

The Better King Arrives: *Comparing David and Jesus at Christmas Part 2* Various Passages

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me...and no one is able to snatch them out of my hand.”

Introduction: When we were kids, **Christmastime** was a straightforward, joyful time of anticipation. Each day and traditional practice brought us closer and closer to the payoff of opening presents, obtaining the short term happiness that we longed for and knew would come on this special day. Throw in great food and family/friends and watching *It's a Wonderful Life* and it made for a wonderful day, one we looked forward to each year and back with fondness.

Fast forward in life and things get a little more complicated. Gifts no longer hold out the same hope of satisfaction as they once did. Family can be a source of tension rather than peace, and losses start piling up as we are reminded what *could have been* and what *once was*, especially if we've lost a loved one around this time. Sure we sing songs of peace on earth and joy, but we actually realize **that Frank Sinatra was lying** – *“Next year our troubles will be out of sight... Once again, as in olden days. Happy golden days of yore. Faithful friends who are dear to us will be near to us once more”*. On top of this you realize you can't eat all of the food you love, and even your kids won't watch a movie starring Jimmy Stewart at Christmas.

Perhaps this is not you, and you only have fond memories of Christmas. Or perhaps you can relate to some of these complexities. The reality is that we are reminded of the year that was and look forward to the one to come, and how we frame this in our mind is important. So we want to think about **Jesus this Christmas** in a holistic way, that moves beyond His appearing humbly in the manger in Bethlehem to *why He came the way He did*. In reflecting on Jesus as King, we are drawn back to consider **King David**, and how he exemplified so much of what Jesus would be, yet he fell short in every metric. But it reminds us that Jesus did not just come on the scene out of nowhere or function the way He did in a reactive way. No, God had it all planned out and each aspect of Jesus birth, life, death, and resurrection was done in a way so that He could offer salvation to sinners like you and me. In looking at Jesus this way, we are strengthened by Jesus' **love, care, and provision for us**, and we are left with **assurance and security in the future**, things that we all long for at Christmas and every day of the year.

A SHEPHERD KING

Most of us did not grow up on a farm, but if we had, we might get a better appreciation of taking care of sheep. My sister and brother in law live on what is now a hobby farm but once was a sustaining one, including several barns where sheep are still being raised for 4H kids and then the slaughter house. We were privy at times out there to watch as our friend Doug would be there for the birth of the lambs a whole experience in itself) and then the relentless care they needed, especially in the cold weather. He would have to tend to them all during the night at first, since their moms either couldn't or wouldn't provide all that the lambs needed. Sheep are NOT the sharpest tools in the shed, they are dependent creatures that need constant guidance, have short memories, and overall smell bad. It is an apt description then, that the Bible compares us with sheep. And sheep at any age need a shepherd, or else they will be in dire straits.

God always provided caring leadership for His people. From Moses to Joshua to the Judges, God had assigned a leader to guide and protect His precious and valuable commodity in the people of Israel. When Israel asked for a king despite God's caution, they enacted a new expression of that care in the form of a shepherd King. The king was supposed to be a person who **feared the LORD, kept all the words of the law, and humbly lead the people** (Deut. 17:18-20). Though Saul failed to be that man, God found His in **David**, who was prepared to lead by **being an active shepherd**, who trusted the Lord to protect the sheep he watched from the lion and bear, and who provided for the sheep in their time of dependency.

This shepherding aspect was clearly laid out by God as well. Any and every shepherd of Israel would need to *spiritually* 1) **FEED the sheep** (Ezek. 34:2) – not just physically but from the Word of God; 2) **CARE for the sheep** – strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, and bring back the straying (Ezek. 34:4). This care was NOT simply physical care but having an intimate knowledge of the people in order to care for their **souls**. 3) **They were to PROTECT the people** – without shepherds the people became food for wild beasts (Ezek. 34:4). Protection was not merely physical, but keeping safe from anyone that would do harm in the spiritual realm; 4) **They were to do this with gentleness and not harshness** – there was a humility that each shepherd needed to embody, to care more for the sheep than themselves, to pursue, to seek after the rebellious and wandering (Ezek. 34:5-6).

David demonstrated this type of shepherding leadership to the men and families that followed him while on the run from Saul, when he sought after and found them after being captured by the Amalekites (1 Samuel 30). But David knew that shepherding people was not merely about keeping them safe physically. If **Psalm 23** is any indication, David took his cue from God Himself, whom he saw as the chief shepherd, his personal shepherd. Shepherding was about **leading, restoring, and helping others find rest**. The epitome of his shepherding care was found in his care and **kindness** for Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9), who was weak, lowly, unable to care for or defend himself, and had nothing to offer in terms of upside or leverage. But David came in and *protected, provided, and magnanimously loved* him in spite of his circumstances. This was what the **king of Israel was supposed to do and be for God's people**. David had the capacity, ability, and desire, but he did not have the endurance as a humble shepherd, since he failed by getting **self-focused**, and instead of sacrificing for the people, he **took for himself**, and was willing to sacrifice the lives of the people given to his care to protect himself. But where David failed, Jesus succeeded.

