

Look for the Shepherd

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Date: 19 March 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 23. And from John chapter 9, 1 through 17 and 35 through 38.

As he went along, he saw a blind man from birth. His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus. But this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me.

Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.

Go, he told him. Wash in the pool of Siloam. This word means sent. So the man went and washed and came home seeing. His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?

[1 : 3 9] Some claimed that he was. Others said, No, he only looks like him. But he himself insisted, I am the man. How then were your eyes open? They asked.

He replied, The man that called Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see. Where is this man? They asked him.

I don't know. He said. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore, the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight.

He put mud on my eyes, the man replied, and I washed, and now I see. Some of the Pharisees said, This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath. But others asked, How can a sinner perform such signs?

So they were divided. Then they turned again to the blind man. What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened. The man replied, He is a prophet. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, Do you believe in the Son of Man?

[2 : 4 6] Then, Who is he, sir? The man asked. Tell me, so that I may believe in him. Jesus said, You have now seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you.

Then the man said, Lord, I believe, and he worshipped him. This is the word of our Lord. Amen. Friends, would you pray with me?

Almighty and gracious God, we appreciate coming to you in this moment and in this time. We thank you for the gift it is. And now, having come with our hearts open, please plant a seed in each of us, that seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. Amen. So, continuing our journey through Lent, as you heard me say during the greeting time, we're in week four, and we're talking about looking for the shepherd.

Looking for the shepherd. And you got to hear that famous verse, right? The Lord is my shepherd. And immediately, most folks' brains kicked into memory mode, right?

[4 : 01] Even though we're using a contemporary translation as opposed to the one most of you are probably saying, right? Because most of us grew up reciting the King James, and so that I lack nothing throws me when I hear it, right?

But that being said, I'm betting most of you kind of followed along with the place. And that's a good thing. It's a good thing that we have that kind of familiarity with the scripture, and that it has that place in our hearts.

But it's interesting when we start talking about this idea of looking for the shepherd, because having a shepherd implies something else that usually we don't like, right? Because implying shepherd means sheep.

We usually don't talk about ourselves as sheep. And if we talk about people as sheep, it's usually not done in a complimentary way, right? When we talk about people being sheep, it usually means that people aren't thinking for themselves.

It usually means that they're just happily led along and aren't very intelligent and that sort of thing. And somebody starts talking about you as one of the sheep, as I said, most of the time your back gets up a little bit.

[5 : 08] But that kind of makes it weird when we're so happy to have this shepherd in our lives. The other thing about having this particular scripture on our mind this morning is that some folks get a little sad when they hear this, because it seems like the 23rd Psalm gets read a lot at funerals.

And so when people hear it, their brain kind of kicks into that mode. But this piece of scripture, when you heard Amy come up here and give us that enthusiasm that we all need to have when we're looking at scripture, it should bring that out in you, right?

Because when you consider what it means to have God love you like this, this is a big deal. But see, as you heard me say at the opening, shepherds were not really widely respected.

We don't tend to think a lot about shepherding in the 21st century, but shepherds were very common during biblical times. And the thing about shepherds was they were kind of those necessary evil jobs.

It was not something you really wanted your kid to grow up and be, if you want to think of it that way. It was needed because sheep were a big part of everybody's life. You needed them for temple sacrifices.

[6 : 32] People ate the meat regularly. And so people needed shepherds around, but that meant people had to be with sheep all the time. And it meant they were out in the fields.

It meant they tended to come into town smelling like the sheep. And folks usually didn't like having shepherds around that much. They were, as I said, kind of a necessary evil kind of a gig.

The problem, though, is that we can't function without them. And even with that sort of low public opinion of the work, there was still something about being a shepherd that was considered so valuable that Jesus would compare himself to one.

And what was that? It's that idea that the shepherd works that hard to take care of the sheep.

That the shepherd comes from this place of love to take care of the sheep. That the shepherd fights off the predators. That the shepherd goes off and gets the ones that fall into a trap.

[7 : 35] That the shepherd makes sure that the sheep always have enough to eat. And when you think about it in those terms, it makes you kind of happy to have a shepherd. You know, there's this meme that's going around social media right now.

And Jesus talked about this shepherd thing a few times. And most of us remember a verse that says something that tells you why having a shepherd is so important. Because Jesus used that verse and said, you know, which of you having a hundred sheep, if one wanders off, wouldn't leave the 99 to go get the one?

