

The Shepherd's Instruction, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

Rather than jumping back into Luke's Gospel and our study of Luke's Gospel, we're going to do, as I mentioned, a short series on shepherding, series on pastoral ministry. This is going to be more of a topical than an expositional series, just a three-week series. I trust it will be faithful to the exegesis of Scripture and the doctrine of Scripture. But over the next three weeks, what I would like to do is speak to you about the shepherd's instruction and the shepherd's exhortation and the shepherd's protection.

I don't intend to give you everything that a pastor does because there's so much to, to cover. But at least these three things I felt would be good little headings for our just short series on shepherding: The shepherd's instruction, the shepherd's exhortation, and the shepherd's protection.

So it's how the shepherd or pastor, elder, overseer, if you will the word Bishop, synonymous terms, by the way, all described in the same office, the same role. So what is the call

of God on a pastor to instruct, to exhort, to protect the flock of God? Because after all, that is his calling, his role, his duty before God, and his responsibility before all of you. So there's a sense in which I'm going to be, for the next three weeks, preaching my own job description.

I'm going to be putting myself out there so you can see what I'm accountable to and I trust that you will, in love and gentleness, hold me accountable to that job description, that you'll pray for me and the other elders and pastors in the same regard, that we would live up to what God has called us to do.

I'd like to begin this morning by having you turn to the end of John's Gospel, end of John's Gospel, chapter 21. And we'll start in verse 15 of John 21. In John 21, we get to listen to a post, this is how I like to call it, a post resurrection leadership meeting. Post resurrection leadership meeting where Jesus meets with his eleven Apostles. Remember Judas Iscariot, he departed from the, from the twelve making them eleven. That would be rectified in Acts Chapter 1 with the choosing of Matthias.

But right now it's eleven Apostles and this meeting happens in John 21 after a good breakfast on the beach, which is where I think all leadership meetings should be held; on the

beach, over fresh caught fire-roasted fish. Elders, let's make that a habit, all right. But it's in this setting that Jesus addresses Peter directly to restore, to single him out from among the other Apostles and restore him back into ministry and get him back on track. And he does this in the presence of the other ten.

So Jesus is asking Peter three questions, three questions that expose Peter's heart. And as I said, he does so in the presence of the other ten Apostles. The three questions that he asked Peter elicit from Peter a believing response. And all three of those questions and those three responses overturn Peter's three denials, showing that the denials of Peter are not true; Peter's true self, so to speak. They're not his regenerate self. That's not really who Peter is.

It's the truth that he proclaims in his love for Jesus Christ, that's the truth of a regenerate heart, regenerate life. Peter's answer is a test to the reality of a regenerate heart, to a sincere faith and love for Jesus Christ. That's the truth about every believer. And so now having reestablished that, overturning Peter's denials, Christ then recommissions him to the work. Look at John 21:15 to 17, "So when they had finished

breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"More than these," might have referred to the other disciples, might have referred to fishing, what he had turned back to; probably refers to the other disciples. You, do you really love me more than these other disciples, as you've affirmed. "And Peter said to him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' So he said to him, 'Tend my lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Shepherd my sheep.' He said to him, the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' And Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.' And Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.'"

As much as I would like to camp out in this text for the rest of the hour, contemplate the richness of this text, the need of this hour requires us to focus on the language of Christ's Commission in particular: Tend my lambs, shepherd my sheep, tend my sheep. The word, tend, in this translation. Tend, Jesus uses it there in verse 15 and verse 17. It's the verb *Bosko*.

Bosko and that pictures a shepherd or a herdsman, who's watching over a flock and tending the sheep as they graze. The shepherd makes sure that the sheep are safe for the express purpose, so that they can eat, so they can eat in safety, so they can eat without fear of wolves or predators coming upon them.

The word that Jesus uses in verse 16, shepherd my sheep, is the verb, *poimaino*, which emphasizes the shepherd's work of leading the sheep, guiding the sheep, caring for them. It is a verb with all kinds of implications; especially, administrative implications is a lot of administration in the pastoral work, as pastors track the health, the growth, the maturity of the sheep. As the pastors track the, the gifts of the sheep or the gifts of the flock to the church and are good stewards of the gifts of the flock, so much involved in this, shepherd my sheep command.

Some of you may feel a bit nervous about pastors asking questions about your spiritual lives. Poking around a little bit, investigating your thinking, trying to figure out why you think the way you, things you do. The trying, trying to understand what it is you believe or don't believe. What you really trust in, what you don't, how you spend your time, your money, your priorities, what they are. What they are.

