

Pastor Ben Libby
 Sermon
 5/22/2019

To Jesus Christ, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification, be glory forever Amen.

The Word of the Lord which forms a portion for our sermon text this morning comes to us from Psalm 119, starting at the One-hundredth and Sixty-first verse:

Psalm 119:161-176 ¹⁶¹ Princes persecute me without a cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your word. ¹⁶² I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure. ¹⁶³ I hate and abhor lying, *But* I love Your law. ¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous judgments. ¹⁶⁵ Great peace have those who love Your law, And nothing causes them to stumble. ¹⁶⁶ LORD, I hope for Your salvation, And I do Your commandments. ¹⁶⁷ My soul keeps Your testimonies, And I love them exceedingly. ¹⁶⁸ I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, For all my ways are before You. ¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word. ¹⁷⁰ Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word. ¹⁷¹ My lips shall utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes. ¹⁷² My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness. ¹⁷³ Let Your hand become my help, For I have chosen Your precepts. ¹⁷⁴ I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law is my delight. ¹⁷⁵ Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; And let Your judgments help me. ¹⁷⁶ I have gone astray like a lost sheep; **Seek Your** servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.

This is the Word of God. Congregation may be seated.

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

Today is the second Sunday after Easter Sunday. In our church calendar, this Sunday has become *Good Shepherd Sunday*. This is the Sunday that takes the time to recognize Jesus as our Good Shepherd. This is not an idea that we came up with, rather it is an idea that is revealed and repeated in the Bible. As our responsive Psalm said, **Psalm 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.** Jesus Himself said in our Gospel reading, **John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.**

But the word "Good" really doesn't do the Good Shepherd justice. If something today receives the qualifying term "good", that isn't regarded as

good enough. If something really is good, then surely, we can describe it in more glowing terms than simply just "good". Good isn't at the same level as "great", and it's not close to "amazing". Maybe it is just the evolution of our modern language. Something that is described as "good" simply does not cut us for us in 2019.

But, despite our ramped-up speech, Good is still Good. There is nothing wrong with being Good. "Good" is still good enough. Think about it. What do people want? A "Good" person as a spouse. A "Good" house and home to raise their family. A "Good" country to live in, free from persecution and crime. If you had these things, as many of us do, then

it can be correctly summarized that you have a “Good” life. Good is often good enough, and essentially, it’s what people are looking for...

Our sermon text makes that clear. It really spells out and fleshes out what makes our Shepherd so “Good”. What makes our Good Shepherd so Good? It is the way that He tends His sheep! It is not in a demanding and demonstrative way. That might be the way the outsiders see it. But to fully understand and appreciate what Jesus does for us, you need to experience that Shepherding firsthand. This psalm describes our relationship to our God beautifully. It describes how we are guided by our Good Shepherd, first and foremost with His Good Book. It also describes the gratitude that all sheep feel for the Good Shepherd because as Jesus said, the Good Shepherd laid down His life for us! And so, we pray **MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDIATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR MAKER AND REDEEMER, AMEN.**

Princes persecute me without a cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your word. ¹⁶² I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure. ¹⁶³ I hate and abhor lying, But I love Your law. ¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous judgments. ¹⁶⁵ Great peace have those who love Your law, And nothing causes them to stumble.

Our sermon text is very distinct and unique. The One-Hundredth and Nineteenth Psalm is a special one. It is the longest Chapter in the whole entire Bible. Why is it so long? Well, this psalm was written in the acrostic style. The whole psalm corresponds to the Hebrew alphabet. The first 8 verses of Psalm 119 each start with the first letter of Hebrew, the Alef. The next 8 verses start with the second letter of the alphabet, the Bet. This continues all throughout the psalm. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and all 22 have 8 verses that start out with those letters, thus 176 verses.

It is appropriate that such a unique and wonderful psalm really describes the greatness that is the Word of God. That is the overarching theme of this psalm. It starts out saying **Psalm 119:1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD!** And that message gets repeated multiple times throughout this hymn. The most well-known verse from this psalm is **Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.**

Again, in our text verses of this psalm, (which consists of the last 2 letters of the Hebrew alphabet), that same sentiment also gets repeated. The psalmist says here that His heart stands in awe of the Word, that finding the Word is like finding a great treasure, that the love of the Law is likened to the opposite of lying.

Another thing to point out and recognize here is that the psalm uses different words for God’s Word. If you go through the text, you can see the word “WORD” used 5 different times. But the Word of God is referred to many more times than just 5 times in these 16 verses. Just look at how many different synonyms are used here for the Word of God! “The Word”, “Your Law”, “Your righteous judgments”, “Your commandments”, “Your Testimonies”, “Your Statues”, “Your precepts”... While each word may have a specific meaning that is meant to be called to mind, you can think of each different word to be the whole Word of God. So, when the psalmist is talking about the Law or His commandments, He isn’t just talking about what we would refer to as the doctrine of the Law, rather the whole counsel of God’s Word.

How does the Good Shepherd guide and guard His sheep? It’s simple, the Good Shepherd shepherds by the book, that is, the Good Book.

