

Text: Heb. 13:20-21

Title: "The greatness of our Shepherd"

Time: 10/2/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro – Sheep lack greatness in a number of ways. They are followers, not leaders. They are easily panicked. They like routine and are resistant to change or things that are new. They are docile and generally defenseless before predators. Except for their wool or meat, they are not generally very useful.

Our passage this morning is about a Shepherd who is described as not only the Shepherd of the Sheep, but also as the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. It is interesting that pastors are called *leaders* in this epistle, but not shepherds. They are sheep too, and none of the sheep are very great. But the Shepherd of the sheep is the Great Shepherd of the Sheep.

In Sunday school we are learning that the attributes of the nature of God may be categorized as those perfections of His greatness and those perfections of His goodness. As we think of our Savior as our Shepherd, we can make that same distinction. We read this morning from John 10 that Christ is the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep. If you have not heard His voice, repented of your sin, and followed Him, you need to do that this morning. He died for you.

In our Hebrews passage this morning, we find that He is also the Great Shepherd. So often we see our Savior as our Good Shepherd who died for us to save us from the penalty of our sin, but we fail to see Him as the Great Shepherd who now leads His sheep in such a way that they may glo-

rify, serve, and worship Him. This morning, we need to contemplate together the greatness of our Shepherd. I want us to do that under three considerations together.

I. Our Shepherd is a great Sacrifice (v. 20a).

Ill: I mentioned that sheep are not very useful animals, except for their wool and their meat. Under the old covenant of Mount Sinai, where God gave His law to man, sheep and goats and bulls did play a very useful role, however. Our author described that role for us in chapter 9 (9:16-22; note that *testament* = *covenant* in 13:20). Under the old covenant of God, a covenant that Israel broke and no man could keep, animals were sacrificed and their blood was sprinkled.

Appl: The passage goes on to speak of a new covenant, a new sacrifice, and a new shedding of blood (9:23-28). Our Shepherd became so by offering Himself as a great sacrifice. Our passage in chapter 13 tells us three things about the greatness of this Sacrifice.

1. The great sacrifice made our God the God of peace (v. 20a). When we contemplate the sinful rebellion of man, we know that God is a holy God of judgment and justice. When we think of our own sinfulness, we remember Him this way as well. But when the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is contemplated, we see that God is the God of peace. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

2. The great sacrifice conquered death (v. 20a). What a powerful enemy death is. You may remember John 11 and the account of the death of Lazarus. Remember how we are

told there that Mary wept in sorrow, and then in v. 35 we are told that Jesus shed tears – a different word there.

Verses 33 and 38 tell us that Christ groaned in His spirit at the death of Lazarus, and the Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield describes how His emotion was different than Mary's: "It is death that is the object of his wrath, and behind death him who has the power of death, and whom he has come into the world to destroy. Tears of sympathy may fill his eyes, but this is incidental. His soul is held by rage: and he advances to the tomb, in Calvin's words, 'as a champion who prepares for conflict'. The raising of Lazarus thus becomes, not an isolated marvel, but . . . a decisive instance and open symbol of Jesus' conquest of death and hell. . . . Not in cold unconcern, but in flaming wrath against the foe, Jesus smites in our behalf. He has not only saved us from the evils which oppress us; he has felt for and with us in our oppression, and under the impulse of these feelings has wrought out our redemption."

3. The great sacrifice ratified an everlasting covenant (v. 20b). What is promised to us in this everlasting covenant is an eternal inheritance (9:15). "Whosoever believes on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Think of the power of that great sacrifice, to ensure that a poor sinner deserving the lowest part of hell is guaranteed the eternal inheritance of the coming kingdom of Christ and all its glory. Nothing can break the covenant made by the blood of the everlasting covenant. Our Shepherd was a great sacrifice.

II. Our Shepherd is a great Priest (v. 21a).

Appl: Verse 20 tells us what the God of peace did for Christ; now verse 21 tells us what He does for us. All that

He does for us, He does through Jesus Christ, especially in His role as our Great High Priest. The word translated *make you perfect* can be translated *prepare for use*, kind of like a priest would prepare a sacrifice for use in worship. It is used of the mending of nets in the Gospels.

To be well-pleasing in the sight of God is the goal of every sacrifice. Our great priest is offering to God living sacrifices by working in us that which is well-pleasing in God's sight. Note some things that Scripture says are well-pleasing in God's sight:

- (1) serving Christ with righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:18);
- (2) living with the judgment seat of Christ in view (2 Cor. 5:9-10);
- (3) walking in the light of goodness and righteousness and truth, while resisting the influence of those in darkness (Eph. 5:10);
- (4) generosity in the work of the Lord (Phil. 4:18);
- (5) the obedience of children toward their parents (Col. 3:20).

Appl2: Our Shepherd is a great Priest who is being used of God to work in us what is well-pleasing in His sight. The more we allow that mending to take place, the more useful we will be as instruments of his grace in this graceless world. Nets that are torn and never mended do not catch many fish. Believers who resist God's working in their lives to repair and correct what is wrong will not be very useful when it comes to making disciples. The Lord has called us to be fishers of men as well as living sacrifices.

III. Our Shepherd is a great Lord (vv. 20b, 21b).

Ill: I looked at a website about caring for sheep this week. It referred to an instinct in sheep that it called, "Follow the

leader." The website told the story of the death of 400 sheep in 2006 in eastern Turkey. Evidently, one sheep decided that it would be a good idea to try to cross a 45-foot deep ravine, and when he did his 399 fellow flock members followed him to their death.

Appl: Our Shepherd is a great Lord. He deserves to be followed, obeyed, and glorified. As sheep we are always following someone. The question is never whether someone is our lord, only who that someone is. There is an enemy of the sheep that wants them to follow him to their destruction. Instead, we ought to follow the Lord. We ought to affirm, "The Lord is my Shepherd." When we do, we live the life that Psalm 23 celebrates. Our Shepherd is a great Lord, and He deserves to be followed. Are you following Him? Does your life bring Him glory?

Conclusion: If you have a Good Shepherd saving you from your sins this morning, you also have a Great Shepherd who is continuing His work in your life. The Good Shepherd and the Great Shepherd are the same shepherd. He is God's great sacrifice that saves you from sin. He is God's priest that works in us changes that make us living sacrifices, well-pleasing in His sight. And He is our great Lord, to whom will be the glory forever and ever. Our author says, "Amen." He said it in his letter, but also in his life of service and sacrifice for Christ. Will we?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching