

## We Have Turned Toward the Shepherd!

Last week's message from 1 Peter was taken from chapter 2:18-24 in a sermon I called 'Conscious Of God', as Peter continued to deal with the issue of submitting to those in authority over us.

Regardless of our position in society, or whether or not those over us are good or bad, and whether they are, or are not, worthy of our submission to them!

V18: "Slaves submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh." Remember, slaves were the lowest of the low. They had not rights or riches. They were a commodity that could be bought and sold. And even put to death by their Roman owners at the drop of a hat. And even so, they too could glorify God in their life of servitude, under all of the worst difficulties and Providence! V19: "For it is commendable if a man bears up under unjust suffering because he is conscious of God." Yes, that word "conscious." Awake to. An inward knowledge of. Aware of. Since we've been "brought out of darkness into his wonderful light we are to hunger after, saturate ourselves in, and devour the scriptures, so that we might know, and serve, our Saviour better and more!

We are "conscious" of Him in all Providence and circumstance. Through blessing and rebuke. Happiness and hardship. So what drives us, what motivates us in this world, is being "conscious of God" in our lives! In v20, Peter speaks of "enduring" such difficulties. No heaven on earth we are not promised. V21. "To this you were called, that you should follow in his steps." No, not a life of ease but living in the shadow of the cross. As we seek to walk in the steps of our Master and our Lord! V22: "he committed no sin" the second Adam, paying the price for the sins and the curse of the first Adam and his family with a sinless life. And the sacrifice of it!

V24: "So that you might die to sin and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." Once we were dead in that old life, now we are dead to that old life. And finally, sin is a terminal disease for which there is no cure but one. And not only is it terminal, but eternally terminal. From which, only through Jesus' life, cross, resurrection and ascension, can we be saved!

So we pick up the text in 1 Peter 2:25: 'Turning To The Shepherd!' V25: "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Isaiah 53:4-5 is where Peter draws his scriptural basis for making his point. And we read. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that bought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Beloved, as I explained last week, Jesus carried it all. All of the hatred. All of the enmity, envy and slander. The lust, the adultery, the sexual depravity. The jealousy, the murder. The disrespect for parents and authority. Yes all of the evils and wickedness's of His people's inhumanity, as well as their rejection of Him and His Father. Jesus carried it all to Cross! "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness, by his wounds you have been healed."

And Peter continues to draw from the well of Isaiah chapter 53 to make his point. Isaiah 53:6: "We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." And yet Peter says in chapter 2:25 "For YOU were like sheep going astray." And I guess we could be mistaken into thinking that he is only addressing his original hearers at that time. But Isaiah says. "WE all like sheep have gone astray." Yes Isaiah makes it very clear that there is no one, who is not "going astray" before Jesus

comes into their life! There is this horrendous scene in a movie which Darlene and I really like. It's a screen adaptation of the novel 'Far From The Madding Crowd'. The scene breaks out with a herd of sheep upon a high cliff top paddock, when a violent storm erupts. A young sheepdog herds the flock together snapping at their heels. And then in a moment of horror and tragedy he drives them all toward the sheer cliff and the edge. Now this is near the beginning of the movie and you think to yourself, what have I gotten myself in for. But it is a really good film. Anyway, I feel that this is a really good metaphor, to explain the imagery which is before us in this verse: "We all like sheep have gone astray." Because crucial to that scene in this movie, is that in the background, we see the human shepherd calling out in vain, to get the dog and the sheep to stop, because he knows of the danger in the dark that awaits them, but to no avail!

Friends, we need to understand that before Jesus comes into our life and into our soul, we are just like those sheep heading toward that cliff. In the darkness of our sin we are blind to the peril that lays just ahead. Because we are born in iniquity and blindness the scriptures tell us. And with that inherent inclination to ignore the Shepherd's, (the shepherd of our souls), the Good Shepherd's voice! People who love us in Christ might be praying for us. They might be warning us, even pleading with us to come to Jesus while there is still time, and we still have life. But we are deaf to their words and blind to the evidence of Christ in them! Remember, Ephesians 2:1-2 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live. When you followed the ways of the world and of the ruler of the Kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

Yes brother and sisters, we are deaf, dumb and blind to that life saving and soul saving message of the gospel. Our natural inclination of rebellion, is always leading us away from God, and His Grace and Mercy found in Jesus! Genesis 6:5-6: "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth and his heart was filled with pain."