That might seem a little bit intimidating to some of you, but then when you stop and realize that this is what Christ has chosen and called pastors to do. This is not our decision to put ourselves in that role in your life, it's Christ's decision. And he makes that decision to give you the gift of pastors and shepherds for your good, for your health, for your spiritual benefit, and for your growth, which leads to your spiritual joy.

If you can stop and remember that. And especially when the difficult questions come, when it feels a little uncomfortable, when the pastor's getting into your kitchen, so to speak, maybe you'll be better inclined to let us in a little bit further because it's what Christ has chosen. And you say, oh, but you're not Christ. You're an imperfect man, granted, but this imperfect man and the others like me are the ones that Christ has chosen to put into your life, and even through imperfections, by his providence to lead us and shepherd us into truth, into greater greener pastures.

Such a one is Peter, clearly an imperfect man. He gives all of us pastors a bit of relief, as we see his failures recorded on the pages of Scripture. But Peter is restored by the Lord, by the Lord who is omniscient, the Lord who sees all things. He restores him, drawing out the confession of his love for the

Lord. "Lord, you know all things." You're omniscient. And that means, as you can see directly into my heart and my love, as feeble as it is, as frail as it can be, as imperfect and unstable as it is at times, "you know that I love you." You know that that's in the depth of my heart. You put it there.

Having drawn out that confession, Jesus then recommissions Peter, puts him back on task to attend to his calling and to tend and to shepherd Christ's sheep, which I'm going to tell you is an all-consuming task, to shepherd the sheep. Near the end of his life, after Peter had been in ministry for more than 30 years, he exhorted his fellow elders. He said, "as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that's to be revealed; shepherd, the flock of God among you, exercising oversight."

The main verb in that exhortation, *poimaino*, shepherd, that is the same verb Jesus used in John 21:16 to recommit him. And Peter tells his fellow elders in 1 Peter 5 how to shepherd, how to exercise oversight, and how not to. He says you're to exercise oversight, you're to shepherd the flock of God, exercise oversight willingly, not under compulsion. You're not pressed into service.

You do this because you're running after it, because you rejoice to do it. Those are the kind of men who are called; you do it eagerly, not for dishonest gain. There's nothing else motivating you. Money, fame, notoriety, you don't, you don't care about any of that stuff. You're eager to shepherd the flock of God. You're also shepherding and exercising oversight, not as someone on your high horse or up in your ivory tower, but you're among the flock. You're examples to the flock, not lording it over them, but counting yourself as a sheep among sheep.

Shepherding souls goes way beyond what is required for shepherding literal sheep. Some people make that metaphor, try to stand up and walk on all fours, so to speak. I mean, shepherding, it's a great metaphor. It's a wonderful metaphor because it conveys the basic character of the work. It's an all-consuming day and night task. It's about hard, often thankless, mostly inglorious work.

But there's way more to know about shepherding than just observing a literal shepherd, in a literal field with literal flocks of sheep. It's not just about that, as the New Testament makes very clear, there's more to know, more to see, to understand what's require, as those Christ chose and called to shepherd his sheep, to see how the gifts and the abilities the

Spirit has given to them are to be employed, we look to the rest of the New Testament.

We fill in the definitions, and the meaning, and the metaphor from the rest of the Word of God. We find in Christ, Christ himself, the supreme example of shepherding, and then we learn from the examples of the Apostles. We go back to the prophets and the priests of the Old Testament and see the continuity from old to new and how people are cared for, and taught, and instructed.

We can learn from faithful shepherds in the history of the Church and see how they interpreted the New Testament, and interpret the Scripture, and how they engaged the task in their own time, as they pursued faithfulness to the Lord. But ultimately, we have to go back to the direction and the instruction of Jesus Christ by his Spirit in his Word, in the ministry of the Apostles and the prophets, all recorded for us in the New Testament.

Just as I read earlier, Paul told Timothy, 1 Timothy 3:15, "I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." Us pastors, shepherds, elders and really all of you following our example, that's what

we are, the church, the household of God, the Church of the living God, that is the called-out ones, where the living God is making himself known and heard and obeyed. We are the pillar in support of the truth. We uphold it by proclaiming it, by teaching it.

So for today, we're gonna consider the shepherd's instruction. The shepherd's instruction. This is the pastor's chief duty, which is to feed the flock, which means really the preaching and the teaching of the Bible and its doctrine. I'm going to give you my thesis statement up front on the chief of all shepherding duties. Preaching, teaching, instruction, and that's to say this: Shepherd's instruct the flock of God by the public preaching of Scripture and by the public and private teaching of Scripture, doctrine, and theology.

