

Micah 5: 2 – 5a
“Our Strong Shepherd”

(2) “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” (3) Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. (4) He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. (5a) And he will be their peace.

What image comes to mind when I say “The Good Shepherd”? For me, it’s that one painting of Jesus. He’s carrying a lamb in his arm. He’s got his shepherd’s staff. A few older sheep are gathered around at his feet. It’s a beautiful picture and we get it primarily from John 10. In John 10 Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd.” And Christians have loved that picture so much we decided to dedicate a Sunday to pondering Jesus as our shepherd.

That said. It might seem strange for us to hear a “Good Shepherd” sermon from the book of Micah. We don’t go to Micah very often. Usually around Christmas time. Micah is the prophet who, 700 years beforehand, told us where Jesus was to be born—in Bethlehem. Well Micah also has a beautiful reference to Jesus as our shepherd...let’s look at that familiar prophecy and go on a little bit past it.

²“**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.**” There we have those familiar Christmas words telling us where Jesus would be born, now let’s go on...

³**Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth** (sounds familiar, like Mary giving birth to Jesus.) **and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.**

⁴**He (Jesus, the Messiah) will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.**

Isn’t that interesting? Micah prophesied that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem...David’s hometown. David, a shepherd boy, who by God’s choice and power became the king of all Israel... David, to whom God promised that the Savior of the world would be one of his descendants... then, as Micah tells us, that Savior would be a shepherd just like David had been so long ago. Then 700 years later comes Jesus, born in Bethlehem, a direct descendant of David... and in John 10 he says, “I am the Good Shepherd.”

For most of us, the image of a shepherd and sheep isn’t very common. We have dairy cows and cornfields. Many of us live in subdivisions or apartment complexes. We have to understand the picture here. Why does God use the image of sheep and shepherd in the bible. The occupation of shepherd is vital because sheep seriously need a shepherd. Here’s why....

Sheep graze on grass, but they can’t really even find food by themselves. They need a shepherd to lead them to good grass, or if the pastureland is gone, the shepherd cuts down branches for them to eat.

On top of that, I’ve never seen a sheep with fangs or claws, *maybe* with a couple stubby horns. They have no natural way to defend themselves. They are premium, grade-A prey. Whoever wants them can have them. So they need a shepherd to protect them.

On top of all that, sheep just aren’t the brightest animals. All you have to do is type “dumb sheep” into an Internet browser and you come up with a hundred examples.

There’s a video of a sheep that runs full-tilt right into a gate and bounces back in a daze. There’s a news story from the country of Turkey a few years ago in which 1500 sheep walked right off a cliff. Only the first 400 died. They became a kind of wooly landing pad for the rest of them.

Isn't it humbling that God compares us, His people, to sheep? We need spiritual food and can't get it ourselves. We need protection from spiritual enemies and cannot protect ourselves. We foolishly wander into dangerous places and are completely unaware of that danger.

And so we, sheep, seriously need our Good Shepherd. Micah describes him for us. **⁴He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.**

He stands. He's on his feet. He's alert, capable and strong. He's not a shepherd who lies down and takes a nap while the sheep go off a cliff. He's not the shepherd who sees the bear coming down the hill and says, "Ok. All done for today!" and runs in the opposite direction. No. He stands. And he shepherds. The primary job of the shepherd was to feed his flock and then also to protect them and tend them and guide them.

He does all this, he shepherds, **in the strength of the Lord.** How strong is God? Try measuring that! He's almighty. Jesus, our shepherd, is God. The same Jesus who stood up in that boat on Galilee and spoke a word. And the wild wind stopped blowing and the crashing waves became as calm as a sea of glass. That's how strong your shepherd is. Nothing is impossible for him. He's God.

And he also shepherds **in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.** Jesus is also, at the same time a man. He came as God's mighty representative. Majesty...is really excellence, the essence of what someone can boast and be proud of. In perfect excellence our shepherd has all the authority of God. He feeds us God's truth directly. He speaks for God and in God's name. All the prophets before him and the apostles after him and every pastor or teacher who teaches God's word today...all they can say is "This is what the Lord says." Jesus came and what did he say? "I tell you the truth." Our shepherd feeds us the pure truth directly. He gives us exactly what we need and he does it with all the strength of God.

Do you like that image of Jesus as your Shepherd? When we're in church, we like it. But often when we leave here and go into our day-to-day practical life we can forget all about it. We sheep too often fall into a number of different categories of sheep and sometimes all of them in the same day.