And you remember that important point. Because you sit there and you'll go, well, I don't know if I'd risk my 99. Until you're the one that needs to be found.

What does it mean to have someone that will come and get you when you are lost? What does it mean to have someone who will come and protect you when there are predators around?

What does it mean to have someone that will come and sustain you when you can't find what you need by yourself? That's what it means to have the Lord as your shepherd.

[9 : 01] Today we get to look at a story of that in a real way. See, because we can talk about it as a metaphor all we want to, but we get to see it in a real way in the story that we're studying today.

John 9 tells us this story about Jesus healing a man born blind. And what I love about this story is that we kind of get the facts, right?

This is one of those ones where there isn't really a dispute about the thing that you think people would be fighting about. Because there is no real argument about whether or not this guy was blind or not.

Or whether or not he was born blind. That's just taken as a fact. Because here we are in this time, and most folk have known this guy. So they know that he just didn't roll into town one day and start pretending to be blind so he could beg.

The other thing is they know where his parents are. We find that out later in the story because they go and get them. We'll say more about that later. But he's clearly blind. And so Jesus and the disciples hit town, and the disciples ask an interesting question.

[10 : 08] One we want to sit with, especially as we wrestle with this shepherd idea. Because they're wondering, well, who sinned? Was it him?

Or was it his parents that he was born blind? It's an interesting thing because you would think a baby wouldn't have sinned so that it would be born blind, right? But that's the question they pose.

And we still kind of float with that kind of twisted thinking, right? That something must be bad. Something must be wrong with you. You must have done something to deserve that. But Jesus reminds us of a simple truth.

That that's not how our God works. It says it was neither his parents or his sin or himself that led to this blindness. But it's here is Jesus' point.

It's here. And because it's here, we have the opportunity to show how God can do amazing things. We can shine the light of God into his life because he is carrying this burden.

[11 : 18] And so Jesus heals him. And I want you to hear that for a minute from that standpoint of the shepherd thing. Because there's a problem. And Jesus steps into it proactively to take care of what's going on.

Sometimes we get it in our heads that, well, if Jesus loved me, I'd never have any problems. And we know that's a lie of the world. We deal with stuff.

And that's a much deeper conversation than we're going to get into this morning. But the simple reality of it is, is that you have a God who loves you enough to step into your moment with you. And to do something about it.

And what's fascinating about this story is people keep being people, right? Because the guy gets healed. And when he comes back, you heard it in the story as Amy was reading it, right?

The people say, well, wait a minute. How are you better now? That's a legit question. You know, that just doesn't happen spontaneously. But at the same time, you can hear the doubt.

[12 : 25] You say, well, I don't even think that's him, right? I don't even think that's the dude. I think he just looks like him. So the people are struggling.

But I want you to hear something really important in that part. Because even though the people around him are doubting, even though the people around him are questioning, the man himself holds on to what he knows to be true.

He holds on to his story. He's like, look, I was blind this morning. And Jesus came. And now I can see. So if y'all don't get it, that's your problem.

But that's what happened to me. Do you hold on to your story that close? See, because when the shepherd has come to you, when you know that you've been fed, when you know that you've been cared for, when you know that God has worked in your life to that degree, do you let the questions talk you out of who you know your God is?

Do you let the doubts of others tell you that what God has done for you isn't true? But he holds on to his story.

[13 : 42] And then, of course, the church gets involved. Yay! Because it says what happens now is after the people come and ask all the questions, the Pharisees show up.

The church gets involved. So they say, well, what happened here? Because, you know, sometimes church folks say, well, that can't be a miracle because we didn't say so.

Because that's essentially what the debate is about. They're like, well, wait a minute. This guy came over here and you want us to believe that God did this? Well, God can't have done this because it happened on a Saturday.

And we know that nothing's supposed to happen on a Saturday. That's the Sabbath debate, is it not? No. But that's what people are doing.

Really. They're going to go back and forth over whether or not this can be called a miracle or whether or not Jesus can be taken seriously because he doesn't follow our rules.

[14 : 50] That's where they are. But again, you see the power of that truth. Because the man keeps telling the story. I was blind.

The man called Jesus put mud on my eyes. And now I can see. It gets worse. We skipped that part of the story.

