

The Perfect Pastor

by Mariano Di Gangi

Mariano Di Gangi's sermon emphasizes Jesus as the perfect pastor who gathers, governs, and guards his flock through love and sacrifice.

Duration: 34:30

Scripture: Psalm 23:1-4, Luke 15:4-7, John 10:1-18, Galatians 3:28, Revelation 7:17

Topics: "Jesus", "Jesus as the Good Shepherd", "The Role of Pastors"

Description

Mariano Di Gangi emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the perfect pastor, contrasting Him with false shepherds who exploit rather than care for their flock. He illustrates how Jesus gathers, governs, and guards His sheep, highlighting His voluntary, vicarious, and victorious sacrifice for humanity. The sermon underscores the importance of recognizing Jesus' voice amidst the distractions of false philosophies and the need for unity within the church. Di Gangi calls believers to follow the Good Shepherd, who provides abundant life and eternal security. Ultimately, he encourages the congregation to commit themselves to Christ, the true shepherd who leads them to peace and fulfillment.

Transcript

Reading from the gospel according to John, the tenth chapter, beginning at verse 1. Hear now the reading of this portion of God's written and inspired word. These are the words of our Lord Jesus. I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in by some other way is a thief and a robber.

The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him for they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.

Jesus used this figurative speech but they didn't understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers but the sheep did not listen to them.

I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they might have life and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away.

Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he's a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd.

I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I laid down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.

They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me.

I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father.

On more than one occasion people have asked me, what do we call you? Do we call you Father? Indeed I have been so addressed on visiting in St. Joseph's and St. Michael's hospitals and told that I didn't have to pay the parking fee, Father, if you use this particular route. In service clubs where I've been privileged to speak, I've been addressed as Padre. Others, presumably with a southern Irish background, would address me as your reverence and on occasion as your eminence.

We come more close to the mark with the term minister and even closer with the biblical term pastor. Now what is the ideal or perfect pastor? If you listen to some of the vacancies committees in some churches, a perfect pastor is someone who is 30 years of age and has at least 35 years of practical pastoral experience. If he spends a good deal of time visiting the shut-ins and the seniors, well they fault him because he isn't looking after the young people who are the church of tomorrow.

If he preaches with voluminous notes, they say he's out to impress us with his erudition. If he dispenses with notes and speaks eye-to-eye, they say he's got the gift of gab, he's unprepared, he must have kissed the Blarney stone on his way to the pulpit. If he's got a vigorous, excited delivery because he passionately feels what he's saying, they'll say we don't come to church to get all stirred up, we want a sermon that is serene.

Well if serenity is the keynote of the preacher, then they say doesn't he believe what he's saying? Why can't he get excited about it? If he puts an emphasis on missions, they'll say that he is neglecting the home base. If he puts emphasis on the local church, he doesn't have a world vision, and so it goes. When you come down to it, the only perfect pastor to look after the flock of God is Jesus Christ, and this portrait of Jesus is one that is found in the strangest place in early Christian art, in one of those subterranean passages which honeycomb the soft stone under the city of Rome, going on perhaps for hundreds of miles of interconnected passageways.

You find one of the earliest pictorial representations of Jesus. He is pictured as a young man with a sheep curled behind his neck and draped over his shoulders, and he has found the sheep that was lost, and with joy in his heart, he's bringing it back to the fold. That is the way that Jesus wants us to think of him.

That is the way that he reveals himself to us. In the 15th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, that is precisely the picture. He is the shepherd who leaves the ninety and nine safely in the fold and goes out in search of the one that was lost before it falls prey to those who would ravage and kill, and in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of John, as we have read tonight, he describes himself as the pastor, as the shepherd, as the one who looks after the flock, as the one who cares for the sheep, and that has implications for anyone who is in pastoral ministry today, and that has relevance for all who are ordained as elders and have a pastoral responsibility for their elders district, which is the district for which they are responsible as under shepherds, and that has a lot to say to all of us since we are sheep under his pastoral care.