I'll say that again, Shepherds instruct the flock of God by the public preaching of Scripture and by the public and private teaching of Scripture, doctrine, and theology. Now based on my thesis, the task of the pastor sounds, hopefully to you, it sounds exceedingly simple, doesn't it? Just preach the Bible and then teach the Bible and its doctrines and its theology.

It's, I'm not being facetious here when I say it's a simple task. It is a simple task. It's exceedingly simple because it's

straightforward. We have a Bible. We have the truths of each individual passage of Scripture, and then we take subjects on Christ or the Spirit or the Word or God. We gather all the texts, rightly interpret it into doctrinal understanding of Scripture, what the Bible teaches about this doctrine or that doctrine, and then we want to synthesize all those doctrines so it's in a, it's in a coherent, cohesive, non-contradictory system of understanding called a theology: systematic theology.

It is simple, it's straightforward, it's hard. Pastors really have a simple, straightforward task. But though our task is simple, as I hope it's just plain common sense; something like that consumes the life of the pastor. It's an all-consuming life dominating from call to death task. This is what Paul said at the end of his life, having done this simple task for his whole entire life since his calling, since his salvation. He said, "I'm already being poured out." He pictured himself as a drink offering liquid.

Liquid has no power of its own. The wine poured out before God, it's subject to the pourer, it's subject to and whatever, it has no power of its own. Its power is in its substance. It's being poured out. He spent himself in this simple task, and he did it for his entire life. Why is this simple, straightforward

task so hard? What makes it such a challenge for us as pastors, shepherds, elders? Let me give you a few outline points you can track along, is.

All that's my introduction, by the way. So you can't judge my time and time starts now, as I get into the first point.

Number one, why is it so hard? What makes it a challenge?

Because there is a constant need. Number one: there's a constant need for instruction. The constant need for instruction makes this an all-consuming lifelong day and night, it is not 40 hours in the work week, it's 80 hours. It's 120 hours.

It's three full time jobs, doing this work, the constant need for instruction. And it's particularly difficult, I think any pastor would tell you this throughout church history, it's particularly difficult in, out of season times, for the Word of God. We're aware of this, but I think it bears pointing out, we are a nation under God's judgement right now, aren't we?

And believe me, folks, this reality that we are a nation under divine judgement has massive implications for the pastoral ministry, because listen, a people that's under the judgement of God, they don't think well, they don't listen well, they don't learn well, because they're disinclined to submit to authority.

They're filled with pride, not humility. They're opposed by God and under his curse and judgement. They reject accountability.

They're distracted by temptation, polluted by sin, compromised by love for the world. Paul speaks of those that God handed over like this in a society in Romans chapter 1, with this degrading, declining levels of judgement of him handing them over first to sexual impurity because of idolatry, in Romans chapter 1. Lacking any humility, repentance, God hands them over to further impurity, to be enslaved to inordinate desires, unnatural desires, not men for women, women for men, but now men for men and women for women, as we see.

And then lacking repentance, not waking up to the condition of their sinfulness, God hands them over further, Romans 1:28, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind." Other translations render that a depraved mind or a debased mind, to do those things which are not proper. We got one party in our political system that is seeking federal funding so that we can, so that we can mutate our children to conform their outer selves to what they think their inner selves are. That is a debased mind.

Paul's lists in Romans 1, of those things which are not proper starts with what controls them. He's speaking about the

inside; internally, he's talks about unrighteousness. You can turn there if you like and see it for yourself. But those things which are, which are not proper starts with what controls them on the inside. Their thinking is controlled by unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, which is another way of saying covetousness. They covet. They desire what other people have, what's not been given to them.

They're controlled by evil, they're envious, murderous, striving, they're deceitful, they're malicious. All that's going on the inside and it from those controlling sins of the heart, Paul then moves to external behaviors. He talks about gossip, slander, arrogance, violence, boasting, and disobedience to parents. When you see those behaviors and you wonder what is driving that, back up in the list, and look at the first list. A heart of unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice, produces that bad fruit.

The sins controlling them on the inside create external behaviors that not only come to characterize them but also degrade them further and dull their minds, making them more like wounded, diseased, rabid animals than rational men and women. They are Romans 1:31, "without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful." And further, in verse 32, "they give

hearty approval to those who are just like them.” They want you to join them not only in tolerating their sin, not in affirming them in their sin, but joining them in celebrating their sin. In other words, they have warped sympathies.

