

Emmanuel

by Thaddeus Barnum

The sermon emphasizes the importance of perspective and looking back to see the goodness of God in our lives, and introduces the concept of the Good Shepherd who provides, protects, and guides us to eternal life.

Duration: 28:47

Scripture: Jeremiah 23:1-4, Jeremiah 23:27, Ezekiel 34:2-3, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 9:36

Topics: "Emmanuel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker encourages listeners to focus their attention on Jesus, the shepherd, rather than being consumed by fear and negativity. The speaker emphasizes the importance of keeping one's eyes on the shepherd, just as Peter did when he walked on water. The shepherd is described as confusing, but also as the chief shepherd who guides and provides for his flock. The sermon also references Revelation chapter seven, highlighting the imagery of the lamb as the shepherd who brings comfort and eternal life to his followers.

Transcript

Gracious Heavenly Father, we praise you as we gather together today. These are the days that we reflect back on the year past and simply say to you, Lord, receive our thanks. Receive our praise for your kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Receive our praise today through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Please be seated.

Good morning. I have to tell you, I love this service. I mean, there's something about the end of the year that just makes a time to be able to reflect on what the Lord has graciously done in the past and to come with thanksgiving in our hearts as we remember what the Lord has done for us.

I say that by remembering the way Paul said it in Colossians chapter 4. Devote yourself to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving. That attitude of thanksgiving. Behind Philippians 4, 6. Be anxious for nothing.

In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known to God. There's that peace underneath it that is so essential to us when we look back.

And the problem is, in my judgment. David, pastor, would you turn me down just a little bit? The congregation says, thank you. Yeah, so the key behind this is that undergirding it is that we tend to be a

people who look back and think about what went wrong.

We tend to the negative. Do you know what I'm talking about? You go to some event, 90% of it goes well. 98% of it goes well.

The 2% in which you walk away, did you see that happen? The negative. We stay in the negative. Why do we do that? But it does tend to be a tendency of ours to look back and record the things that did not go well.

Number two, I think sometimes we don't take time for perspective and looking back. Why? Because we're so caught up in whatever the present issue is. The present issue.

The one that's got our heart today. The one that's concerning us today. And so it doesn't give us that permission to look back.

And finally, I would say to you, these things. This negativity. This always in the oppression of the moment.

Always tends to give us a wrong view of God. He has not answered my prayers. And therefore, he doesn't hear me.

He doesn't love me. We get a wrong perspective of God. I want to appeal to you this morning.

This is a time for thanksgiving. And I want to do it to the place I left you on Wednesday night on Christmas Eve. I'd like to return to that passage of Scripture which was given to us first in the Gospel of Luke.

Where it clearly says that when the angel of the Lord came, he came to the shepherds. And we hear that wonderful phrase, the shepherds were out in the field in Luke 2 and verse 8. They were out in the field and they were keeping watch over their flock by night. And what I shared with you on Christmas Eve is that I think it was purposeful.

Absolutely intentional that the Lord appeared to shepherds. The first thing. Because this is a dominant theme in the Old Testament.

It's a dominant theme in all of Scripture. That the Lord himself is our shepherd. And we saw on Wednesday night the complexities of this job.

It is not an easy task to be a shepherd. It is a full time commitment. It is something that is given tremendous commitment of soul and expertise that is required of us.

You've got to be a doctor. You've got to be an EMT. You've got to be an obstetrician.

You've got to be a lawyer, a counselor. You've got to be a policeman. You've got to be a slave that cleans up the things you don't want to talk about.

And you've got to be the chief executive officer at all times. It's nothing less than being a mom. Being a dad.

The thing that was so hard for me growing up in these last, in the 80s and 90s, is that the church discovered that all we need to do to be successful in the church is to import the knowledge of secular executive leaders and train pastors to be like executive businessmen. It was a great tragedy to the church, to be honest. All we needed to do is not study secular leadership.

All we needed to do was study the shepherd. This is the image God gave us to tell us what true, biblical, godly leadership is all about. And this is why the great announcement comes that we have got, you and I, born that night at Bethlehem, we have got the good shepherd who has come to provide, he's come to protect, and he's come to guide.

In the Old Testament, Professor Gordon Conwell did a study of shepherds and wrote his journals on this and a devotional on this that we might learn the heart of what a real Israeli Middle East shepherd does and the complexities behind that job. He came to the conclusion that these three areas define us, define all of us in our job of overseeing. We are those who provide, we are those who protect, and we are those who guide.

And you can see that being a comprehensive job description of all of us who have oversight in any way. And nowhere is it tested more than this passage here. They watched over their flock by night.

This is a time where a shepherd is tested. Tested because this is where the predators come out. This is the fact that there are others who watch over the flock by night who have a fearsome desire to steal and to ravage and destroy the flock.

