

**Isaiah's Passion History**

**Isaiah 53:6** <sup>6</sup> **All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (NKJV)**

**Sermon Theme: The Shepherd and the Sheep**

1. Our sheep-like natures
2. The shepherding care of our Savior Jesus Christ

In the name our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ who laid down His life for the sheep dear fellow redeemed;

When we hear or think of the 23rd Psalm, we are reminded of our sheeplike characteristics and tendencies, as well as Jesus' shepherding care for us. While our sinful pride doesn't like to hear of our total helplessness and our total dependency on the LORD, this is a fact of life. As the Spirit of God then helps us to acknowledge this, the poetic message of this psalm is a source of great comfort and hope.

Under the tender loving care of the LORD, who is the Chief Shepherd of our souls, we who are the sheep of His pasture experience a life of peace, contentment, and security. The spirit of tranquility and serenity is realized when we look to the LORD in faith and follow His call and guiding as we make our way through the troubles and problems of life.

The prophet Isaiah helps us in this regard through the message of our text as he reveals our sheeplike nature and the shepherding care of our Savior Jesus Christ.

In the first part of our brief text, Isaiah directs our attention to one aspect of sheep which we are well aware of, namely their straying tendencies. Quite often sheep can be found wandering off and leaving behind the boundaries that have been set up for their good. Following the impulses of their whims and fancies, their straying footsteps invariably take them into areas not conducive to good health and safety. Wandering sheep unknowingly feed on pasturage that is noxious or drink from polluted water holes. And when sheep leave behind the watchful eye of their shepherd, they are easy prey to predatory animals. Sheep who have gone astray from their shepherd simply cannot survive on their own.

The similarities between sheep and sinful mankind are very striking. Human waywardness is evidenced by the following sentiments, 'I want to decide for myself what is right and what is wrong' and 'I want to do what I choose to do if I think that it will make me happy.' Whenever we go our own way, following our impulses and inclinations, most often our chosen way takes us down paths that are far removed from the righteous paths of God. And why is this? It is because our natural inborn inclinations are not governed by the Spirit of God, but rather by our sin-darkened minds and our sin-corrupted hearts. And instead of our straying footsteps taking us down the road to happiness of life, we stumble, trip, and fall into a life of heartache, grief, and destruction.

Isaiah was undoubtedly thinking of the past history of the Israelites when he said, “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, every one to his own way.” The Lord had especially chosen the Jews to be the sheep of His pasture. With His almighty hand He took care of all their needs and through His revealed Word He called this people out of the world as a separate people devoted to Him in faith and love.

And yet, in spite of His shepherding care, down through the years the children of Israel repeatedly strayed far and wide away from the Lord. Shortly after God miraculously delivered them from their captors in Egypt, they responded to His gracious leading with ten major instances of murmuring against Him. In the book of the Psalms the Lord characterized His chosen people’s wilderness sojourn, “For forty years I was grieved with that generation, And said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.' (Ps. 95:10) In later years during the period of the Judges when the Israelites were living in Palestine, the waywardness of the Jews was characterized in these words, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25) And during the period of the kings, the Israelites continued to imitate the worldly and idolatrous ways of the heathen in the land.

During those Old Testament times the LORD sent His prophets to shepherd the Jews back to His fold. While some returned to the Lord, many did not. And then many years later when Jesus came to live among the Jews, He observed that they were as lost sheep without a shepherd.

Isaiah’s statement in our text, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way,” is not only applicable to one race and nation, but also to all others as well. Such waywardness is particularly obvious in our present day society. The sins of the world are more out in the open in our day. What was once said and done secretly under the cover of darkness is now being said and done in the light of day. And people are so bold as to rebuke anyone who finds fault with their perverse living and label their detractors as being closed minded, bigots, and haters. Human society feels very free to do its own thing, going its own way and even revels in it.

