

Easter 4/Good Shepherd
April 25, 2010

Acts 13:15, 16, 26-33
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*CW Supplement – “The Lord’s My Shepherd”

A “Message of Encouragement” About Our Good Shepherd

- I. The message of salvation through faith in Him.
- II. The message of God’s faithfulness to His Word.
- III. The message of God firmly in control of all things.

Dear Christian friends,

“Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak!” How can you NOT HAVE a **“message of encouragement”** on Good Shepherd Sunday? Look again at today’s readings! HOW OFTEN haven’t God’s people turned to the **familiar words** of Psalm 23 for a **“word of encouragement”**? **“The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.”** Or take the epistle reading. That’s one of my favorite passages in the Bible. LOOK what God has all planned and promised us! THIS LIFE with all its **hassles** and **headaches** can easily get us down – but what a **“word of encouragement”** that vision is!

Then there’s the gospel reading. John 10 is the GOOD SHEPHERD CHAPTER of the NT. We heard Jesus promise, **“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand.”** Earlier in that chapter Jesus had said, **“I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down My life for the sheep.”**

“Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak!” It wasn’t Good Shepherd Sunday in that synagogue - it wasn’t even Sunday! But Paul certainly had A “MESSAGE OF ENCOURAGEMENT” ABOUT OUR GOOD SHEPHERD. Paul encouraged these people with 1)the **message** of salvation through faith in Jesus, 2)the **message** of God’s faithfulness to His Word and 3)the **message** of God firmly in control of all things.

I. The message of salvation through faith in Jesus.

Paul and **Barnabas** were on their first missionary journey. They had arrived in the city of PISIDIAN ANTIOCH – a major city in what we **today would call** south central Turkey. **As was his custom** Paul began his work in the local synagogue. There he’d find people – Jews and Gentiles converts – who were familiar with God’s **OT promises** of a Savior. There Paul would proclaim those **promises fulfilled** in Jesus of Nazareth.

The regular synagogue service had ended. Like us today they had APPOINTED SCRIPTURE READINGS – **prayers** and **psalms** they’d sing. Now the **“synagogue rulers”** – we’d say the Church Council – asked Paul and Barnabas, **“Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak!”**

These verses are part two of Paul’s sermon. **Part one** reviewed God’s promise of a Savior **from the Jews** and the **family** of David. Now Paul continues, **“Brothers, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.”** That **“message of salvation”** is Jesus crucified and risen. The man Jesus from Nazareth is NONE OTHER than the **eternal Son** of God just as God has promised in Psalm 2, **“You are My Son.”**

AS OUR SAVIOR – **in our place** – Jesus had lived an absolutely sinless, holy life. **“They found no proper ground for a death sentence,”** Paul explained. The chief priests had to TRUMP UP charges against Jesus. Both Pilate and Herod had found Jesus innocent of all charges. MOST IMPORTANTLY – God the Father was **“well pleased”** with His **“beloved Son’s”** perfect life.

But **on the cross** the sinless, innocent Jesus died. Died – AS OUR SAVIOR – as our **Substitute**. Jesus was condemned to death **because we** HAD STOOD CONDEMNED under God's law. Paul points out how the **people of Jerusalem** and their **rulers** had acted IN REBELLION against God. Can't we see the same thing in **our** lives? Just look at your **life last week**. Where there times you rebelled against **what God said** should BE THE PRIORITIES in your life – rebelled against **what God said** should be the way you treat your children – spouse – parents – brothers/sisters? Where there times you just plainly didn't do what God CLEARLY TOLD you to do? God won't let us SHRUG that off with an "Oh, well...." God says that's sin and continues, **"The soul that sins, it shall die."**

Yet what a **"word of encouragement"** we have here! Right here we see JUST HOW GOOD our Good Shepherd is. Jesus **"laid down His life"** on the cross to pay the debt of our sin. Or in that vision from Revelation – Jesus washes us clean in His shed blood. Jesus clothes us with the **"white robe"** of His holy life. Later in this sermon Paul preaches, **"I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Him anyone who believes is justified."** Trusting in Jesus our Good Shepherd we have God's **forgiveness** of all our sins – we have **peace** with God – we have **eternal life** in heaven. How can we NOT BE THRILLED and encouraged with that message?!

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers He has fulfilled for us by raising up Jesus." On this Good Shepherd Sunday we are also encouraged by...