And that expression that comes out of this New Testament gospel passage, keeping watch over, is a dominant image of Old Testament. It's a word, this keeping watch over, is an image that is used in different ways through Old Testament, New Testament, perhaps one of them being the prison guard who watches over the prisoners. It's the same word that's used when Joseph was in the prison guarding over the prisoners, the jailer that's used in the text of Acts.

You've got the image in Old Testament of a watchman who stands upon the gates and they watch over the city. And their job is to watch for the enemy and to cry out if there's ever a time for battle. The watchmen are always keeping watch during the watches of the night.

In Psalm 17, you have the image of keep me as the apple of the eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings. Both of these images, the eyelid coming down, protecting the eye, keeping watch over the eye, it's the same imagery.

The same imagery as the eagle that spreads the wings and brings in the brood. Hide me in the shelter, which is where we get that beautiful Psalm 91. He will cover you with His pinion.

Under His wings you may seek refuge. His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. You will not be afraid of the terror by night.

Psalm 91, verse 9, because you have made the Lord your dwelling place. By being in His shelter, under the covering of His wing, He keeps you, guards you. He watches over.

It's the same imagery. He watches over us. That word is dominant in Psalm 129.

Sorry, Psalm 121, where we hear that beautiful image of the Lord is your keeper. He is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord is your keeper. He will protect you, guard you, watch over you from all evil. He will keep your soul.

Same imagery. He will watch over. Just as a shepherd watches over the flock.

So the imagery of Old Testament is the Lord watches over His people. Like a watchman on the city. Like an eagle's wings covering and us choosing Lord to be under your covering.

He watches over us. And this God of ours does not sleep. Don't you love that? I love that in Psalm 121.

The Lord is coming. The end of the year. He will not allow your foot to slip.

He who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. I love that.

Because you remember Elijah. I love that too. In the time when he's dealing with the Baal gods.

They're calling on the Baal gods. On Mount Carmel. And he's asking the fire to come down.

And the Baal gods don't respond. And Elijah is sitting there having the best of times. Why? Where is he? Is he sleeping? Poor Elijah.

He's got that humor deep in his soul that our God does not sleep. He protects us. He guards us.

And we, Psalm 91.9. We have made the Lord our dwelling place. The Lord is our shepherd. He is the one who guards and provides and protects and keeps the soul.

He's the one that watches over us. And in that imagery, what you find throughout the Old Testament is that this is how the Lord crafted leaders coming up. This is why he uses that same language with David.

David is going to learn how to be a leader by being a shepherd of the flock. That's how he's going to learn the principles behind protecting and guarding and laying down his life for the flock. That's where the test is.

If you've got compassion, is it your job or is it your family? If it's your job, when the wolf comes, you flee. If it is your family, when the wolf comes, you deal with the wolf. That's what shepherds do.

And when it came time for David to rise up, this is what the Lord said in 2 Samuel 5. He said, I am calling you to shepherd my people Israel. To shepherd my people. The same imagery is here.

It is both the joy and also the sorrow behind Old Testament. Why is that? Well, because what you find are kings that had risen up, kings of Judah who guarded and shepherded and were good kings who followed the Lord and were under the Lord's guidance and direction. But then came up the evil kings.

The ones who did not follow the Lord. And what you end up finding throughout the Old Testament is this rhythm inside. And the Lord speaking against the false shepherds.

The shepherds who care for themselves. This is why that passage from Ezekiel 34 is so dominant and so strong. And the language so powerful.

Thus says the Lord God, Ezekiel 34 and verse 2. Shepherds of Israel, you've been feeding yourselves. Should not the shepherds feed the flock? Verse 3. You eat the fat, you clothe yourself with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened.

The sick you have not healed. The injured you have not bound up. The strayed you have not brought back.

The lost you have not sought. With force. With harshness.

You have ruled them. Later in that text it says in verse 27. They were enslaved by these.

They were under the bars of yoke and enslaved by them. So that they were scattered. And this becomes the two-fold horror of the nature of how the Lord saw this.

One were those shepherds that came and dominated and became oppressors to the flock. And the others where they abandoned and neglected the flock. And that became the cry, as you know, of our Lord Jesus.

As He looked over the people and saw the people as sheep without a shepherd. Not the ones being dominated or oppressed. Having no shepherd.

And the sheep without shepherd. They stray. That's what we do.

We think we're something. We go off on our own. We do what we want to do.

We go where we want to go. And what ends up happening to us? We become prey for the wild beasts. Which is exactly how this passage works.

So they were scattered because there was no shepherd. They became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered.

They wandered over all the mountains. On every high hill. My sheep were scattered over the face of the earth.

