

Slaughterhouses sometimes find it difficult to direct sheep marked for slaughter up the ramp to the place of their execution. They will mill about in confusion, desperately looking for someone to follow and show them the way home. To overcome the problem, some slaughter houses use what they call a "Judas-goat." This diabolical creature will mill about the sheep boldly and confidently until he has gained their trust. Then he will walk up the ramp to the place where the slaughter takes place. When the sheep are well on their way, this goat will turn a corner and quickly find a hidden door on the side of the ramp and push his way out, while the unsuspecting sheep keep going to their death. Over the centuries, our world has seen its share of "Judas-goats." Some come in the form of national leaders like a Hitler or a Stalin. With their well polished speeches, they have led millions to follow godless philosophies and bloody and ruthless policies. Others come dressed in the robes of a preacher - like Joel Oelsteen, who helps you to feel better about yourself, teaches you that God loves you dearly, smiles at you, seems so sincere, but is not willing to say that Jesus is the only way to heaven. He leaves it up to God to decide where a person will spend eternity. In a sense, what he says, is true. But he gives the impression by his statement that there are other ways to heaven.

It is no different today than it was in Jeremiah's day or in Jesus' day. Political leaders care little for right and wrong and do little to lead their people. Religious leaders don't teach people the truth about God and the plan of salvation. There always has been and always will be Judas-goats who look for sheep who are confused and ready to follow the first person who looks like they know where they are going. So today, our prayer is that God continue to give us pastors who stand for the truth of God's Word. And that we as parishioners stay in the Word ourselves, so we can make sure that what our pastors are teaching us, is indeed the truth. So, we consider today the thought: "Be Faithful to the Word!" 1) Appreciate a Good Shepherd 2) Appreciate a Lasting Righteousness.

The kings and priests and prophets in Jeremiah's day were not good shepherds. They were Judas-goats. They were leading God's people astray. And God was ticked off at them. They were not going to get away with it. God says, "I will bring punishment on you for the evil you have done. Lousy, good for nothing shepherds. Imagine the Lord of the universe coming down with his wrath on good for nothing world leaders and pastors. Ug, Would hate to be classified in that group. Sounds like there are a bunch of these good for nothing shepherds wandering around this earth. Kind of depressing. But there is good news for the sheep. The Lord says, "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.

The children of Israel were about to be scattered as a result of the bad shepherding that had taken place in Israel. A nation called Babylon would conquer them. Many would be taken into captivity for 70 years. Others would be killed. But God in heaven would not forsake them. He would be their shepherd. He would gather his scattered flock and bring them back home and give them faithful shepherds again - like Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah and Malachi. And finally, he would supply them with the greatest shepherd, they could ever hope to have, Jesus Christ. As I look at Jesus, he models the kind of shepherd, I want to be. First, Jesus is a caring shepherd. In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus and his disciples were tired from a long preaching-teaching engagement. They

wanted to rest, take five. But another group of people came to them. However, Jesus didn't turn them away. He made time for them. So today, a Good Shepherd or pastor is one whom you know really cares about you. My pastor wears his heart on his sleeve. I know that he cares for me, and if I have a problem, he will be there for me. He isn't always running around doing other things besides his shepherding duties. He isn't looking to do less work at church. A Good Shepherd is a caring shepherd. But you can have a very caring shepherd, and He can still be a Schmuck. A Good Shepherd is one who clearing preaches about righteousness. How can I tell if my pastor is a Schmuck or a Good Shepherd.? Well, I have categorized the four types of unfaithful pastors for you today. First, there is the Spineless Shepherd. This shepherd doesn't stand for anything. He never tells you how you have hurt God by the sins you do daily, that you deserve death and damnation from God for your sins. No, the Spineless Pastor never wants you to get upset with him. Abortion, yea it happens. Adultery, people make bad choices at times. Homosexuality. How can you help it, if you are born that way? Divorce, well you need to be happy. Living Together outside marriage. Sure, you have to get to know each other first. The Spineless Shepherd, allows you to adjust your life according to your moral standards and thinking vs. what God says in is commandments. Hey, Spineless Shepherd, the day of punishment is coming for you and all who follow you. How About, The Bullet Point Shepherd. This shepherd tells you that you have the tools to handle problems in life. He teaches you if you follow these bullet points, a particular life issue will be solved. He leads you on a journey to have a better marriage, control your anger, get more out of life. The Bullet Point Pastor motivates you by the Law. Do this, do that, and everything will be better. No mention of Christ at Calvary being the real one who motivates us to live changed lives. No mention of your sins, and a need for a Savior. Stay away from the Bullet Point Pastor. Then there is the Working Shepherd. This guy or gal tells you that you have the ability to be the person God wants you to be. If you just try to lead a good life, you'll make it to heaven. Be kind, caring in this life, and you will make it to heaven. Finally, the last unfaithful shepherd is the Ambulance Chaser Shepherd. This guy or gal gets everyone into heaven. Even if your loved one has been away from the church for several years, the Ambulance Chaser will tell a few good stories about the person's life, assure the family that their loved one is in heaven, and quietly collect his \$100.00 from the Funeral home.

