

“Caring for the Flock” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Easter 4 May 11, 2025

- I. **Acts 20:27-28** – “²⁷ ... I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood.”
- II. **Jesus is the Good Shepherd**, and pastors are the undershepherds.
 - a. In today’s Church, people have many ways of understanding the Office of the Public Ministry... and what a pastor is and does.
 - i. Even in our own church body, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, questions arise as to how a man should be prepared to become a pastor... and what are his roles and responsibilities in the church.
 - ii. The funny thing is the requirements to become a pastor are as simple as going online and getting a certificate of ordination for a few bucks ... or spending up to eight years in higher education.
 - iii. Here’s the truth though... Jesus began the process of making undershepherds, or pastors, with His Apostles as they installed qualified men into the various churches that began to meet after He ascended into heaven.
 1. Paul wrote letters to Timothy and Titus that help us know what the qualifications are for men to be pastors... and Jesus started all this by giving the Apostles this responsibility the day He rose from the dead.
 2. In fact, as we read a couple of weeks ago, “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.’” (John 20:21-23)
 - a. This Scripture is showing that Jesus charged and commissioned these men to teach and preach both Law and Gospel – and to carry on His work until He returns.
 - b. From that point on, men from all over the world were raised up to become what the Bible calls pastors, elders, or overseers... which are names for a person who watches over the flock now that Jesus is in heaven at the right hand of the Father.
 - iv. The point of all this is to say it’s important who your pastor is because Jesus sends out His disciples saying, “The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” (Luke 10:16)

1. You see, a pastor who preaches and teaches with incompetence, or without faith and knowledge is dangerous to the flock!
2. I read an analogy from a guy named Stanley Hauerwas who said... Imagine if a medical student told his advisor, "I'm not into anatomy this year, I'm into [relational skills]" and asked to skip anatomy class to focus on people... The medical school would reply, "Who in the [heck] do you think you are, kid? ... You're going to take anatomy. If you don't like it, that's tough."
3. "Now what that shows is that people believe incompetent physicians can hurt them. Therefore, people expect medical schools to hold their students responsible for the kind of training that is necessary to be competent physicians. On the other hand, few people believe an incompetent pastor can damage their salvation."
- v. The church has always said that bad teaching is more deadly than anything else, because it has to do with people's salvation!
 1. We expect nothing less than formal training and accountability in medical schools and medical boards because we don't want our doctors to simply be popular or relatable; we want them to practice medicine correctly and truthfully and serve under the authority and oversight of others.
 2. We need to be as discerning in whom we trust with care of souls as we are with care of our bodies.¹
- b. Pastors are not just about being good guys or having charisma... pastors are teaching truth from Scripture and are held to a higher standard.

III. **Paul gathers the pastors from Ephesus to encourage them in Acts 20.**

- a. He wants them to know that he was faithful to his calling, and he will be going to face the Jews in Jerusalem, which will probably cost him his life.
 - i. He taught them the whole counsel of God and to take their charge seriously, as the Holy Spirit made them pastors or overseers to care for the Church of God which Jesus obtained with His own blood.
 - ii. He then warns them, "after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." (v 29)
 - iii. Not only would outside forces come after the people of God, but also people within their own churches would introduce false teachings... take advantage of people for financial gain... and try to influence others to forsake their first love – which is Jesus Christ the Savior.
- b. Just as pastors were needed then to stand firm in the Word of truth, undershepherds are still here for the benefit of the flock as you are attacked by wolves on a constant basis.
 - i. If you watch TV, listen to podcasts, or watch videos, many false teachers twist the Gospel into a way to make money like the

prosperity Gospel... or that everyone goes to heaven even if they don't believe in Christ like universalism... or giving comfort to people in their sins by downplaying the need for repentance.

1. Some of these same people teach you to compromise God's will in your life as they affirm your sins and destructive behaviors and tell you that Jesus loves everyone, so whatever you do is okay.
2. In addition, it's amazing how many books and devotions are written with shallow theology and weak teaching that misleads people and cherry picks Scripture to make points.
- ii. You might come across a person who manipulates you and tries to control you through spiritual authority – and their goal is to use you for personal gain rather than build you up in Christ.
- iii. Sometimes wolves are in our own congregation as they gossip and slander people behind the scenes... trying fracture relationships... attempting to undermine the pastor or other leaders... and stirring up resentment and strife that leads some people to leave the church.
- c. Paul tells the undershepherds from Ephesus to watch out for these things among the flock and do their best to be like him... preach and teach the full counsel of God... and remain faithful to the Gospel and the calling.
 - i. This means that they should continue to preach God's Word even when it's not popular and goes against the norms of society.
 - ii. This means they are to correct, teach, rebuke, call people to repentance when necessary, and always put the Gospel of Jesus work and grace before the flock.

IV. **Even to this day, your Good Shepherd Jesus is caring for you.**

- a. Always remember, Jesus' rescue mission was for you!
 - i. He was born as a humble infant... grew up to teach the truth about God's will for us... was crucified in our place to pay for our sins... and ultimately rose again in glory to give us the forgiveness of sins.
 - ii. All this was carried out in the presence of His followers, who would then take that wonderful message out to the rest of the world – including by raising up pastors to care for the things of God.
- b. Some might wonder how He can be present in our lives when He is in heaven with the Father, but He knows exactly how to hold us in mind, in body, and in spirit.
 - i. He leads us in the Scriptures... which engage us with His love and wisdom... and ultimately helps our mind and emotional wellbeing.
 - ii. He blesses us with the body of Christ (which includes pastors) to care for our bodies and earthly needs when possible.
 - iii. And He blesses us with pastors and other leaders who guide us in the Holy Spirit, as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us... and our faith and spirit are renewed and strengthened constantly.

1. Especially pastors are here to keep you in the Word, connect you to the body of Christ, and continue to give you the promise of forgiveness and the Lord's Supper.
- c. The Good Shepherd has not left His flock defenseless... He continues to care for His Church through faithful undershepherds who proclaim His Word, guard against wolves, and deliver His gifts of forgiveness and grace.
 - i. As long as Christ reigns—and He always will—His people will never be without His voice, His presence, or His protection. Amen.

¹ Source: Trish Harrison Warren, "Who's in Charge of the Christian Blogosphere?" *Christianity Today* (April 2017)