

**November 25, 2007
Christ the King Sunday**

"Our King Is Our Loving Shepherd"

JEREMIAH 23:2-6

Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD. ³ "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. ⁴ I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. ⁵ "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

It has been said that the best and most efficient form of government is a benevolent dictatorship or benevolent monarchy. Imagine being ruled by a king who possesses lots of power, knows his people and always has their best interest in mind. Such is our king Jesus. He is often described in Scripture as a Shepherd who knows his sheep and cares for them, a king who is all powerful and really wants to use his power to care for his people. That is why we say in the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want, or lack anything. Goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives. Or as we just sung, "The King of Love my Shepherd is. His goodness fails never. I nothing lack for I am his. And He is mine forever."

When we pray the Lord's Prayer we join in the well known words, "Thy kingdom come." With this we are asking our King to come into our world and rescue people the way a shepherd rescues a lost sheep. We are also asking him to come into our lives with even more of his perfect, unending love. On this Christ the King Sunday we want to speak to you on this comforting thought. "Our King Is a Our Loving Shepherd."

Our king provides shepherds who care for us

Sheep need shepherds to care for them by providing them with food and water. In ancient times that meant the shepherd had to find pastures with healthy grass for the sheep and water nearby. If the sheep were left to wander on their own and become scattered they would easily become prey for the world animals always looking for an easy meal.

The Lord God uses this picture of shepherding to condemn the shepherds who scattered the sheep at the time of the prophet Jeremiah. "Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people; 'Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done.'" The Lord God looked at his people and saw them as sheep that were scattered and exposed to serious danger.

Who were these bad shepherds who did not care for the sheep? They were kings with names like Ahab, Ahaz and Manasseh who pretended to worship the Lord and even offer sacrifices to the true God in the temple, but then also worshipped Baal and even offered their own children as human sacrifices in their devotion to their false god. They were priests who watched the people come to worship the Lord in the temple in the morning, but never stopped them from climbing up to the high places in the evening to bring offerings to Baal and Ashtoreth under the starlight and moonlight. They were the prophets who gave the people messages they wanted to hear, but constantly put down the messages of true prophets. They were the parents who took their children to worship in temple of the Lord, but really got excited when it came to the worship of Baal. One of the saddest verses in the Bible is found in Judges where it says of the people who entered the Promised Land, "A new generation grew up that did not know the Lord." It took only one generation to break the chain.

When the Lord looked at his people he saw them as sheep that were scattered ready to be devoured by wild animals. Here is what the Lord said through the prophet Ezekiel: "So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered and they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them."

Does the Lord sit back and watch people perish forever like sheep that are lost? No, the Lord takes matters into his own hands and provides them with real shepherds who care for them. First, he gets rid of the bad shepherds. "I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done." Look at how the Lord raises up people who know the truth of his Word. They stand up and say "We don't want these false teachers to be our shepherds and lead us and our children away from the Lord." The Lord steps in and gathers in his flock by providing shepherds faithful to his Word. He raises up leaders where the truth of his Word changes the lives of people. "I myself will gather the remnant of the flock out of all the countries where have driven them and will bring they back to their pasture, where they will increase in number." The Lord will find his people in these last days and gather them into his church as his Word reaches people. Then he will bring them together and give them new shepherds who are faithful. "I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be terrified nor will any be missing."

How much confidence can we have this morning that our King who is shepherd will care and provide for his church by giving them faithful shepherds? Listen to these words the Lord spoke in Ezekiel 34 where he promises to take over and provide true shepherds for his people. "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD.

How does the Lord do this today? Look back in history and see how the Lord raised up a

shepherd for the church by the name of Martin Luther. False teachers had come into the church and scattered the people with false teaching about how they were saved. They were taught to worship relics and pray to saints and do good works to atone for sin. The Lord raised up Martin Luther and led him to discover that the just or righteous people live not by their performance but by their faith and trust in what Jesus did for them. It was Luther who provided moms and dads with a little catechism they could use to teach the truth to their children so they could see the unfailing love of Jesus as their King of kings and Lord of lords. You remember these words from the catechism about your King of Love. "Christ has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his innocent sufferings and death, that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

Our King of kings and Lord of lords still sits at the right hand of his heavenly Father and raises up faithful confessors who are willing to speak the truth of his Word even in the face of death itself. In his book *Against the Night* Charles Colson has a chapter called "Communities of Light." He cites the example of a Cuban Christian named Armando Valladeros who had been imprisoned for his faith in the infamous *Isla de Pinos*. He told of Christians who were taken out under the cover of darkness and placed before the firing squad. Before the shots rang out, the Christians would shout in Spanish, "Viva Christo Rey! Viva Christo Rey!" Long live Christ the King! The communists had to gag their mouths to keep them confessing Jesus with their dying breaths. So great is Christ our King, I am convinced that if the same thing happened to us, we would confess Christ with our dying breath. But now the hard work comes, not of dying for Jesus, but living for him, and confessing him faithfully in our daily lives. The King who is control of his kingdom will even use us to confess his truth and gather people into his church and strengthen them. Such is his love for people.

Our King will provide us with righteousness

Our King of kings and Lord of lords will also provide us with something we can find in no other place in the world. "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely, and what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called; the Lord Our Righteousness." Our King is called, "The Lord Our Righteousness." It is only in the Lord that we can be credited with the righteousness that we need to be accepted by a holy and perfect God. Our King is called a righteous Branch. He is a shoot or branch that comes out of the rotten and corrupted stump of the human race that is able to rescue people with his perfect righteousness.

Let me tell you a story about a plum tree to illustrate the beauty of Jesus as the righteous branch. I recall as a child enjoying the blue plums that would come on the two plum trees next to our house. One tree died, and a few years after that a windstorm knocked over the other tree. Nothing was left except a broken off stump. But out of that stump, the original root stock of a wild plum, came a little shoot that grew into small tree. In the spring there were white blossoms and in the fall of the year there were plums that were not blue but purple and even better tasting than the other plums.

Jesus was like that shoot that came out of the dead stump of the human race. The dead

stump was corrupted by Adam's fall and unacceptable to God. "There is none that does good, no not one." Jesus came into our world and he was a righteous branch. The fruit he produced in his life was perfect. He was the perfect King with a perfect love for people and for his heavenly Father, so different from the rest of us whose lives are marred by bad thoughts, harsh words, and failures to show love and kindness to others when we have the chance. So what does Jesus do with the perfect life he lived for us? He gives it to us as a free gift. His name tells us this gift is ours. He is the Lord Our Righteousness. His righteousness becomes ours. That is the best blessing that our king has for us. What if those new plums that came on our tree not only tasted good, but had the power to make us feel good, heal all our sickness, and bring great joy into our lives? What if these plums were a miracle fruit that cured cancer, heart disease and other diseases? That is what the fruit Jesus produced in his life does for us. It gives us eternal life. It allows us to live every day under the constant love and care of our heavenly Father. What a king we have in Jesus and what a privilege it is to be in his kingdom now and forever. Amen.