

America is a nation with an **identity** crisis. The only value we can seem to agree on (as a people) is that **diversity** is a good thing....which is another way of saying we like being all over the map in every arena.

We prize individualism, with everyone free to do whatever is right in their own eyes while they seek to maximize their own potential.

Think about that picture... a country full of people all going in different directions... **desperate** to find themselves.... knocking people down as they gonot thinking a thing about it...

Not surprisingly....that picture looks a lot like sheepwhich don't stay in a flock naturally..... left to themselves they will go in ANY direction they think they can get their **needs met**.....

On the whole....We are one of the best pictures in historyof sheep **without** a shepherd.....

Rightly we could confess with Isaiah....."All of **us** like sheep have gone astray.....we have turned EVERY ONE to his **OWN** way....."

So.... more than a fix for our economy..... more than better education..... more than we need oil.....

Each of us..... need **a Shepherd**..... someone to LEAD us....and instruct us..

Not just ANY shepherd.....though.....we need one we can **trust**.... one who is faithful...one who is true...

We need..... nothing short of ...the **GOOD** Shepherd.... the One sent by God to seek and to save that which was lost....

The only one.... who actually **CARES** for your soul....

(I was impressed by the Lord the other night as I was praying for this mtg)... that some of you would come in here today thinking.... Not one person on the planet gives a rip about me.....

What God wants to remind you of today... is that He has sent you **a Shepherd**...

One who has laid down His life to save His sheep... and who is now a **FRIEND** that sticks closer than a brother....

I want you to RECEIVE His friendship today.... Receive His authority over your life...

He is the ONE that the editor of Ecclesiastes closes his book pointing to.....

Jesus Christ.....

The **Good** Shepherd

You recall that the theme of Ecclesiastes has been a **desperate** one.....

Solomon spent a lifetime searching for meaning (in this present world)... He tried to figure out how everything fit together.....

And he came up with **one** conclusion.....NOTHING makes sense!

Ecclesiastes has this conclusion both at the beginning of the book and here at the end.....

Ecclesiastes 12:8

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; **all** is vanity."

No matter what you are trying to use to fill up your soul....**EVERYTHING** is going to leave you empty....unless you seek to be filled with **JESUS**.... He alone can satisfy your deepest needs.....

THAT is why God put this book in the Bible..... to vividly show you there simply are no other options....

You might recall... that this book is called Ecclesiastes.... because "The Preacher" ... is a title = the **convener**... the leader of an assembly.....

Ecclesia is the Greek word for church – the **assembly** of those who are in Christ...

In English... then... the title might be..... The Preacher...or Words of the Leader of the Church...

Solomon (even though he did not have NT revelation) was the Pastor of Israel during his reign.... the **prenatal** church (if you will)

In some ways.... he was not a very good pastor.....**but** he DID have a relationship with the Shepherd.....

He LOONGED for Israel to know this Good Shepherd..... the One who personally leads Israel like a flock...

See that here in the epilogue to our study....

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

" Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."

The Good Shepherd

1. Cares for His People through Pastors

A pastor... is just another word for a shepherd. Someone called by God to teach, lead and protect and **CARE** for....His blood bought sheep.

There is only ONE **Good** Shepherd..... (Jesus Christ) and He has appointed gifted men UNDER Him.... to **look after his flock** until He returns....

Sad but true....while pastors are gifted for this task.... their hearts are prone to the **same pitfalls** as everyone else....

Solomon (best example in the Bible) of a man especially anointed by God to judge and lead Israel (his flock) ...He was even at various times filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be God's instrument in recording the very Words of God that we now see in Scripture.....

Yet he sought to FILL His heart with substitutes for Christ from the world.....

Think about that..... an author of Scripture.... to whom God had appeared and made unfathomable promises to concerning Israel.....

Only scarcely knew the **fullness** of having the Good Shepherd satisfy the deepest needs of his heart.....like you can....b/c of the coming of Jesus Christ...

For Paul writes to those of you who are partakers of the gospel....

Colossians 2:9-10

"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and **you have been filled** in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."