When speaking of the straying ways of the world, we shouldn’t deceive ourselves into thinking we are without sin or faults. Neither should we imagine we are not susceptible to straying from the paths of God. Please note that Isaiah included himself and all of us when he made the statement, “All we like sheep have gone astray.” While the prophet was a god-fearing man who faithfully served the Lord in his ministry, still he was also a sinner like you and me who have strayed from the Lord in one way or another. He like all of us was in need of the Good Shepherd who sought after him and brought him back with the staff of His gracious Word.

The tendency to stray is ever present with us on account of our sinful and imperfect nature that prompts us to go our own sinful way. And each time we stray into some kind of sin that sin can have the dreadful affect of separating us from God and bringing us under His fearful judgment were it not for our Good Shepherd who leads us back by calling us to repentance and urging us to turn to Him in faith, seeking His pardoning mercy.

While we have oftentimes forsaken the Lord in going astray and have deserved His wrath and punishment, the Lord has never forsaken us. The apostle Paul speaks of God's faithfulness to us in this, saying, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." (2 Tim. 2:13) The Lord has shown Himself to be a faithful and loving Shepherd who dearly cares for us and all the world. As the Good Shepherd Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost. And He didn't just come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but He also came for all others. He once said, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice and there will be one flock and one shepherd." (Jn. 10:16)

The Gospel of Matthew gives evidence of Jesus' loving kindness and tender mercies toward the lost sheep of Israel, as we read of Him, "When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd." (Mt. 9:36) Jesus' great love for the lost and condemned sheep compelled Him to have mercy upon them and prompted Him to take measures to rescue them.

Jesus' rescue efforts were not only in words, but also in sacrificial action. He said of Himself in the Gospel of John, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." (10:11) A faithful dedicated shepherd is one who willingly subjects himself to life threatening risks in order to save the sheep from harm and danger. Well, Jesus didn't just subject Himself to danger; He threw Himself into the jaws of death and hell in order to eternally rescue us and all the world.

Our text in Isaiah gives us this perspective of Jesus' rescue efforts as the Good Shepherd, "And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Paul writes concerning this in 2 Corinthians "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (5:21) God transferred our sins to Jesus and in turn transferred Jesus' righteousness to us.

Again in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he refers to sin as the sting of death. Sin has such a terrible sting to it, because it causes death. The prophet Ezekiel writes, "the soul who sins shall die." (18:20) We know from Holy Scripture that the stinger of sin not only causes temporal death, but it can also finally cause eternal death and condemnation in hell.

Not wanting any of us to suffer this last and most dreadful kind of death, it was the will of the heavenly Father to have His only begotten Son suffer the sting of death and condemnation in our place. Looking again to our text, we learn that the Father caused all the sins of the world to strike Jesus with their full force. He stung Jesus with the severe punishment for every sin of mankind.

Because of what our Good Shepherd has suffered for us in our place, the sting of death has been removed from us. In I Corinthians Paul writes, "'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (15:55-57) Because Jesus overcame sin and conquered death, we can say together with the psalmist, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no

evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Ps. 23:4,6)

A story was once told of “a young Christian lad (who) was asked by his pastor when he first knew that his sins were all forgiven before God in heaven. The lad quickly replied, ‘when a bee stung mother.’ The story was briefly this: Frightened by a bee that seemed determined to sting him and seeing that his own efforts to chase it away only made matters worse, he had run to his mother and had hidden himself behind her apron. As the mother protectingly put her arms about the boy, the bee settled upon her arm and stung her so deeply that the stinger remained in her flesh. The mother then assured her boy that now he was perfectly safe, since the bee could not sting twice, and she went on to tell him also that in a similar manner Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the tree. That moment of realization, said the lad, ‘I shall never forget it. It was all so clear then. I saw and understood for the first time what my mother had taught me for a long time, that God would not punish me because He has punished Jesus in my stead.’”

May we ever have such a simple knowledge and child-like faith in Jesus, ever looking to Him in faith as our Shepherd who laid down His life for us sheep to bless us with eternal life in heaven. Amen.