

Sunday, February 12th sermon: "Christ Died Like a Sheep -- The God of All Comforts (Pt 5)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,
by John Pittman Hey

Isaiah 53:6-7; John 10:9-18

God comforts His people, primarily by forgiving our sins, cleansing us from all unrighteousness, and reconciling us to Himself. Judgment is taken away, and everlasting life is promised!

One of the greatest metaphors God uses to comfort His people is that of the Shepherd and His sheep.

God uses this metaphor to express His love and comfort for His people. He denounces the false and wicked shepherds who did not protect the sheep.

In all this, the metaphor refers to sheep being scattered, wandering away, and fleeing due to fear. These are pictures of the sins of the Lord's people, that cause them to disobey Him and leave Him.

Yet God is tenderly disposed to His sheep! He promises to appoint a faithful shepherd, the Lord Jesus, to rescue and protect His flock.

Jesus invoked the metaphor to describe saving His people from their sin. Wicked men demanded that Christ denounce poor sinners, but Jesus rather declares His joy over one lost sinner who repents, and is rescued by the Good Shepherd!

In John 10, Christ suddenly extends this metaphor in a startling way – He promises to save His sheep by dying for them!

Normally, the shepherd's life is more valuable than the whole flock, yet God the Father is pleased with His Son, when Jesus lays down His Own life to save His sheep.

The Father gave the sheep to Christ. The sheep have no say in the matter! They are assigned to Christ by God.

But they are changed, so that they follow the Good Shepherd, they hear His voice, they obey Him, where once they had wandered away from God. This is why Peter teaches that the sheep are healed by the death of Christ – healed from their disobedience and straying from God.

God gave the sheep to His Son, because He determined to save them from death! They follow Him with changed hearts, because of His kindness toward them!

Normally, in this world, all sheep ultimately lose their lives, but not so for Christ's sheep! The goodness of our Shepherd is that He dies to save us, and thereby gives us eternal life, so that we never perish.

There is a special pathos in this metaphor, in this death of the Shepherd to save His sheep. The night Jesus went to Calvary to die for us, He recalled the promise of olden times, that God would smite the Shepherd, and the sheep would be scattered. It was God who smote our Lord Jesus, in our place, and for our crimes, on the cross.

Nowhere is this drama more poignantly expressed than in Isaiah 53. There, the substitution of Jesus in our place, to suffer God's wrath against our sins, laid upon Jesus, is graphically described.

There, God uses the metaphor once again to sadly, yet gently, describe our sins: "all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Jesus, the iniquities of us all."

What a gentle, comfortable, and subdued description of our rebellion, and disobedience, and fleeing from the face of our holy and righteous God! What a muted description of our crimes against Him! These are our lostness, our sin against God. Our own faults have doomed us to destruction.

What a subdued description. Our God in pity for us, likens our sins to the foolish delinquencies of poor, helpless, stupid sheep.

But God lays on our Jesus, our Savior, all our transgressions, and punishes Him in our place.

Some false teachers dispute the way in which Christ was made like His people at the incarnation. They try to use Christ's incarnate humanity to deny our sin nature, our fall in Adam, our original sin, by claiming that if we were so, then Christ must also be fallen, and guilty of Adam's sin, and therefore He could never die as a perfect sacrifice in our place.

But there was never any sin in Christ, because He was not born in Adam. Adam did not represent Jesus in his sin in the Garden.

Rather, Christ is the second Adam, born of the Holy Ghost, come to save His people from their doom in Adam.

Christ is flesh and blood, God incarnate in human flesh, with a human mind and heart, and natural desires, but perfectly obedient to God His Father.

In Isaiah 53, there is that final, astounding turn in the metaphor, that pictures for us the critical way in which Jesus is like us in His humanity.

Because it is necessary that our Redeemer be made like the ones He will die to save, Isaiah points out this truth, that in some way, our Good Shepherd is made like His Own sheep!

Not that Jesus ever went astray like sheep, or turned to His Own way like sheep, or was foolish like sheep, or stubborn like sheep, or helpless like sheep, or driven away by fear like sheep.

No, what does Isaiah lament: that our Shepherd, our Savior, our Substitute, died like a sheep!

After God laid all our crimes upon Jesus, it is said, that "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and like a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth!"

In Isaiah's telling of our justification, there are two different sheep: the disobedient sheep who have gone astray, and the obedient Lamb, Who died for those sheep who went astray!

No wonder John the Baptist cried out, when He laid eyes on Jesus, "behold, the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world!"

No wonder the Saints forever in glory worship and praise the Lamb, for He was slain, and has redeemed us to God by His blood!

By taking on His role as our Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus comforts His people who had gone astray!

Our Good Shepherd was, indeed, made like His brethren, so that He could die in our place, and bring eternal life to His sheep who were lost!