So, let’s stop for a moment from our everyday grazing, and ponder exactly what we are grazing on. It is very easy to take the Bible for granted, it has always been there, and God promises that no matter what happens in this life the Word of Life will never

be far from any of us. We Christians know our Bible well. Many parts of it are memorized, and for good reason! We see it all over the place, in secular and non-secular places. We quote the Bible. We see the Bible get misquoted. But the Bible is just one of many religious tomes. Many other religions also have many other religious writings. What makes our Good Book the so Good?

Well, for the Christian, it all comes down to the Bible, at least it should. When people who call themselves Christians start to listen to other thoughts and ideas that are outside of Scripture, that is when false doctrine sets in. But for the real followers of Christ, the Bible is all we have! It is not just a wise book that has some very good advice and proverbs to live your life by. It certainly is that, but it is also much more! It is the very Word of God Himself! This is not just some good advice, this is the Word of Life, breathed by the Triune God and given to us for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. There is nothing else besides the Holy Word of God!

Saying, "The Bible is all we have" is a bad way of putting it. The Bible truly is all we have, and it is more than enough for any situation life may throw at us! Whenever there is something great that happens in our lives, there is a Bible passage to express proper gratitude. Whenever there is a tragedy in our lives, there is a comforting Word from Your God to You found within its pages. The Bible contains history, examples of what happened to people who didn't follow God's Word and people who did. The Bible contains prophecy, things spelled out hundreds of years before they occurred on earth. The Bible shows us our God, it shows us His power, and it shows us a path to eternal life with Him.

And yet, how easy it can be to take the Bible for granted. How easy it is for us to neglect our own personal Bible study. We humans needed to be reminded constantly, and once we think we know everything the Bible says, we forget those reminders that God makes to us. Our spiritual enemies will

always try to attack the Word. If they can get us to doubt its authority or neglect its words, then they can cut the legs of our faith. "You're really going to put your trust in a book that was written a thousand years ago?"

Well, yeah! When it's the Word of God, you bet! When it comes to the Good Book, God's Word, "Good" is just the tip of the iceberg. Just look at how the Psalmist here describes the Word...

¹⁶² I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure.

¹⁷² My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness.

¹⁷⁴ I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law is my delight.

But how could we ever relate to these words? It seems like this person not only loves God's Word, but he also keeps it. **Psalm 119:163 I hate and abhor lying, But I love Your law.** Does that sound like you? **Psalm 119:166 LORD, I hope for Your salvation, And I do Your commandments.** Does that sound like you? **Psalm 119:173 For I have chosen Your precepts...Psalm 119:167 And I love them exceedingly.** . Does that sound like you?

We certainly love and try to live by God's Holy Word. But we also know how short we come in actually doing what it says. God's Word tells us how we are to conduct our lives, and yet, our sinful natures often take us down different avenues. More often, we relate more with the sentiment of Paul in **Romans 7:18-19 ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.**

And yet, the words of this Psalm are very relatable to us. This person is clearly in need; the person needs help! Just like us, this person is expressing the need for their God. He needs God to hear his plea, just like we do. **Psalm 119:169-170**

¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word. ¹⁷⁰ Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word.

That is why Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Yes, He is Good all by Himself, apart from us completely. Jesus was perfect. Again, “Good” applies here. But it also pales in comparison of what His righteousness is. Many men are described as “good”. To be a good man is something that surely most men aspire to. But there was only 1 purely Good Man. The God-Man, Jesus Christ the righteous!

We all can’t truly relate to being “Good”. But we can all relate to the last verse of this many versed Psalm. Psalm 119:176 ¹⁷⁶ I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments. The Psalmist admits what we must admit as well. We aren’t good! This should sound like us! We have gone astray! We know what we are commanded, and we know how many times we have failed to keep those commands.

But that is the reason we call Jesus OUR GOOD Shepherd. He seeks us out. When we go astray, He finds us and restores us. When we sin, like we do all the time, we have a loving and merciful Shepherd who is willing to forgive us and bring us back into the fold!

Much has been said in many a sermon about the nature of sheep. They are defenseless animals who really can’t protect themselves. They are raised for their wool and sometimes their meat. But without a shepherd, they are for the most part lost. Not only are they defenseless, but they are unintelligent as well. No wonder we often get compared to these creatures!

But really, when you think about, sheep were created to be cared for. Most sheep don’t shed their wool on their own, they need help. They need a shepherd who will not only protect them and look out for them, but they also need someone who will take care of their needs as well!

And that is our relationship with Jesus in a nut shell. If we were on our own, we wouldn’t stand a chance. Our many wanderings have left us exhausted and afraid. Our many trespasses weigh us down, like pounds of fleece that we cannot shed. But then the Good Shepherd finds us! He sheers away our pounds of sins. In the arms of our loving Savior, we are free from the weight of sin, and we will graze in the pasture of Heaven forever with Him!

Being a sheep may not sound very appealing. For those, such as ourselves, who place so much importance on “A book written hundreds of years ago”, we may be called sheep derogatorily by others who see themselves as more enlightened than we are. And yes, being a sheep is not a desirable comparison. Who would choose to be a sheep?

Well... we would! Being a sheep is not a great choice. Unless there is a shepherd, that is. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and there is no better place to be than in His sheepfold! Yes, we go astray all the time. But that’s what makes our Shepherd so Good! He finds us, forgives us, and restores us! Jesus is the Good Shepherd. In this case, “Good” isn’t just good enough. Good is what everyone needs, and it is what we truly have in Jesus! AMEN!