They take up the cause and the complaint of sinners, not the cause of the righteous. They sympathize with men in their sins and all their complaints, and they rebel against the cause of the righteous. They rebel ultimately against God. Now, can you reason with people like that, those who have debased minds? Can you dialogue with them? Can you engage in dialogue? Those who are characteristically untrustworthy, are they good dialogue partners? Are they sincere? Honest and open with you, playing by the same rules as you're using in a conversation.

More to the point, when you take them to the authority of God's Word, which is what as a Christian we must do. We're not the authority. Society and its rules are not the authority. It's not a collective consciousness that determines our laws and rules and everything else. God and his absolute standard of law is the authority. And so when we inevitably take them to the authority of God's Word, for those who have rejected the most basic and primary authority of their lives, which is parental authority, for those who are characterized by disobedience to

their own parents, they have a heart disposition to rebel against authority.

So what do you do with people like that? What does the Bible tell us to do with people like that? We're not to reason with them, dialogue with them, we're not even to debate with them. You know what we're to do? Preach to them. We're to proclaim the truth of God's Word. We are heralds of the gospel, preachers of the law. We're prophetic. We're declaring, thus saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord in the law, and it's the consequences for you violating it and here is the offer of the Lord of his grace, if you'll bow the knee, humble yourselves, repent, and believe.

We preach law and gospel. We preach the word. It's what John the Baptist came doing, isn't it? He came preaching the Kingdom of God. He said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus Christ after him, first words recorded about him, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and all those and only those whom the Holy Spirit has regenerated by his invisible work that give external evidence of that new birth by believing, and obeying, and by following.

So for those who are regenerate, saved by divine grace unto faith and repentance. Let's ask another question. Has there

been any effect of this Romans 1 decline in our nation? Has there been any effect of that decline on them? Even regenerate people have. Let's ask it more personally. Have we been affected by the culture that we've been saved out of? Have you been affected? Has your mind been affected? Has your thinking been affected? Have your sympathies been affected by the world that you live in? Any lasting results of that?

If the answer to those questions is not yes and maybe not, Amen, but oh me, oh my. If the answer to those questions is not yes, of course we've been affected, then we have to ask, well then what need is there for repentance? What need is there for my sanctification? What is the issue with me anyway? Why am I not absolute perfection in my thoughts, my words, behavior, actions?

We have to go right back to, oh yes, we've been nurtured, and raised, and weaned, and cultivated, and groomed in this world around us, and we enter into the church. It doesn't always just drop at the door. Paul reminded Titus of this when he commissioned him to go and appoint elders in Crete. He said those who enter the front door of your church in Crete, Titus, "one of themselves a prophet of their own, said this about his countrymen, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy

gluttons.'" And Paul says this testimony is true. You ever met a Cretan, right? So for this reason, "reprove them severely so they may be sound in the faith."

One tragic consequence of the judgement of God on our nation. Those who are granted by divine grace, faith to believe in Christ, and repent of their sins. Those who are saved from this wicked and depraved generation, they have so much to overcome in simply learning the truth, just to absorb what's here. Isaiah lamented to his people, calling them out of sin, to repent and to return to Yahweh.

In Isaiah chapter 1, verses 4 to 6, he cried out with a prophetic lament. "Alas, sinful nation, people heavy with iniquity, seed of evildoers, sons who act corruptly." Just make a comment there. If he's preaching to the seed of evildoers and the sons, well, then there's generations before those people who produced them. There's generation after generation of sinful thinking, and sinful patterns, and sinful habits. Isaiah continues, he says, "They've forsaken Yahweh, they've spurned or despised the Holy One of Israel. They've become estranged from him. And the whole head is sick. The whole heart is faint from the sole of the foot, even to the head. There's nothing sound in

it, only bruises and welts and raw wounds. Not pressed outer bandage, not soften with oil."

Listen folks, sin leaves a mark. The practice of sin cuts deep grooves in the mind, establishes deep, lasting patterns of thinking and feeling. Feelings jump out to the fore of the sinful mind so that feelings create habits and patterns of acting and reacting. It's very subtle and deep seated. Sick heads, faint hearts, unsound souls, they don't learn well. Learning requires discipline of the mind, and humility before the truth, and submission to the authority of the truth. Yes, it is true, regeneration changes everything.

Salvation changes everything. It results in faith that receives the saving grace of God. Justification is a radical, fundamental change of standing before God. It's a legal standing that changes everything. But the process of sanctification that starts at the moment of justification, at the moment of regeneration, that's just begun. New birth by the Spirit, which produces new life in Christ. It's called new for a reason. It is indeed new, as in like an infant new. The infancy of a new believer exists within a very old body, some of us older than others, one that has a past, a body that has a history.