In the passage of Scripture that we have read tonight, we get a picture of what this shepherd does, and I want to begin at the end and work back toward the beginning. Jesus says in verse 16, I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.

They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. Now what does that tell us about the activity of Jesus? It tells us that he is the shepherd who gathers the flock. Other sheep I have that are not of this sheep pen, these also I must bring.

He will gather what is away, that it all might come home again. The Apostle Paul picks this up at the wind-up of the third chapter of his letter to the Galatians when he says that in Christ there is no longer the distinction between Jew and Gentile. In Christ there is no longer the distinction between male and female.

In Christ there is no longer a distinction between slave and free, for they are all one in Christ Jesus. And isn't that what our Lord had in mind, the gathering in of people who were diverse in order that they might cluster around his personality and be made one? Our shepherd does not scatter the sheep. Our shepherd gathers the flock, and that's why he said, you shall be witnesses to me, beginning in Jerusalem, into Judea, into Samaria, to the ends of the earth, that you might go and make disciples of all nations.

The in-gathering of people who were diverse, the bringing together of people who might even be at odds with one another, to form one fold under one shepherd. He is the one who gathers. And here we find the doctrine of the Catholicity of the Church.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that Scripture authorizes the Roman Catholic Church with its imperial papacy. What I am saying is that the Christian Church is meant to have real Catholicity.

Slave and free, male and female, Jew and Gentile, learned and illiterate, rich and poor, young and old, one in Christ who gathers around himself and makes us one. The author of the book of the Revelation caught a glimpse of the glory of that final vision, that out of every tribe and tongue and kindred and people upon the face of the earth would be recruited the grandest choir that ever sang an anthem to the glory of God. He gathers them in.

He brings together the Catholicity and unity of the church is the work of this shepherd who brings them in and gathers them together. Now what does that tell us? It tells us that in the church of Jesus Christ there is no room for racial segregation. It tells us that in the church of Jesus Christ there is no room for social snobbery.

It tells us that in the church of Jesus Christ there is no place for sectarian divisions and unholy splits. We have no business scattering what he painstakingly is committed to gathering. The shepherd gathers the flock.

Other sheep I have which are not of this sheep pen I must bring them also that they might be one flock and one shepherd. He is a shepherd who gathers. But have you noticed that he is also a shepherd who governs.

He says I will bring them together. They will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock under one shepherd. This is precisely what had been prophesied by Micah in the fifth chapter of his prophetic work that in Bethlehem of Judea, a small one-horse town that would be overlooked by those who are impressed only by the metropolitan areas of the land, in little Bethlehem of Judah would be born one who would be the shepherd of my people Israel, who would be a king, who would bring righteousness and who would bring peace.

He comes not only to gather in what had gone astray and to bring together what was divided. He comes also to govern. He comes to rule for the fold is under his direction and there is room for only one supreme shepherd.

This is the truth that the Apostle Paul acknowledged when writing to the Colossians. He said that Jesus Christ alone was the head of the church. If there is only one fold and one flock there must be only one supreme shepherd to govern it all and his name is Jesus Christ.

How does he govern his people? He governs his people with his voice. Recall what was said earlier in the chapter. His sheep listen to his voice and he repeats this as a motif, as a theme over and over again in this passage.

My sheep hear my voice and they follow me and they discern between my voice and the voice of a stranger and they will not be misled. If you and I are part of his flock, if we acknowledge him as our shepherd, it will be seen in our willingness to listen to his voice and to follow his leading and to turn away from the sounds given out by the false shepherds who abound in this world of error. If we are governed by him who is the only shepherd of the flock, we will have an affinity for his voice.

I love the way that the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith puts it, that the Supreme Judge in matters of religious controversy is not a General Assembly, is not a synod, is not a presbytery, is not an autocratic minister, but the Holy Spirit who speaks in the scriptures. Our supreme authority for faith and morals is the voice of the shepherd who by his Holy Spirit speaks to us in the scriptures. Martin Luther and John Calvin were absolutely united on this point, that when we open the scriptures the mouth of God is opened and our ears and hearts should be opened to listen to the Master's voice.

