

### **Jesus Takes Matters into his Own Hands!**

***Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD. "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.***

You know what would be nice here in Arlington? A Dairy Queen. Let's say you open up a Dairy Queen. You work hard getting the franchise license and permits and money and you build one. Obviously, you can't be there sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. So you hire managers and assistant managers, and a whole bunch of employees. You thoroughly train them from running the ice cream machine to frying hamburgers to how to make the deposit and plan the work schedule. They should do fine so you take a week's vacation.

When you get back, everything is a shambles. Workers are not frying the fries or making the Blizzards as they should. In fact, the managers failed to even work out a schedule for them to work. The managers and assistant managers hide in their office and shop on the internet. You learn they have been depositing the money into their own accounts. What would you do? Fire the whole lot of them. You may even call the police and have some of them arrested.

Imagine the Lord's reaction when he looked down upon his Old Testament Church in the days of Jeremiah. ***"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord.*** God's representatives, the prophets and priests, even the kings, failed God. Their job wasn't hard; do exactly what he says. But they didn't. In fact, they were even leading the people to false gods and persecuted and executed the true prophets of the Lord.

So the Lord was going to fire them all take matters into his own hands. ***"Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: 'Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,' declares the Lord."*** He will get rid of them all in the upcoming Babylonian exile. They will be punished for their wickedness. The mighty Oak tree of the monarchy that God gave the people, the monarchy of kings David and Solomon, will be chopped down and only a rotting, decaying stump will remain.

But the Lord still cares for his Church. ***"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch."*** A new tree will grow out of the dead stump of Jesse. Jesus will come and make sure his Church thrives. This Sunday is known as Christ the King Sunday. God promised David that his line and his rule will last forever, and God is keeping that promise in Jesus Christ. Today we see how God took matters into his own hands and raises up for us a new King, a King who will reign over us as a Shepherd and through his faithful shepherds.

#### *I. A King who is a Shepherd.*

There are about two thousand different countries and governments in the world. Only 38 or so have what we would legitimately call a king or queen, and of that 38, only 2 or 3 are absolute monarchs, that is, they rule their countries and make all the laws. The rest are mostly symbolic rulers. Jesus is King, but he is not a figurehead. He rules with absolute power.

We see Jesus wielding that absolute power. We saw him exercise complete control over the weather. We saw him feed five thousand people with two loaves and five fish. We saw him raise the dead back to life. He caused the lame to walk and the blind to see. He came back to life after three days in the grave. No king nowhere at no time wields such power. Jesus does because he is our God king.

But notice that Jesus rules over us as a Shepherd. ***"I myself will gather the remnant of the my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."*** Rulers expand and protect their countries through negotiations or through military might. But not Jesus. He conquers us, but he does so in a fascinating way. Jesus is that Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Obviously, if someone is drowning in a lake or river, you don't stand safely on the shore and say, "Ok, swim half way here and then I will swim out to save you." God doesn't do that with us. He doesn't see us drowning in sin and death and say, "Ok, come half way to me and then I will help."

No. The entire distance between God and sinner was covered by God alone. The combined efforts of the three persons of the Trinity worked together to bridge that gap: God so loved this world that he gave his only Son; the Son who laid down his life for us; the Holy Spirit who calls and sparks saving in our hearts so that by believing we will not perish, but have everlasting life.

That is why this Shepherd King is given a very special name: ***“The LORD Our Righteousness.”*** First of all, he is the Lord our God. Next he is “righteousness.” This is an interesting Word. It means to be right, just, fair, correct. If I asked you to copy a 10,000 word essay and to make sure every word and comma is identical to the original, and you do it and it is identical even when it comes to the weight and quality of paper, you could say that it is righteous, exactly like the original. I doubt if your life is a perfect reflection or copy of God. Mine isn’t. But look at the word between Lord and righteousness. It is, “our.” The Lord is “OUR” righteousness. Let’s say I give you some tickets to the Vikings. If you look at the tickets, you notice they are not for general admission. They are for the best, most luxurious suite there, the owners’ suite. If you walked up to the suite and started to open the door, an usher will stop you. But when you show them these tickets, they will hold the door open for you. Jesus, this Shepherd King, is our righteousness. His perfect life and innocent death is the reason we will go to heaven. He is our ticket to sit not in general admission, but in the owner’s suite.

So Jesus is no ordinary King. He is our Shepherd King. What should Jesus do next? He either has to stay on earth and set up a palace somewhere and we have to travel great distances to visit him. Or he could ascend up into heaven where he rules the universe for his church. Thank God he ascended, but he doesn’t leave us empty handed. He promises to rule and protect us with his Word and other shepherds, like managers in a Dairy Queen, to make sure we receive that Word.

## *II. The Shepherd Kings Shepherds.*

***“I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,’ declares the Lord.”***

Back in the 1850’s, when our Wisconsin Synod was only a dozen congregations in the Milwaukee area, pastors were hard to come by. The mission societies in Germany couldn’t send more pastors because they had other fields throughout the world who needed pastors. There was no seminary to train pastors. Sometimes a pastor would have three or five congregations and a dozen preaching stations to take care of. One congregation gave a former shoemaker a chance at being their pastor. After a few weeks they asked him to resign. How did they know he wasn’t a pastor? How would you know if you had a pastor or not?

Jesus promised to send “shepherds” to his flock here on earth. The first shepherds we see are the apostles. But Paul was martyred. John lived to be a hundred but he, too, died. Jesus promises he will send other shepherds. But who are they and how do we know they are his shepherds? The key is faithfulness, faithfulness to God and his Word. God’s Church is built on the foundation of the teaching of the prophets and apostles with Jesus as the chief cornerstone.

A faithful shepherd won’t say, “Thus says Sigmund Freud,” or Dr. Phil or Oprah. He reads to you the Bible and carefully explains it so he doesn’t change a thought or a word. He says, “Thus says the Lord,” and then gives you a Bible to check for yourselves. He will not lead the flock down a different path or to other gods. He will protect the flock from wolves who like to hide in sheep’s clothing.

This gives us great confidence. We are not afraid of our sins because God’s faithful shepherds share his Word which assures us our guilt is gone. It means we will not even fear death armed with the promise of the resurrection to heaven. We don’t have to fear our enemies on earth or the devil armed with his promises. And we are not afraid to do what is right in God’s eyes because we know what is right and what is not. Where do these shepherds come from? From congregations like ours. You see, these shepherds are followers, too, sheep in Christ’s flock. They believe it, too.

Normally we in a democratic society cringe at the thought of a monarchy, but we welcome Jesus as our King. We do because he rules us as the Shepherd who laid down his life to save us. Long live our Shepherd-King, and we will live long with him, a very long time indeed. Amen.