II. The message of God's faithfulness to His Word.

BEFORE Paul preached his sermon the people had heard **"the reading of the Law and the Prophets."** WHY had God given the Jews the OT? **Why** do we still bother to read it today? The OT is about three quarters of the Bible. It has some pretty strange names in it – **Habakkuk – Haggai – Zephaniah**, etc. The OT covers a long period of time – time we classify as ANCIENT HISTORY. But that doesn't make the OT BORING history!

The OT – as the NT – is the message of **salvation**. THROUGH the OT God proclaimed again and again **His promise** of a Savior. Jesus could honestly say about the OT, **"These are they which testify about Me."** With His law God showed the people their CONTINUING NEED for a Savior. **With His gospel** God kept His promise of the Savior CONTINUALLY BEFORE the eyes of His people. God gave the OT SO THAT when the Savior finally came they people would **"recognize"** Him. What does Paul do here to PROVE Jesus is the **promised** Savior? He quotes the OT over and over. The OT is NOT ABOUT THE JEWS but **all about Jesus!** Sure it involves the Jews and the Promised Land because God had promised that the Savior of all **would be born** a Jew in the land of the Jews.

"The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning Him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath." Many of the Jews of Paul's day did what many people STILL DO today. They make the Bible **nothing more** than a BOOK OF RULES and regulations. **"Do this and you shall live."** They see the Bible AS MYTHS and fables telling us to BE GOOD people and live good lives and be GOOD NEIGHBORS. They miss the whole point of the Bible. We haven't been **good people living** good lives. We desperately need a Savior from sin and hell. We need a Good Shepherd to **"lay down His life"** for us. God gave us His Word to lead us to Jesus. God's Word is the **"green pastures and quiet waters"** God uses to **"restore our souls."**

What a **"word of encouragement"** we have here! God fulfilled His promise of a Savior. We CAN TRUST God's Word. We can COUNT ON God to keep His promises. Take another look at Psalm

23. ***“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*** Take that vision in Revelation. ***“They are before the throne of God and in front of the Lamb. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”*** Hear Jesus say, ***“I give them eternal life, they shall never perish.”*** Those aren’t just NICE THOUGHTS – they are God’s promises. They aren’t from a HALLMARK card but God’s inspired Word. They are **promises** we can confidently count on God to keep.

Do you see why today is **so comforting** and precious? Here’s one more **“message of encouragement”**...

III. The message of God firmly in control of all things.

“The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning Him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. When they had carried out all that was written about Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.” How did THINGS LOOK that **first Good Friday** and Easter weekend? The chief priests thought they were FINALLY DONE with Jesus. He was dead and **buried** – GONE FOR GOOD – or **so they thought**. That’s also the way the disciples saw things. ***“We had hoped He was the one who was going to redeem Israel,”*** the Emmaus disciples said. ***“Had hoped”*** – but NO LONGER. As those women headed out to Jesus’ grave they FULLY EXPECTED to find Jesus’ body **dead** and **cold** – His grave tightly sealed – NOT WIDE OPEN and **empty**.

“But God raised Him from the dead, and for many days He was seen” by many people. Take another look at Holy Week and Easter. God was FIRMLY IN CONTROL all along – working all things according to His plans. Jesus died on that cross JUST AS God had planned. And Jesus rose from the dead JUST AS God had planned. **Nobody** was going to throw a MONKEY WRENCH into **God’s** plans. God’s plans don’t go DOWN THE DRAIN.

What a **“word of encouragement”** that is for us today! Our **Good Shepherd** NOT ONLY has us firmly and safely in His hands – His hands are FIRMLY IN CONTROL of **all** things. God gave John that vision of the **saints triumphant** in heaven to encourage His people in the DARK DAYS and **trying times** of this life. At times it CAN LOOK as if evil and wickedness will triumph – as if ***“the gates of hell will prevail”*** against Christ’s Church – as if we Christians are nothing but BIG LOSERS. But look again at that ***“great multitude before the throne of God and in front of the Lamb.”*** There’s the ULTIMATE VICTORY. We are ***“more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”***

What darker day is there than when we must ***“walk through the valley of the shadow of death”*** – whether it’s the death of a loved one or our own death? EVEN THEN we need ***“fear no evil – for Thou art with me.”*** EVEN THEN our Good Shepherd is FIRMLY IN CONTROL turning defeat into victory – robbing death of its sting – taking us HOME to heaven – giving us ***“the crown of life.”*** WHAT a **“word of encouragement!”**

“Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak!” Do you know someone who needs ***“a word of encouragement”***? Share your Good Shepherd with them. Brighten their day and life by PASSING ALONG to them **what you know** about Jesus – our ***“Good Shepherd.”*** Amen.

“The Lord’s My Shepherd” on insert