With none to search. None to seek for them. You'll find this same sort of passage in Jeremiah chapter 23.

Where he says, You have scattered my flock. You have driven them away. You have not attended to them.

And then comes the promises. Sitting at the heart of Old Testament. Here again in Jeremiah 23-4.

I will set my shepherd over them. Who will care for them. And they will fear no more.

They will not be dismayed. Days are coming declares the Lord. When I will raise up for David a righteous branch.

And he shall reign as king and deal wisely. And shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved.

And Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called. The Lord is our righteousness.

Again in Ezekiel 34-23. I will set up over them one shepherd. My servant David.

And he shall feed them. And he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I the Lord God will be their God.

My servant David will be prince among them. I am the Lord. I have spoken.

I will make a covenant of peace. And will banish the wild beasts. From the land so that they will dwell securely.

And I love this passage. Listen. They shall dwell securely.

And none shall make them afraid. My friends, do you know why the angel came to shepherds on Christmas night? Isn't it clear to you? Isn't the Lord telling us this is everything? This is what I am for you. And I Myself will search out.

I Myself will seek. I Myself will bring back. I Myself will gather.

I Myself will bind up the broken. I Myself. I Myself will do this.

And I will set over them My shepherd. I bring you good news of great joy. Today in the city of David, there is born for you a saviour.

A protector. In the hearts of the night. As the shepherds are watching for the predators outside.

There it is. And isn't there? Aren't there not predators? Isn't that the whole point of the Magi story? Isn't this an amazing story? The Magi are coming. The Magi know the story.

They're coming to find out. They're following a star. And they're coming.

And they come before the great king. Here he is. A king over Israel.

A king in the land of Judah. Whose name is Herod. Is he a good shepherd or is he a bad shepherd? They say we've come to worship him.

So, Herod, who clearly does not know his Bible, gathers the chief priests around him. And ascribes. Well, where is he to be born? And out comes this passage of Micah 5. This is what they read in Herod's hearing.

From Micah chapter 5. You Bethlehem Ephrathah. Too little to be among the clans of Judah. From you shall come forth from me one who is to be ruler in Israel.

Whose coming forth and going forth is from of old. From ancient days. In other words, they knew that this eternal shepherd was coming.

Not just another king for another day. For another time. Where kings are born and kings die.

This one is coming out of eternity. This one is... And they knew it. Why? Because they said it.

We've come to worship him. We've come to worship him. And out come these words that come into Herod.

And on goes Micah. He shall stand and he shall shepherd his flock in the strength of his Lord. And they shall dwell secure.

For now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace. Do you see what he's saying? There's a new king.

But he's not just a king. He's the eternal king. He's a new... He's not just a king.

He's shepherd king. As David was shepherd king. He is shepherd king.

And we have come to worship him. And Herod says, well, go find out where he is so that I might come and worship. You see the deception.

You see the lies. This man ruled by force. You have two shepherds in Matthew 2. Perfect imagery.

The shepherd king who's come to dominate and to oppress. And you've got the shepherd king born in a manger. But this one isn't born for a time.

This one is born unto us to be shepherd unto us forever. My friends, what perspective do you have on this? Are you looking back at the past year? Are you looking at all the things that went wrong? All the things that have not gone well for you? Can you look back over 2014 and see where the shepherd has been shepherd to you? It's a choice, isn't it? Think about this. Are you in the valley of the shadow of death? Are you staring at the dark? Are you staring at the evil? It's the same thing Peter did when he was walking on the waves.

Are you staring at your shepherd? Or are you staring at the wind in the waves? Where are your eyes? For if they're on the shepherd, out will come Thanksgiving. If they're on the wind and the waves, if they're on the dark and the evil, my friends, you'll be lost in your soul. All you'll have is negative things to say about the past year.

You will not know the truth behind all these things. We have a shepherd today. Now, let me tell you something about this shepherd, if I could.

I really won't be long. I have till four. I want to tell you about this shepherd just for a moment.

I want to tell you about this shepherd because he's confusing. He's confusing. Did you hear me? Did you get it? Why is he confusing? I can't answer that.

But he is. Why is he confusing? You see, he doesn't always answer our prayers. This woman, this woman, let me tell you how confusing it is.

This woman comes out to a well. She's thirsty. And he says, I'd like a drink too.

Give me a drink. She says, we don't talk, we're not supposed to talk to women. That's my translation.

He said, by the way, I have water that when you drink it, you shall never thirst again. He's confusing. Everyone who drinks of the water that you've got will thirst again.

But the water that I shall give, you shall never thirst. For the water that I shall give shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life. Sir, she says, give me that water.

He's confusing. He showers bread from heaven. He breaks bread and feeds 5,000.