Brothers and sisters, we've looked at these verses before. And among others, there are two things which leap up off the page at us every time. Firstly; the natural inclination of mankind toward rebellion and sin since the fall from the garden of Eden. Again, think of the words. "That every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." As I've explained before, it is not saying that we are all murderers and sexual deviates and rapists and incapable of any good no. It's saying, that our whole being is naturally opposed to God! "Every inclination."

As my brother Ted summed it up in response to a previous message some weeks ago, it's the seed of the thought, not even the thought itself. So in light of these things, (which we have also seen before), choosing God, is an eternally spiritual impossibility. We can't choose Him, He chooses us. And even when we feel we have chosen Him, it is merely that we have responded to being chosen by Him! We are bent toward sin from the dust to the grave. 'Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a Wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found was blind but now I see'. Yes this is who we all are until Jesus comes into our life!

And the second thing which leaps out at us here from the page are these words of God, about God. "His heart was filled with pain." Friends, whenever I read these words, yes, every time I read these words my mind races within me. That the eternal God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, yes the Omniscient (all knowing), Omnipotent (all powerful), and Omnipresent (ever present God), the eternal "I AM WHO I AM." Who is in need of no one and no thing, "His heart was filled with pain."

But Beloved, the unanswerable question which nonetheless must be asked is: What was it that was breaking the heart of the ever living God? Was it simply that the wickedness of men offended His Holy Name and presence? Was it the sheer ingratitude of humanity? Was it the price which He knew that was going to have to be paid by, (not only mankind) but the whole world because of man's sin? Or was it the knowledge, that within His Eternal Mind's Eye, God saw and was grieving over, that price which was going to eventually have to be paid by His One and Only Son Jesus? So that we could be set free from sin's grip and the curse of death? I don't know. But certainly, this statement is infinitely rich with meaning. Far more so than merely face value. "His heart was filled with pain."

Beloved, do yourselves a favour sometime. Ponder over these words!

But let us return now to the movie scene. The sheep are rejecting the shepherd's voice to turn from the danger, and then one by one, (with the dog snapping at their heels), they follow each other over the edge into the abyss! Beloved can you see? Not only is it our natural inclination to reject the voice of the Good Shepherd which we have in his gospel of "Come to Me and I will give you rest" but also, like that dog barking and tearing at the heels of the sheep, so too does Satan tear at us within our lusts and temptations. While the world, like a rabid dog, gnash and tear at our lives making every effort to keep us away from freedom in Christ!

Job 1:7: "the Lord said to Satan. Where have you come from? (And notice the reply because it is chilling:) "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Brothers and sisters, the Evil One never sleeps, because he knows his time is running out. He is ever on the lookout for the souls of the Saints. Listen to how in chapter 5 verse 8 of this letter Peter lays hold of this imagery from Job 1:7: "Beware your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking souls to devour."

It has been said, that in a sense, the devil feeds upon the souls of lost humanity! Yes friends, he does all that he can to consume us. Using our natural inclination of rebellion, while also tearing at the heels of our life and our relationship with God, so that he can carry us into that eternal abyss and fire of God's judgement with him. For which he and his angels are destined! Yes Isaiah writes: "We all like sheep have gone astray." And as we have been seeing, that since this whole passage from v13 of this chapter, is about submitting to authorities over us, and will continue to be so in chapter 3:1 and following. So in saying "For you were like sheep going astray," Peter is simply saying that we were rejecting Jesus' and God's authority over us. It's the ultimate rebellion against authority isn't it? And this is the gospel of the ages. And even more so today! Yes it's the gospel of the world. We don't need to hearken unto the warnings of the God of the Bible. No we don't need to pay heed to, and to abide by what God has revealed of Himself in the Old Testament scriptures which are embodied in His Son Jesus Christ. The fear of God. Holiness. The confessing and repenting of sin. Judgement and hell.

'Oh that's old, worn out and irrelevant today'. 'We are far more enlightened than to be stuck in the Old Testament', they say. As if somehow the Old Testament is not part of God's Word anymore. Yes the old has been superseded. We have the New Testament now. We tell people about God's love. We tell them about His goodness and how He just long's for them to come to Him. Yes He just stands with open arms pleading with people to come! Well what rubbish! What blasphemy! What a false and deceiving portrayal of the all-powerful God of the universe.

And Brethren here's another thing: There is nothing that is loving about allowing people to continue sleepwalking toward the abyss of hell. Yes as we love them into hell and they continue to "go their own way." But of course brothers and sisters, Peter is writing to believers here. Even to you and I.