To be a Christian means that we hear his voice and we follow his leading and we will not turn aside to the false philosophies that abound in our day. It means, for example, that we will know the difference between the philosophy that Jesus and his apostles give us and the false philosophy which says your pleasure and your happiness are the only thing that really matter. The hedonism that is absolutely rampant in our day is the voice of a false shepherd and people are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

So also is the false philosophy of nihilism, that there is no future, there is no future, there is no future, and tomorrow means nothing, nothing, nothing, and there are many young people who drive themselves into an artificial state of desperation because they've espoused the false philosophy of nihilism, that there is nothing that is really worthwhile, so why not destroy yourself now? Others are led astray by the false philosophy of materialism, that it does profit a man everything to gain the whole world even if he loses his own soul. Still others are misled by false theologies, the idea that repentance doesn't really matter, that

faith in Jesus isn't an absolute necessity, but because God is love everybody's going to be saved ultimately. So what's the pressure, what's the urgency in calling people to repent and believe the gospel? The heresy of universalism is rampant today through most theological seminaries in North America and it's cutting the nerve of mission and it is stunting evangelistic outreach.

If that philosophy is true, why bother? If it is false, beware of following it. Still others listen to the voice of false shepherds who go around trumpeting an ethic that is totally unethical. We are concerned about the loss of life in the Gulf War, whether the life of people in the UN coalition or the life of people in the nation of Iraq.

We are concerned and we begin to hear the first reports, one pilot missing, another pilot shot down, another pilot taken captive, and we have come to accept the voice of those who propagate a false ethic of the senseless slaughter for most cases for a matter of convenience of 65,000 young lives every year through the curse of abortion is quite acceptable in a civilized and so-called Christian Canada, not to mention the million and a half a year who were sacrificed on the altar of convenience rather than medical necessity in the United States. There are false shepherds who give us a bill of goods that will damn us if we follow them. To be a Christian means that we are attuned to the shepherd's voice and when he speaks we follow, and if it's a false theology and a false ethic and a false way of looking at life, we will have nothing to do with it.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths.

He speaks, his sheep listen, and the flock follows him. Isn't that what God the Father said from highest heaven on the Mount of Transfiguration to the disciples? This is my beloved son, hear ye him. A Christian is one who listens to the shepherd's voice and will not be taken in by false philosophies, false theologies, and false systems of ethics.

He governs as well as gathers his sheep. Now there are those who govern in this world for the sake of fleecing rather than feeding the flock. There are those who govern in this world in order to dominate and to tyrannize and to exploit, but not Jesus.

I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. He is not like the hireling who sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep to save his own skin, letting the wolf attack the flock and scatter it. He does not care.

He cares nothing for the sheep, but Jesus governs and he seeks the good of his flock and he gives them life to superabundance. He gives his people the forgiveness of sins. He grants unto his own peace with God.

He fills our disillusioned hearts with the joy of the Holy Spirit. He takes the weakness of our wills and gives us strength to resist the power of evil. He looks at us in our mortality and bestows upon us life everlasting.

I am come that they might have life. He does not come to exploit the flock, but to gift the flock with all the graces that come out of the treasury of God. I know my sheep and I am known by them and I call them by name.

And that's where the whole matter becomes intensely personal. It becomes biblically intimate and in that context we understand the words of the 23rd Psalm which our choir rendered for us in a beautiful version

tonight. The Lord, this Lord, is my shepherd.

He is my pastor. I'm proud to be part of his flock, totally dependent upon his bounty. Because this Lord is my pastor, my shepherd, I shall not lack anything that I really need for this world or for the next.

In a time of turbulence he makes me to lie down in green pastures. In times of stress he leads me beside waters of stillness. He restores my soul and brings me back to where I ought to be when I have gone astray.

He is the one who will go with me through the dark valley of the deep shade, the valley of the shadow of death, and his rod and his staff will comfort me, defending me from all my enemies. He is a shepherd who gathers. He is a shepherd who governs.