Through trusting in Jesus Christ....(gospel)....your soul can know COMPLETE love... COMPLETE joy..... COMPLETE peace.....

Every one of your cravings...can be put to rest by becoming **CONTENT** with the LOVE of Jesus poured out into your heart.....

Solomon did not know the fullness of this reality.....he only had a **foretaste**...

So... he sought after fullness in the world.... through **lust**..... and greed... and pride...

THAT is why he came up **empty**..... and that is why his sons....saw through the veneer....and ditched the Lord altogether...

But don't be too hard on him..... he only had a third of the revelation we do.... and don't we still wander off to do the same thing?

I was reflecting this week..... on all the people... this wayward pastor Solomon must have **HURT** along the way.....by his sin....

Some of **you**..... have been HURT by the sins of pastors in your past.....and you still have the scars....

I **hate** that b/c nothing grieves me more than when I end up hurting the ones I want to bless....

I want to encourage you even now..... (if that is your situation)....to forgive them.... to entrust them to the **STRICT** judgment of God they will incur by His hand for their error....

And grant them the grace that forgives you when you sin against the same ONE who is Shepherding their souls...

It is amazing to me..... but in spite of his sin..... God used the Preacher (Solomon) ... to point Israel to the Shepherd...

by him taking great **CARE** to seek out, arrange and write down God's Wisdom.. which we now have in the Bible...

We see that (most pointedly) in Proverbs.....(also in some of the Psalms..here and in the Song of Solomon)....

So even now.....you can thank God for Solomon..... as **fallible** as he was.....

God's grace was greater than all his sin.....and he was used mightily of God to bring you the **true Word** of your Shepherd:

Ecclesiastes 12:9-10

" Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with **great care**. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth."

Lots of wise Christians out there today..... it is not a rarity to find people in any given congregation that are **wiser** than their pastors.....

Sadly....though.....a good number of them use whatever wisdom God has given them... exclusively for THEMSELVES....

Like other resources entrusted to us for the benefit of God's flock..... wise men often HOARD what God has given to them....

Pastors are called by God to **teach**.... to **dispense** God's wisdom to His flock....

Carefully and lovingly applying both the encouraging **and** the difficult Words of God to their lives...

Because.... (as sheep)....we don't always FEEL like going after what is best for us.....

The other day... I was REALLY wrestling with God over something..... so much so.... (sad to say) that even though I knew the problem was in my soul.....

I did not want to go to the Scriptures..... I needed someone to hand feed me the truth....

So I went to a book written by a pastor who I know loves me..... and applied those truths to my heart...

That's the role of a pastor.... to the degree that we are finding our fullness in Jesus Christ (and not the world)... we can be used by God...to care for YOUR soul...

THE **Primary** way.... that God wants to extend His loving care to you.... is by displacing the LIES you have bought into (from the world).... with His **carefully chosen words**....in which you can DELIGHT...

Ecclesiastes 12:10-11

"The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by **one** Shepherd."

All Scripture is breathed out by God.....(2 Tim. 3) all over the world ... right now...**One Shepherd** is speaking His Words to His sheep....

The Good Shepherd

2. Speaks to His People through Scripture

One downside to all of our digital communication is that almost none of it is **retained**.... in fact.... some of you go to great lengths so yours WON'T be retained..... (which ought to tell you something about its value)...

But back in the day....when people in love actually wrote on paper.....or at least printed out what they had written.....

People **KEPT** love letters..... whether it was in a shoe box..... or a drawer....or even an album.... how many of you??

The communication.... the expressions of care.... and the revelation of the heart... were so precious....

That you wanted to be able to go BACK and **reread** them... to cherish them....

Well.... GOD has collected a group of love letters for you..... together they are words of TRUTH....though which you can enter in to the JOY of your Savior.....

They have been collected by.... preserved by... and given to you by the LORD as a **gift**.... to lead you in the way everlasting...

The LORD is OUR Shepherd.... Jesus, the son of David...

The prophets foretold his coming.....

Ezekiel 34:23

"And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall **feed** them: he shall **feed** them and be their shepherd."

We are celebrating the birth of two baby boys into our congregation this week.....