Many Christians who enter the doors of the church, they enter in, and I can hear the rattle of bones from all the skeletons that they think are hidden in the closet but are actually dragged in carts behind them. There's a sin nature for Christians to overcome in all of us, and in some there are deeply ingrained patterns of thinking, habits of acting and reacting that are decades in the making, difficult to undo.

This is why, beloved, we love to preach the gospel to the children here. We want to see the children in our families come to know Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord from a very early age. We want them to be instructed in the, in the faith, in the goodness of God, to see his wisdom and trust him even in things they don't understand. We want them to know Christ. Children here, listen, we love you. We want you not to be saved later in life like some of us were.

We don't want you to have a remarkable testimony filled with how deeply you were lost in sin so that you could be saved from it. We want you to have a, a, continuity between early trust in your parents regarding them, loving them. A continuity that goes right into trusting God as your father, Christ as your Savior and Lord. Because sin has a, it affects and distorts your thinking. It hurts your mind. We want you to be spared from so

much. So the preaching, teaching, years of repenting and obeying the truth, that is how an infant believer grows up into maturity in Christ. It takes time and instruction is essential.

Let me make one more brief point before moving on to another point. Comes from Amos 8:11 and 12, "Behold, the days are coming, declares Lord Yahweh, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of Yahweh. And people will wander from sea to sea, and from the north and even to the east, and they will go to and fro to seek the word of Yahweh. They will not find it."

Judah in the days of Amos was under divine judgment, and that divine judgment was a withholding of the words of Yahweh. Judah had refused to heed the words of the prophet, as the previous chapter demonstrates. And so because they won't listen to Amos, because they won't listen to the prophets that he sent by his grace, God's going to silent the prophetic witness in Judah, just shut their mouths, which is a terrible judgment, removing prophetic witness, silencing of people who will tell you the truth.

Similar thing has happened in our own country. And like in Amos, it's not a famine for bread or a thirst for water. There

would be a kind of grace in that judgement because taking away our food and our water is going to drive us to our knees because of the sake, for the sake of our body, to humble ourselves before the God who gives food and gives water.

Oh no, we're a sleepwalking people. We're comfortable, got plenty of bread, lots of stuff to dip it in, plenty of meat to go with it, plenty of not just water but all kinds of flavored drinks, and we're content and satisfied, and comfortable and at ease and it's called somnambulism, Sleepwalking.

The famine we're involved in now is for hearing the words of Yahweh. So many of these little infants who have been born, regenerated by God's grace, born again in the context, many of them in weak churches taught by unqualified pastors, preached to by ignorant preachers. These little infants, they grow a little in the Word. They learn enough to become dissatisfied with weak preaching, break free from some bad religion, maybe have a bad experience or two that makes them kind of discontent, and disgruntled, and uproots them, and unseats them from relationships, and drives them, purges them from that church.

So they're spit out and wandering. They start wandering, seeking the Word of God, but they don't find it. Just like these people in Amos 8. And along the way, as they wander to and fro

looking for the Word of God but not finding it, they pick up bad ministry patterns. They absorb false models. They operate by bad paradigms. They learn unbiblical expectations. But they don't know it.

They've all kinds of wrong models of what preaching should be, of what church should be like. They come in and their judgement is on the forefront of their mind, criticizing everything they don't like in the church. Some of them think they know a whole lot more than they do just because they spotted error in one church or context. A spiritual pride sets in and creates yet another obstacle for them, learning and growing.

And when, by God's grace, they finally arrive in a sound church with sound teaching from biblically qualified shepherds, they're like the victims of starvation who cannot digest food. They're bloated, but they're empty, malnourished. They recoil at the taste of food. They assume they know best how to feed themselves and how to nurture themselves; they don't. Takes time to heal, and to learn, and to get healthy enough to grow and to grow up strong.

Nevertheless, it's a diet of the pure milk of the Word and the meat of the Word that they so desperately need. They need

truth, and they need a lot of truth. They need the whole truth and they need it constantly, all the time. They need to sit still with a submissive heart under the Word preached, to become accustomed to proclamation, accustomed to the hard work of learning well, to realize that they've got to exercise a mental muscle that they have let lie dormant for years. They got to, turn, tune their ears and their hearts to the pattern of sound words and sound doctrine.

And they have to learn that the church service is about studying. Truth is the essential thing, so the Christians can learn to know who God is and what he's like. So the Christians can learn to obey God, to revere him, to magnify him, to rejoice in him, to love him with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind. And then they can walk in obedience to him because they love him so dearly. They want to be counted, and known, and recognized as God's children. Nothing gives them greater pleasure.