Chapter one verse one: "Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ, to gods elect." He is writing to those who "were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned (turned in the older translation), to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Beloved, unlike those sheep upon that cliff, though the storms of the world's temptations rage around us and the winds howl, while the lightning flashes and their heavens thunder, by God's Grace and Mercy, we have been given "ears to hear the Good Shepherd's voice in the Gospel!"

John 10:1-4 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, he's a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice." John 10:7: "Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth: I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved." Jesus is using that ancient imagery of the shepherd, who having penned the sheep for the night amidst a thicket of trees or something similar, would then place himself between a couple of trees or rocks, so the only way to get to the sheep was literally through him. He placed his life on the line to defend the sheep! John 10:11: "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." And finally John 10:14-15. "I am the Good Shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep."

The sheep hear the Shepherd's Voice! 1 Peter 2:25: "But now you have returned to the Shepherd." Brothers and sisters, the word which Peter uses here for "returned" in Greek is the word *epēstraphete*. And it can mean "returned." But really this doesn't make any sense here. Because to "return," to something or someone, the implication is that you must first have been there before. But again in this instance, this makes no sense at all. We were not with Christ. We were not formerly with the Shepherd and have now come back to Him no.

Again, Isaiah 53:6: "We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." So we were all "going our own way" our own way of sin! We do not "return" because we were not with Jesus in the first place. "For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" the scriptures tell us. But this Greek word *epēstraphete* can also be translated to mean turnabout. Or "turn toward." Now this does make sense. "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have turned toward the Shepherd."

Friends let's now return to that movie scene which we began with earlier. Again, we are those sheep upon that cliff-top paddock. The storms of life thundering and raging around us, which is the great tribulation. Satan is tearing at the heels of our life doing all that he can to push us over the edge. Using the dogs of the world, and even those "wolves in sheep's clothing coming to us as angels of light." We are nearing the edge and all is lost. But then, (unlike those sheep in that movie, who did not respond to the shepherd's voice) by God's Grace and Mercy in the midst of the storm, we do hear the Master's voice! "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Beloved just short of the edge we hear His voice and we "turn toward the Shepherd."

Yes dear friends we hear His voice and we "turn toward" the Saviour! And we see the Cross for the very first time. And when the eyes of our heart are opened, we see how close to the edge of destruction we really were. So with the tax collector in Luke 18:13 we must confess: "God have mercy on me the sinner."

O Beloved, Jesus has weathered the storms of life for our sakes upon that cross of suffering and shame. God has placed His Spirit in our hearts so that we would hear His Son's voice in the gospel, "turn" and live. Hallelujah, what a Saviour! "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have turned toward the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

But let's remember, that the passage is all about being subject to authority. Submitting to all kinds of authority. Whether it be to rulers, governors or kings. Whether we be freeman or slaves. Whether they be upright or wicked. Deserving or undeserving of our submission. And we do it all because we are "conscious of God." "To this we were called because Christ suffered for us and left us an example." Under insult, He didn't retaliate. Because "He entrusted himself to him who judges justly." He suffered for our sake that we might live.

And now we are told that He is the "overseer of our souls." So He is the superintendent. He is the supervisor. He is the inspector. Even the guardian of our souls. It is the Greek word *episkapos*. It's where we get the idea of a Bishop from. So as Jesus "oversees our soul," we must submit to Him as the superintendent and guardian of our soul, if we would see heavens glories! But Beloved, unlike human authorities, who often have no regard, or a disregard or even a contempt and an outright callous disdain, for those under their charge, O praise God, that Jesus is eternally not like them! He is that "Overseer" who has paid the price for our souls. He is the One who keeps watch over our souls and even guards our souls and keeps them for heaven. He has gone through death and carried us with Him. He has suffered our punishment so that we could be where He is. He wore the contempt, the ridicule, the hatred and the enmity of the whole world for our sakes. He even left the glory of the Father's side and clothed Himself with our flesh, so that we could be closed in His righteousness!

So friends, we are called, not to submit to someone who has a wicked intent for us or some hidden evil agenda, but to someone who loves us so much, that He even died for us! Yes Beloved, we "have turned to the Shepherd." We "have turned toward the Shepherd." Who is the Guardian. Who is the Keeper. Who is the Watchman. Who is the Bishop. Who is the Overseer. Who is the Saviour of our souls! Praise God!

'Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God I come. I come'.

Let's pray!