peace in this world. Peace is only experienced by those who know Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. However, our first consideration was from Psalm 23 with the challenge of *“The LORD is my shepherd.”* King David, the writer of Psalm 23, knew in a real way the LORD as his shepherd. The challenge is, do we know the Lord as our shepherd?

Miss CA Wellesley has a hymn which has fitting words to close our consideration of Christ as the Great Shepherd.

*O Thou great all-gracious Shepherd,
Shedding for us Thy life's blood,
Unto shame and death delivered,
All to bring us nigh to God!
Now our willing hearts adore Thee,
Now we taste Thy dying love,
While by faith we come before Thee -
Faith which lifts our souls above.*

*As our Surety we behold Thee,
Ransoming our souls from death;
As the willing victim view Thee
Yielding up to God Thy breath.
In the broken bread we own Thee,
Bruised for us and put to shame;
And the cup, O Lord, we thank Thee,
Speaks of pardon through Thy name.*

*But 'tis past, and, Lord we hail Thee
Crowned with glory on the throne;
Meet it is Thy saints should bless Thee
For the place Thy death hath won:
Won for us - that in full measure
We should have our part with Thee -
Taste the river of Thy pleasure,
Share in all Thy victory.*

Thank you for listening. May the Lord bless and encourage you today.

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