One thing more, he is a shepherd who guards. He's already contrasted himself with the hireling who sees the wolf coming, so he runs and leaves the wolf to scatter and ravage the flock. But he also tells us that he is in contrast to the thief and the robber.

The thief, by the way, in the Greek text is called hocleptus, from which we get the word kleptomaniac. What's the difference between a thief and a robber? The thief seeks to deprive others of what is theirs by stealth. The robber, when he cannot succeed by being crafty, adds violence to his procedure.

So those who steal and those who plunder, Jesus says, I am not like that. I have not come to destroy the flock but to give it life, even if it means laying down my life to guard my people from certain danger. He speaks of his sacrifice.

He refers to the cross. See, the cross was no unforeseen accident that took Jesus by surprise at the end of his short life. The shadow of the cross was over his cradle at Bethlehem.

The shadow of the cross was mixed in with all the prophecies of his coming glory. Right from the beginning, God said that the serpent would snatch at his heel and wound him prior to being itself crushed by the heel of this Redeemer. He speaks of his sacrifice to guard the flock from danger.

And concerning this sacrifice, there are several things that we should note briefly but clearly. Our salvation depends on it. First, it is a voluntary sacrifice.

No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own accord. If that isn't a voluntary sacrifice, I don't know what is.

Or you've got the scheming of Caiaphas, and you've got the unconsecrated buffoonery of Herod, and you've got the political expediency of Pilate, and you've got the animosity and the antagonism of chief priests, rulers, and scribes, and the howling of a mindless mob that wants him dead. But in the final analysis, he lays down his life of himself. It is a voluntary sacrifice.

For even in the depth of his predicament, he could have called 10,000 angels to rescue him, but he did not. He could have come down from the cross and saved himself, but he did not. Willingly, of himself, he was to make that sacrifice.

It was a voluntary sacrifice. And the next thing that we should notice is that it was a vicarious sacrifice. I laid down my life for the sheep.

There are those who say that when Jesus came down from heaven and became man, he shared our poverty, he shared our pain, and on the cross he shared our brokenness, and now he can sympathize with us. That's true, but it falls wide of the mark of what the gospel says. He did not merely come down from heaven to sympathize with and identify with our brokenness, but to bear the penalty, the curse of our wickedness.

A voluntary sacrifice and a vicarious sacrifice, he dies in the place of and for the benefit of those who deserve to die so that they might be spared from the judgment of God. You can't understand the 53rd chapter of Isaiah apart from that. You cannot really celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper apart from that.

This is my body which is broken for you. This is my blood which is poured out for the remission of the sins of many. He does more than identify with our brokenness.

He bears the penalty of our wickedness and dies in our stead, and it is a victorious sacrifice. I laid down my life, and I have power to take it up again, and on the third day, that is precisely what he will do, and he will defeat death and bring life and immortality to light. The hymn writer put it beautifully, simply, and powerfully when he said, Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God, he to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.

God forbid that we should dismiss the doctrine of his voluntary, vicarious, and victorious atonement as a dull, dead doctrine. I tell you that your salvation depends upon it, and your inspiration for Christian service depends upon it. The Apostle Paul said, we do what we do to the point of utter exhaustion, even when it's not appreciated, even when it brings us pain, because the love of Christ constrains us.

We don't do it for people, we do it for Jesus, because of all that Jesus, kind shepherd, did for us. A shepherd who gathers what has gone astray and blends it into oneness. A shepherd who governs, rules, leads by his word and by his spirit.

A shepherd who guards his people with his very life, that the sheep might be spared. He is willing to be sacrificed. God grant that we beholding the portrait of this shepherd, might love him, worship him, and serve him.

And then at the last experience the fulfillment of what we find in the seventh chapter of the book of the Revelation, that he shall lead his flock beside waters of stillness, in a realm where there shall be no more darkness, no more suffering, no more sorrow, and no more death. Let us pray. Spirit of the living God, lead us to Jesus Christ, that committing ourselves to him, we might experience life that is abundant.

And then at the last, behold him who was sacrificed for us, reigning upon his throne of immortal glory. In his name we pray. Amen.

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