Maybe we're the kind of sheep who like to play "shepherd" and we put our Good Shepherd somewhere in the distant background. So we think we need to control every little thing in our life. Everything depends on me. If *I* plan the right plans...If *I* spend the right amount of time...If *I* do this or that...Then I'll have "success." And we never actually reach "success" or the feeling of success that we seek with all our own effort.

Maybe we're the kind of sheep that like to focus on and follow all the sheep or the sheep ideas that are all around us. And the Bible tells us that there are wolves in sheep's clothing. We're so focused on the little sheep tail in front of us that we don't look up and see our Good Shepherd. I think that might have been the problem for those 1500 sheep...one decided to walk off the cliff and the others just followed right along. Maybe in our life it's a book that sounds great, maybe has some good things in it, but wants to lead us away from Jesus. Maybe it's a talk show host who has great advice and insightful things to say about life, but then talks about spiritual things and tries to teach us wrong ideas about God. It's ok to follow sheep but only as long as they too are following the Good Shepherd.

Or maybe we're the kind of sheep who even forget that we have a good shepherd at all. We think it's all up to us and we implode on the inside. We look at our life and feel out of control. We worry and we're afraid of what the future might bring. We get frustrated when things don't go our way and we whine and complain because it's all up to us and we forget that our shepherd is in control through every age and situation of our life. He's feeding us. He's caring for us. He's protecting us. He won't let anything come to us that is more than we can bear and he will help us bear what we don't think we have the strength to endure. Our Shepherd is Jesus. He shepherds with all the strength of God and he feeds us with the truth.

We sure don't deserve a shepherd like that. But the amazing thing is...we still have him. We did nothing to get him. He loved us and chose us to be his sheep. He's a strong shepherd...even when he didn't look like it.

Our Shepherd Jesus became a sheep just like us. A perfect sheep, who never wandered or worried or whined. He came as the Lamb of God and was led like a lamb to the slaughter. He didn't look strong when he went up that hill called Golgatha. He didn't look strong when he was stretched out as a sacrifice on that cross. But he was! He died with all the strength of God and when he died it was a sacrifice that counted for each of us. He died as a sacrifice for our sin, for every time we wandered, every time we whined, every time we spit up the good food...the truth...or the good blessings which he gave us and said "not good enough for me!" He died for every sin we ever did.

And then he didn't stay dead. 3 days later he rose from the dead so we too would rise after we died. And after you say that it is great to read these lines again...As our *Risen Savior* He *stands* and shepherds his flock each and every day...in the strength of the Lord and in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

And what's the natural result of this? Micah goes on...

And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he will be their peace.

.... We **live securely**. So let life come! With its tangles and turns with its tumbles and problems and setbacks. Let it come! In Jesus we've already won. In Jesus we live securely. Live securely is a great way to translate that phrase...but another way you could do it is "sit down." Look at that interesting contrast...our Shepherd "stands" and then here....when it comes to us what do we "do" we sit down. In the area of our greatest need...our salvation. He stands, he works, he shepherds...we sit, we dwell secure. So simple, so powerful, so much exactly what we need.

That's not to say that Christians just sleep walk through life or take it easy...oh far from it! The sheep who has such a perfect strong capable shepherd can live and never be tired of following that shepherd. God's given us our minds and he wants us to plan and work to the best of our ability. But what it means is we don't have to worry. He's got it all under control. We can just be his sheep, fed and loved by him.

And he will be great to the ends of the earth...you can't go anywhere where he isn't going to be your shepherd. And as his sheep...we want him to look good wherever we are. West Bend or Jackson is the ends of the earth away from the land of Israel. But here we are celebrating our shepherd here today.

He will be their peace. Literally...He is peace. Period. He is peace. It doesn't mean he's going to give us a warm fuzzy feeling of peace all the time. But here's the reality no matter how we feel: In Jesus we have peace. He's got it all in his loving shepherd's care. He's lived and died and risen for us.

When we look down at ourselves all we see is our wandering, worried sheep selves...or a world that is so hostile to sheep. But our Shepherd Jesus comes to us in his Word and lifts our eyes to see him as our Shepherd. With him as our shepherd we have peace, full peace... God's love instead of God's wrath. That reality is true no matter how we may feel. Someday when our good shepherd carries us home. When he takes us to heaven then we will fully realize how amazing that peace really is. Then we'll feel it too.

So go, live securely in the peace he gives, be sheep and live for your Good Shepherd.

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Easter 4 – Good Shepherd Sunday

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