So Pastor, tell me, how do I know you are a Good Shepherd, and not a Schmuck Shepherd like the ones just mentioned? Well, here is the answer. You will hear a good shepherd, regularly talk about Jesus. The good shepherd will talk to you about Christ's perfect life and the righteousness that He has provided to us. As our lesson today says about Jesus, He is the Lord, our RIGHTEOUSNESS. It's easy to understand the word righteousness. Righteousness is what a person does when he does what is right. Jesus always did what was just and right. He never cursed or swore. He never disobeyed his parents or the authorities. He never hurt anyone. He never harbored a lustful thought in his heart. He never stole or wanted to be rich. He never doubted or worried. Or putting it positively, he always told the truth. He always obeyed his parents. He always put the best explanation on things he heard about his neighbor. He was always content with what he had. He always went to the synagogue on the sabbath.

And righteousness is what is required of us, if we ever hope to make it to heaven, and back into God's good favor. But our understanding of righteousness is messed up.

Our understanding of righteousness reminds me of a story about a young child. The child was told by his mother that his room was not clean. The child would then ask his mother to go with him to his brother's room. His brother's room was always messier than his room. "See, my room is clean; just look at his."

Unfortunately, this strategy did not work. Mom would take her son down the hall to her room. When it came to tidy rooms, mom was indeed righteous. Her closet was just right. Her bed was just right. Her bathroom was just right. Compared to hers, the boy's room was, well, just wrong. She would show him her room and say, "This is what I mean by clean." God does the same. He points to himself and says, "This is what I mean by righteousness. And when He does that we feel the messiness of our sins. Any sins. Jesus is righteousness. If I compare my life to his, I can only be depressed. Can God want me as his child if I have to compare myself to his only Son, who NEVER did what was wrong and who ALWAYS did what was right? I am in trouble if I play the compare game.

But look at just one little word in our text today. Go down to verse six. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness. Look at the little word that sits between the two names for our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. It's a three letter word just before the word "righteousness." See it? It says OUR. Jesus wasn't a righteous shepherd and king just to show us up to be the unrighteous sinners that we are. Jesus is OUR righteousness. If God says, "Did you keep the first commandment? Did you give me the glory only in your life? Did you love me with your heart and soul and mind?" You can say, "No, Lord, I didn't. I must confess my sins. I cannot hide them from you. But Jesus did. He always honored you. Even when he was dying on the cross and you had to forsake him and punish him, he still honored you. Right? Lord, it says right here that Jesus did that for me. He is the LORD our righteousness. So if you asked if I kept the first commandment, I would have to say, "yes." Jesus kept it for me!" A good shepherd is someone who clearly preaches about righteousness, the righteousness of Christ and how Christ's righteousness is now OUR Righteousness.

1 Corinthians 16:13 *"Stay true to what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong."* Today, very few Christians are willing to stand up for what's right. In a world where tolerance is valued more than truth, where people even doubt the existence if there is a right or a wrong and post modernism, and the whole society says, "What's good for you may not be good for me," etc., most Christians are afraid to stand up for the truth. We are afraid that we will be labeled, "Narrow minded," "Prejudiced", "Judgmental", "Old fashioned", "Out of date," "Bigoted" or whatever.

If you claim to be a believer, if you claim to be a follower of Christ, there will be times in your life when out of love you must speak up for what God's Word says. You will take flak. If I were to go home and see my house on fire and my kids in there were asleep, nothing could stop me from running in to get those kids. The press might call me a hero or courageous. The fire department might call me crazy or nuts. But the bottom line is, love leaves no choice. It's not an option. I have to do this. I have to take a stand out of love. You've got to care enough to confront.

May God bless Open Bible congregation with Pastors and congregational members who are willing to stand for the truth of God's Word. May we be a flock that delights in the Pure Word of God, refuse to settle for anything less than that. Faithful to the Word always!