

Peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Amen. My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. Jesus is preaching around the temple and He is being asked whether or not He is the Christ. He says, "Look, I did all these things in your midst and they communicated who I am, but you refuse to believe me because you are not part of my flock." The big question for us is, are we part of His flock or not? How do we know? If we are part of the flock, what does that mean for us? Paul is also addressing the same concept as he is getting ready basically to go to Jerusalem. This is where he gets arrested, he gets thrown into prison, he gets sent off to Rome, so it's towards the tail end of his ministry. He is calling together the pastors and the shepherds of the flock in Ephesus and the surrounding area.

He is encouraging them to continue in the walk of faith that he has given to them to encourage them to continue to preach the word of God to them because we need to hear and know what it means to be part of the flock and what it means to have a good shepherd. What is a good shepherd? Now, we have the image that comes from David of the good shepherd, and that shepherd is the one that protects their flock from the enemies that are surrounding them, the lions and the bears and other people who are trying to steal the flock. The shepherd is responsible for that. The reason the sheep need that shepherd is because the sheep get themselves into trouble a lot, very easily and very quickly because sheep are not the smartest of all of creation. They're not. They're some of the dumbest, quite frankly. Now, that offers me a lot of comfort because I'm pretty dumb sometimes, and if God loves me and cares for me and corrects me, then there's hope for all of us.

The shepherd protects us because we need protection, because our natural inclination is to go off into bad areas and false paths. Our natural inclination as human beings is to fall into sin. How are we to avoid that sin? How are we to keep within the flock and to be safe and secure? Well, part of it is what we do every Sunday. We gather together as the flock. God is our good shepherd, and He has placed overseers or under shepherds to guard and protect His flock, I being one of them for this particular flock here at Faith. I am speaking God's words to you. The crazy thing is as I'm speaking those words, especially when we confess our sins, I am confessing along with you. As the under shepherd, I am not holier or more righteous than any of you. I'm a sinner in need of the grace of God as much as you do. When we finish confessing our sins, I turn around and I speak for God to you. The wild thing is I not only speak from God to you His words, I speak them to me as well.

I am hearing those words of absolution from His shepherd, which is me, to forgive me, Patrick Pooock, of the sins that I have committed. God works through His under shepherds to proclaim the word. Paul is encouraging them, encouraging them to pay attention so that they might not be drawn astray. Because even now, even in those early days, Paul knows that they are going to become wolves in sheep's clothing who are going to try to steal the flock, to see the flock, kill the flock. Some of those are even going to come from within the people that Paul is already working with from within the church itself. How do we avoid being deceived by these wolves? How do we avoid going off in a path that is not scriptural? Well, that requires us to be in the word. We are to hear the word, we're to study the word and we're to be filled up with the word, be transformed by the renewing of our minds through the word of God that it fills us. In order to do that, we need to study the word. We need to know what it says.

Now, we hear that exposition every Sunday in the sermon, but I have to warn you, don't believe a word I say. I know that sounds a little weird, but let me repeat that. Don't believe a word I say to you unless it conforms to the word of God. Just because I am standing here proclaiming something to you, and just because somebody else is proclaiming something to you, don't automatically believe it just because we're wearing the robes. That's not the reason you follow and you listen and you believe. You don't follow me. I'm the underling. The only job I have is to proclaim what he has for you. If I go beyond that word, you are called to not listen to me. It's important for all of us, me and you, to be in God's word, to study the word and to know what He has for us. What He has for us is that nobody can snatch us from His hand. That He calls us by name and we know him. When we were baptized, we were brought into the flock. We were brought into the family of God.

As part of the flock and part of the family, we hear our shepherd's voice every time we read the scriptures. As it is taught to us in the small catechism is distilled down into its core forms. It gives us a guidance on how to read the Scriptures. It gives us a guidance on how to listen to anybody, myself or anybody else that is preaching God's word. Does it conform with what scripture says? If it does, then we can listen to it. If it does not, we can ignore it because it is not from God. Even if it comes from me, I'm not perfect, although I try very hard to make sure what I say is in confirmation to God's word, it's possible I could say something wrong. But I strive every day to pray that His word would be proclaimed to you through me, and that what I say would be in accordance to with that word. Don't believe a word I say unless it conforms to the word of God.

When it conforms to the word of God, you know this, that you are precious in His sight, that He as our good shepherd guards and protects us. Satan, our own sin,

death itself, nothing can snatch us. Nothing can snatch us from His word. He says it twice as He's talking to the people because it's that important. He wants us to know that we are secure. Then we get to the book of Revelation and He tells us what that means. When we gather together and we are gathered together in this image, the Book of Revelation here, it talks about this great multitude that nobody can number. This comes right after he talks about the 144,000. Now, that's a number that is representative of the completeness of the people of God, but we are part of that multitude that nobody can number. We are part. John saw you and me somewhere in that crowd as he had a vision of the elect, of all who have been called and brought into the family. God, we were there. He saw us because He has us in His hands.

We don't need to be afraid of what happens in this life. Paul, as he's exhorting the pastors, he says, "I'm going to Jerusalem. I don't know what's going to happen except the Holy Spirit has told me every city I go to, I'm going to be imprisoned. I'm going to face affliction." If I were Paul, I think I would stay in one place and not go to any other cities. But God called Paul and Paul saw his shepherd guiding him so that the imprisonment, the affliction, the trials, the tribulations, the beatings, the torture, all that he faced, he rejoiced in it because he knew in all of that God had him secure and that he did not need to be afraid. Now, hopefully none of us have to go through the beatings and imprisonments, but it could happen. When it does, we need to understand that we who have come through the great tribulation of this world are clothed in the robes of righteousness by Christ's death and resurrection, and that shepherd is watching over us.

When we die, when the last day comes, be it our own last day or the last day for all of creation, when that day comes, we know that we will be comforted because it says that, "We will hunger no more and neither will we thirst." Now, it says, "they," but we replace it with us because we again are part of that multitude that was there in Revelation. It says, "They shall, we shall hunger. No more neither thirst anymore. The sun shall not strike them or us, nor any scorching heat. For the lamb is in the midst of the throne and will be there, our shepherd, and He will guide them, us, to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their, our, eyes."

God loves us so much and knows us so well and cares for us so deeply that He will not give the task of comforting us to anybody else but himself. He comes and He wipes away our tears. He comforts us with His presence because He knows us by name. When we finally go home, He will be there to welcome us and to wipe away every tear from our eyes. That is what it means to have a good shepherd. He protects us. He guards us. He loves us. He reassures us that He is with us always to the very end of the age. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide

MAY 11, 2025 SERMON

with you always, now and forevermore [inaudible 00:12:13] life everlasting.
Amen.