As I think about their mom's **doting** over them.... I am thanking God for the special relationship that will exist in the years to come between son and mother.....

She will do a lot for her son.... change diapers..... wash clothes..... she will protect him from illness (as best she can).... but what is of UTMOST interest to that baby boy (maybe partly because he is a boy....) is what??

the **FOOD!**... that mama will lovingly provide for him as he grows...

Likewise.... our Good Shepherd.... knows exactly what food His lambs need for their **souls**....

- You know what it feels like for your soul to be hungry don't you?

Kind of like physical hunger.....there is just a **restlessness**... an **EMPTINESS**...

a **LONGING**.... for meaning... for identity and purpose.....

ALL of which you can **try** to fill with the cotton candy of the world.....

But all of which can only be FILLED with the **true food** of God's Holy Word....

Scripture is to your soul what grain is to cattle..... it is protein for your innermost being..

Without a steady diet of it any Christian is going to be **weak** at best.....

You need to know **WHY** that is.....(we are going to explore this connection more in the fall as we unpack John 1)....

Jesus... our Good Shepherd **is** the LIVING WORD.... so when you prayerfully eat His Word....(by receiving and believing the truth).... you are partaking of **HIM**... you are welcoming HIM

You are taking into yourself... and **digesting** (applying) to your soul.... the reality of the PERSON of Jesus.... your Good Shepherd...

Eccles. 12:11 says these collected sayings (Bible) given by One Shepherd are like

"NAILS firmly fixed...."

In other words... because God never changes.... neither does His Word.....

Psalm 119:89

" Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens."

Everything else in your life will **CHANGE**.... like the shifting sands on a beach.... but the truth of the Bible will remain fixed....

Like those spikes in climbing wall..... when you begin to climb up there.... you put the well being of your entire physical future on the line... as you hang by one of

those pegs.... (even though you have no idea who made the wall or what condition it is in)...

God guarantees that **His** PEGS will hold you...as you cling to them....

Words of truth and words of POWER.....

Words that give you IDENTITY and Purpose.....

If you will SEEK Him..... Your Shepherd will speak to you personally and intimately through His WORD....

it is through His Word that His Spirit will guide you into green pastures and beside **quiet waters**....providing the ROCK solid nourishment for all the work God has for you to do...

But we still have a **problem**..... that is that even though our Shepherd is continually pointing us to those good and satisfying truths.....

Our **sinful souls** are continuously **straying**like stupid sheep.....who think the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence....

??

So... your Shepherd will also use portions of His Word as a **GOAD**....

Goads were sharp sticks which shepherds used to poke sheep going in the wrong direction... goads aren't sugar coated.....because they are corrective ..they are designed to **hurt**.

THAT is why you don't feel like reading your Bible and seeking the Lord when you are going after some idol.... some sin.....which you secretly love....and want to rely on....

You know that the Spirit through the Word will arrest you... and **poke** you so as to get you back on the path of righteousness where you can find rest....and where you can accomplish the good works God has called you to do....

Remember Saul on the road to Damascus?...he had been hearing the good news of the Savior.....yet he was stubbornly choosing to **rely on himself** and his OWN righteousness.... instead of receiving the free gift of Christ....

So... as the risen Christ appeared to him... he said...

Acts 26:14

" 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is **hard** for you to kick against the goads.' "

In other words.... don't you realize Saul?.... I am THE LORD... I have called you by name..... the **sting** of my rebuke is only going to become **more severe** the longer you resist my direction for you??

If you are headed in the wrong direction this morning..... Your Shepherd is giving you a loving GOAD.....

"Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of **refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord,"

If the LORD is **Your** Shepherd... cherish and treasure His speaking to you through the Word...

It is His means of RESCUING you from much calamity.....

AND building you up in the gospel...

Christ promises to speak through His Word... and He wants you to use it as a **guidepost** as you encounter what **men** say about him....

Ecclesiastes 12:12

"My son, beware of anything **beyond** these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

Long before Barnes and Noble.....or the unlimited opinions of the blogosphere.....

People have been tempted to want **ADD to** Scripture..... with some new insight.....