And he turns to them and says, but you don't understand. I don't have just bread to give you. You know, the Old Testament teaches that the bread, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

But he's saying something different than this. He's saying, I've got bread of life to give you. Bread of eternal life.

No, no, he doesn't say that. He doesn't say, I've got it to give you. He says, I am it.

I am the bread of life. Eat of this, eat of me, and you shall never hunger again. I'm the bread of life.

He is confusing. And he confused the people because what they wanted was him to destroy the powers of Rome. Rome was the one dominating them.

Rome was the oppressor. Rome was the government. Rome, Isis, name that generation's terrifying leaders.

We've got them in our day. They're only increasing in darkness. And he comes and does nothing with Rome.

You know why? Because he's confusing. He's not shepherd over figuring out the stuff of this life only. And he said it to Pilate when he was being tried.

He said, if this kingdom, the kingdom of this world, he said, are you king of Israel? His response was, my kingdom is not of this world. I've come to destroy something far greater than Rome will ever be. I've come to deal with the real enemy of your soul.

That's who I've come to deal with. I've come to deal with the real story. The one that breaks into everlasting life.

I've come to be the shepherd here during your days here. Stay in the valley of the shadow of death and feel my rod. Feel my staff.

Know that I am here and I will see you through this life. But I have come to be a shepherd that will deal with a bigger story. With death, with sin, with the devil himself.

This is how 1 John 3 says it. The Son of God appeared for this purpose. To destroy the works of the devil.

Do you understand the nature behind this? This cross, this bread, this wine. He's come for a different purpose than what we want him to be. We want him to heal our body now.

We want him to give us food and provision and all the things. And sometimes he does and sometimes he doesn't. He's come to be bigger story.

Bigger story because he is real shepherd. The eternal shepherd. He is the one and he holds that name.

Listen to this story. Listen to how the Bible holds this. 1 Peter chapter 2. By his wounds you have been healed.

You were straying like sheep. But now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your soul. 1 Peter ends this way.

When the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. He's called the chief shepherd. When you come to Revelation chapter 7, you've got the amazing imagery of the lamb who is at the center of the throne.

And he shall be their shepherd. And shall guide them to the springs of the water of life. They shall hunger no more.

They shall thirst no more. The sun will not beat down on them nor any heat. For the lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd.

Shall guide them to the springs of the water of life. And God shall wipe every tear from their eyes. Do you believe it? See the perspective change.

Let me tell you how simple this is. Let me tell you the day, Christmas day. I was a child.

I was 14, 13, 14 years old. And I had put my Christmas list in. I wanted two things.

I wanted a full drum set. I only had a snare and a stupid cymbal. And I wanted the best football my parents could find.

And one day before Christmas, my mother came in. Oh, she was so happy. I've got you the best gift ever.

Well, I knew I'd gotten both. I could see it on her face. It was radiating.

I'd gotten the football and I'd gotten the full drum set. I could see it. I could see it in her eyes.

Come Christmas day, there was neither drum set nor football. And there was some stupid painting she had gotten. It was maybe a card by four, five, by five, by five.

From a nun named Sister Corita. And on it, it said in beautiful colors, beautiful little painting, I love you very. It was stupid.

What does a 14-year-old want to do with that? What does a 14-year-old do with that? Drum sets come and go and footballs come and go. I don't have any presents of my youth still with me, but that one. It would be one of our last Christmases together, for she would die of cancer at the age of 45 two years later.

And that was her gift to me. It's called perspective. It's called perspective.

Do you have an attitude to look back and say, Lord, it's not what you haven't done that I wanted. It's what you've done that I've needed. And so I've come to give you thanks at the end of the year.

And I've come to give you praise. Praise for you are my shepherd. You provide for my soul.

You protect me from evil. I have a whole list of prayer requests that you did not answer. No footballs and no golf clubs and no drum sets and no me wanting what I wanted.

You gave me what you, and I don't understand it always. As our dearly beloved sister Jen shared with us last Sunday, so many things we do not understand, but He is our shepherd today. He's our chief shepherd today.

And today we give Him praise and thanksgiving. It's a choice. It's a choice.

It's having an attitude of thanksgiving. It's a choice. It's a perspective choice.

Do you see Him as your shepherd? Do you see Him in the valley of the shadow of death? He's got a rod. He's got a staff. We can get through this journey, and when this journey is done and death comes to breathe hot air into our faith, it cannot have us because the shepherd became lamb.

The lamb laid down his life and defeated death. He cannot have us. It never happens because the chief shepherd is the shepherd forever.

The lamb upon the center of the throne deserves your praise today and always. Don't go into the new year without Him. But before you get there, let's spend the week and reflect.

What has He done? To what do we give Him praise and honor and glory? The lamb upon the throne, our shepherd, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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