Because I told you, they went and go get his parents. They bring him into the church. And then there's more debate. I spared you all that part this morning. But we skipped ahead to the most important part.

Because as we talk about our shepherd, where we picked up the story in verse 35, tells us Jesus heard that they kicked him out. Because that's what happens.

They kicked him out. Because he wouldn't bend to what the church wanted. And Jesus comes and finds him.

[15 : 54] See, that's that shepherd thing again. Because when Jesus knows that he's been kicked out by all those who are supposed to take care of him.

People who are supposed to know better. People who are supposed to love the way we're supposed to love. But they kicked him out. But Jesus is the one who goes and finds him.

And when Jesus finds him, he asks him the question that matters. Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Now, this guy, who's probably not a big church person. Who probably may have heard the stories and had some of that grounding. But at the same time, he's like, who is he?

That I may worship him. You can see him now. See, he's the one that's talking to you.

[16 : 58] And then, he worships him. When the shepherd has worked in your life, what does it bring out of you?

This is a theme we've had before, right? When things go sideways in your life. When things aren't going according to plan. And then God moves in your circumstances.

What is your response to that? See, because the whole theme underneath what we've been talking about over these past few weeks.

Is when the world gets weird. When the world gets ugly. When stuff gets strange. We start looking for ways to feel better. We start looking for things that we believe will help solve our problems.

In other words, we go looking for love in all the wrong places. When we have a shepherd who will take care of us in the right ways.

[18 : 01] And when we know that he has taken care of us in the right ways. What then do we do when we have that?

Do we just take him for granted? And just assume he'll be back? Or we just kind of level off for a little bit. And then when things are going fine.

But then something new happens and we wander off again. And yet we still discount how amazing it is.

That when there's 99 sheep over here. Jesus is still willing to love you enough. To come and get you. When you're lost.

See friends, when we are loved like that. The deeper question we got to ask ourselves is.

[19 : 01] Why do we keep looking for love in the wrong places? Because he has shown us what this is like. He has shown us who he is. And he shows us what he does.

And yet we still have this thing about ourselves. That sends us to these other places. And that's really our lesson today, right? Why can't we trust that love enough to stay where we know things are right?

Why is it when he has shown us over and over? Do we still ask questions? Do we still doubt? Do we still think the grass is literally greener from the sheep perspective over there?

But that's what we do. And if you hear nothing else today. I want you to remember that you are loved like that.

You are loved so much. That not only does he do the right thing by you. Because that is how he moves. That is his disposition. That is who he is and what he does.

[20 : 06] But not only that. When you wander off. That he is still willing to leave the 99 for you. See, the thing is, we hear that song.

And like many of you, I grew up in a house that had it as art, right? There was this little thing. There was one of these little desk mount things that my mom kept. It had 23rd Psalm on it.

And others of you, I'm sure, may still have it somewhere. Some of you may know it by heart and were taught to memorize it in Sunday school and all them good things. But the question I want you to sit with today is, what does it mean to you?

Not only from a sentimental standpoint, but what does it really mean to you? When you think about how your life is lived, when you consider who God is for you, what does that psalm do to your walk with God?

I want you to hear it again. And I want you to remember what it says. When it says, the Lord is my shepherd.

[21 : 22] The simple sentence, I lack nothing, shows you a God who provides. Now, some of us may not have always had enough.

Some people may have struggled mightily. But you're here today. Which means there was something provided at some point.

And even if God only provided the opportunity for you to do the work, to earn what was on your plate, you still ended up with what you needed. You lacked nothing.

God is your provider. For those of us who are struggling with anxieties, those who have frustrations, and those who are like, man, my world is so crazy and I wish I just had a break.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. See, the thing is, if you're not finding peace in your day-to-day world, where are you looking for that peace?

[22 : 26] I bet you're looking in the wrong place as opposed to the right place. Because if you leaned into God, and if you trusted his leading, he would show you the green pastures where you could find rest.

He would take you to those quiet waters where you could relax your mind. And you would see your soul restored. When you're looking for guidance, when you've got decisions to make, when you want to know the right thing to do, what does the psalm tell you next, right?

He guides me along the right path for his name's sake. He shows you what is right. He moves you in the right directions.

Not only for your benefit, but because you are the walking, talking example of the power of who he is. When the world who doesn't follow keeps finding the wrong things, the people who are around you will see in you what it means when you follow God.