Whether they are trying to fill in the gaps of mysteries only God knows.....

Or more common to our day... dumbing down the majesty of God in trying to make him more like humans....

Your Shepherd says..... **BEWARE** of that!

Make sure whatever you STUDY about God..... **lines up** with what God has permanently revealed HERE in these firm collected sayings...

Isaiah 8:20

"To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn."

In addition..... make sure that you don't spend what LITTLE devotional time and energy you have..... wearing yourself OUT with the opinions of man.... IN PLACE of....you personal interaction and application of the Scriptures.....

Some of you LOVE tangents..... (and intellectual arguments...)

Never before in the history of the world have you had more opportunities to wear yourself out on things that don't really matter....

All the while Your Shepherd is waiting to speak to you through His Word!

The final truth that God wants to point us to through our study of Ecclesiastes....

The Good Shepherd

3. Wants Train you to Fear **Only** Him

I want you to think for a moment about what you FEAR the most.....

Psychologists often analyze people's dreams to try and discover this ,, but I think you **know**....what functions as a **FEAR – motivator** in your life...

For most of you it is the thought of being REJECTED by your peers.....

It takes you to great and expensive lengths..... consuming most of your free time and mental energy....

For others it might be fear of **illness**..... so you do everything in your power to kill every germ within five feet of you...or your kids...

Might be the death of a dream you have had your whole life...

Whatever it isthe Good Shepherd wants to set you free from it...by training you to only fear ONE thing.....

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."

Six times in this book.... Solomon has told us that Fearing God is the basic solution to walking in wisdom....

If you fear God.... regard him in His proper position as the center of all things..... you are on your way to worshipping Him... and to avoiding serving the creation instead....

For everybody from Adam... to Abraham.... to John the Baptist.....Fearing God and Keeping His commandments has summarized the **whole DUTY** of God's people...

Stay in the fold.... walk between the lines..... (that wasn't bad)...

But Christianity is FAR more than that.....it is FAR **better** than mere duty.....

B/C in sending His Only Son..... God has tripled the stakes of why we should walk in awe of Him....

John 10:11

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd **lays down his life for the sheep.** ...

While we were continually straying like stupid sheep..... God sent us a Shepherd....

Not only so that we could see how His sheep are supposed to live.....but so that we could see just how much God loves you.....by giving up His own son to suffer and die for your sin....

The Good Shepherd WILLINGLY **bore God's judgment** for **your** sin.....on the cross....

He was PUNISHED for your transgressions.....

And it is by His bloody stripes that you are HEALED from your iniquities.....

Ponder that..... FEAR the ramifications of that..... If God has gone to that length to save you from sin..... what business do you have even toying with it?

Your sin.... all of it.... was completely atoned for by Jesus on the cross....

THEN... to prove that God's righteous standard of judgment has been satisfied and that all your sin is completely **FORGIVEN**...

God **RAISED** Jesus from the dead!

So that whoever believes in HIM will not be disappointed....

so that whoever **receives** Him can become a child of the Living God!

So that whoever **trusts** in Him as their Shepherd... can have eternal life!

It is ONE thing to have a God far off in the heavens..... sending down commands through His angels..... and through Moses...

And asking you to FEAR and OBEY Him.....

But is a totally different picture that we have a God....who sent us His Son.

And says.... I love you.... this much.....

If you love me..... walk in **awe** of me.... worship me..... and keep my Word.

Because....

This same loving... lowly servant – Shepherd....

Is soon going to return to **JUDGE** every deed done in the Body... both good and bad....

John 5:22

"The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

The whole duty of everyone who believes in the Son... is now to live every hour of your life.... under the reality that He is coming to call us to an account....

In the presence of this Lamb....this morning.... I want to call you to disclose your secrets....

Now...before the Day of Judgment.... confess them to Him..... ask Him for grace to confess them to those whom your sin has affected.....

Ecclesiastes 12:14

"For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."

Do you see why YOU need a Shepherd.....? You can't trust your heart..... and you sure can't trust the feelings of your flesh.....

Thank God... The LORD is our Shepherd....