He guides me along the right path for his name's sake. And even when stuff happens, those bad things, those ugly things, those things that really drive us to look for love in the wrong places.

[23 : 51] Even when we walk through the darkest valley, we don't have to be afraid. Because he's with us. See, the problem is most of us would prefer not to go through the valley.

We say the shepherd wouldn't let me go in there. That's simply not the way life works, though. The way we get through the valley is trusting him to be with us.

Trusting him to lead us in the way. That's how we get through it. But we don't get to avoid it. It'd be nice. But it's just not the way it's going to work.

You know, one of the things that we really don't like is when we find out we've wronged, we've done something wrong. We know we've made a mistake. We know we've wandered off the path.

But God corrects. God corrects. Just like those of us who have been around other young people. Those of us who have had to supervise people.

- [24 : 57] Somebody makes a mistake. It is not the loving thing to keep letting them make the mistake. Right? You tell them things need to change. But when you're a shepherd, what do you use to help a sheep understand that they're moving in the wrong direction?
- You use your rod and your staff to do that. In other words, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Because it shows me that you're still there.
- And it shows me you're not going to let me fall into that creek again. When we continue on this path. When you have a God who loves you like that.
- When you know these things to be true. What happens in your life? You know that you are blessed. See, we think of blessing in such outlandish terms.
- We forget that we are blessed in so many regular ways. Every step. Every breath. Every smile of a friend. It's a blessing. When you consider what it means for somebody to treat you special.
- [26 : 08] You know back in biblical times. The most special thing you could do for someone. Was to anoint them. That's how kings were chosen. That's how people showed that you had great worth.
- And what does the psalm tell us next? You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Not only do you have enough.
- You have more than enough. We are a blessed people. Because we have a shepherd. Who loves us like that.
- And in the midst of this world. This world that does so much to steal our joy. And break our spirits. Why would we wander away. When we are loved to that degree.
- You see the challenge we face. Is not the fact that there's bad stuff out there. We know there's bad stuff out there. The problem is. Is that we keep concentrating on the bad stuff.
- [27 : 15] And forgetting. How good it is. Exactly. Where we are. Because.
- The Lord. Is our shepherd. Amen. And amen. Loving and gracious God. We thank you for the gift it is. To know your love in this way.
- The fact that you. Continue. To call to us. When we wander off. The fact that you will come get us. When we can't find our way home. That we can simply stop where we are.
- And listen for your voice. And know. That we are safe. That when the predators. Circle us around. That you. Will defend us. That when the hill is brown.
- And there is nothing to sustain us. You will lead us. To where. We have more than enough. And we can lay down. And rest. God help us when we forget.
- [28 : 13] How true that is. In our lives. Let us hold on to it. Let us live our lives from it. Let us. Be lights that reflect that truth.
- To a world where there is so much hurt. So much loss. So much pain. Let us indeed remember. That we do not have to look for love. Anywhere else.
- Because we are loved totally. Amazingly. By you. Amen. Amen. Talked about how the love of God.
- Reaches out to us. Finds us. Holds us all. And not only do we talk about. How it finds us. But what that finding. Could draw out of each of us. As you consider. How to live your faith.
- As you go from where you are. This morning. Think about. How you might volunteer. And give some time. We need time. To help continue our ministry. Through the fist fries.
- [29 : 13] We need time. To help with. Our Easter celebration. All of those. Are ways in which. You can give time. And energy. To support our ongoing. Ministries of the church. If you are looking for ways. In which to give financially.

You can also. Give to some other things. We have happening. Those are lifted in your bulletin. So make sure you read that carefully. If you'd like to grow in your faith. There are opportunities for fellowship. And study.

We have our next tough questions. Bible study. Coming up. A week from Tuesday. On the 28th. We also have our Lenten study. That's going on. On Thursdays. Both in the afternoons. And in the evening.

So. Please. Read your bulletin. And look at the website carefully. You can see all those opportunities. Explained in detail. But for now. Let us receive this blessing. As we go forward.

And remember today. That we have a response. Go forth into the world. Looking for love.

[30 : 05] In all the right places. We will look at the times. The shepherd. Contending to the world. Around us. And now in the name of God. Our creator and king.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Our Lord. And our savior. And in the name of the Holy Spirit. Our comforter. And our sustainer. May God bless us. As we leave the love of God.

And all God's children. Amen.