Though Jesus was NOT born AS a shepherd, it is significant that the first visitors of his birth were. The imagery and metaphor of shepherding the sheep was intentionally used by Jesus, as it continues to be used by the church (Acts 20 & 1 Peter 5 and the shepherding function of elders; John 21:15-17 and the call to Peter to feed God's sheep). At the conclusion of His public ministry, He openly identified Himself as the **Good Shepherd** in **John 10:11-18**:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

Notice a few ways that Jesus describes the reality of Him being a shepherd:

- 1) **He is not just “a” shepherd, He is THE shepherd, who is by quality “good”** – He is the defining shepherd, the model, the epitome, the greatest expression of being a shepherd. He is the fulfillment of the shepherding function that Israel’s king was supposed to be.
- 2) **He is a vested and personal shepherd** – Apparently there were “hired” hands that were used as shepherds, who did not own the sheep, who would run when the wolves came, like the opposite of the “boy who cried wolf”. This is like hiring a security guard who runs when there is a physical threat or a doctor that faints at the sight of blood. A hired hand says, “I’m not getting paid enough to wrestle wolves”, and leaves the sheep to get slaughtered. Jesus stays because He actually owns the sheep.
- 3) **The sheep are defined by those who came to Him as the “Door”** – The sheep here are defined as those who were saved and find pasture when they come through the door of the shepherd (10:9-10). These sheep were those in the present (referring to the Jewish audience) and those who were “other sheep” not in the fold, referring to Gentiles (10:16). Jesus is quintessentially the Shepherd of His flock, not everyone in the world
- 4) **The defining and repeated characteristic of the Good Shepherd is His laying down His life** – In every power system, the one in power demands sacrifice of the subordinate. In the best of military actions, the general or king assigns lower ranking soldiers to fight, and loss of life becomes numbers on a spreadsheet in a game of attrition. But here Jesus puts the power/authority mindset of the world on its head. **He is the One who lays down His life for the sheep.** *Again, is this because the sheep are so valuable?* In all honesty, sheep are kind of a dime a dozen (or about \$150 for a lamb), and after costs of feed, care, and overhead, there is not much ROI. No, the issue is NOT that the sheep are valuable in and of themselves, but the inherent fact that **they are HIS! He lays down His life because they are valuable to Him!** And notice that He does it **WILLINGLY** (“No one takes it from me”) and **AUTHORITATIVELY** (“I have the authority to lay it down”). In this, Jesus fulfills **All** that a shepherd/leader/king was supposed to be for His people – Giving care, protection, provision, and love through kindness.

What does this mean for us in terms of Jesus being a shepherd?

Jesus knows and loves all of those He saves –

“I know my own and my own know me” – This is intensely personal. The word used for “know” here is the word used for experiential knowledge, not just general understanding. An exceptional earthly shepherd knows the tendencies of his sheep, which ones are squirrely, which ones wander off, which ones need extra time. Jesus saves us because **He loves us**, and because He loves us, He knows us. ***Isn’t this one of the things that all people long for? To be known and loved? To have someone who knows us, with all our quirks and sin, and still loves us?*** But this knowledge is NOT a one-way street but a mutual expression, as we are called to **know Him!** In fact, this is the differentiating factor between true believers and imposters (Matt. 7:21-21), between those who merely “say” they know God but only know facts ABOUT Him and do not truly know and love Him.

At Christmas we can feel overwhelmed, let down, left out, unfulfilled, and anxious, but no believer should claim they are not known or loved! If this is the case, it is because you have stopped pursuing

your Savior or the fact that you truly do not know Him. He not only saves us but shepherds our hearts, minds, and soul.

Jesus willingly & humbly died in our place –

Isaiah 53:7 *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth”*

1 Peter 2:22-25 *“He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”*

The Good Shepherd became like a sheep in order to save His own from their sin. Notice that the prophesy of Jesus in the OT matches the reality of His death in the NT. He was both LAMB (*“Behold the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world”* – John 1:29) and SHEPHERD of our souls. He went silently to the cross NOT because He was powerless but because He possessed all power. He went willingly because He entrusted Himself to the Father who judges righteously. He went authoritatively because death could not contain Him but was able to take up His life again in the resurrection. We were **straying**, meaning the last thing we wanted was salvation, and the last thing we deserved was salvation, but He saved us anyway. The only response from us: **humility**. We humble ourselves before our Shepherd, dropping our defenses and pride, our stupid narcissistic sinfulness, and our playing of the victim, and simply rest in our Savior knowing that we are stinky, ugly, dumb sheep who have been given everything through our Shepherd King.

Jesus gives us assurance and security

In a world of unknowns and uncertainty, we can bank on the fact that we not only have assurances, but the powerful backing of a Good Shepherd to give us security. Our banks can be assured by the FDIC, but that is only as good as the ability of the US government to stay solvent enough to actually cover all the losses. We have assurances from the God of the universe for our eternal destiny, which moves us from **vain hope in things “getting better” to trusting the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.**

Back in John 10, Jesus laid out the fact that some did not believe because they were not His sheep (10:26), but His real sheep hear Him, know Him, and follow Him (10:27). He gives His sheep **eternal life** (assurance), and then goes one step further with **security in John 10:28-30:**

“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. 30 I and the Father are one.”

What is the most secure place to put your investment today? Stocks? CD’s? High Yield savings accounts? T-Bills? Gold? Bitcoin? Money Markets? Under the mattress? Again, there is a level of risk in each of these. Full and total security in anything is a myth. But Jesus offers security of our life in Him by doubling down on two realities: **No one can snatch us out of His hand, and the Father, who is greater than all, is also clutching onto us.** To get to us and to take us out of the saving love of our shepherd

would require a force that was able to pry open God the Father and God the Son's hands, which is laughably impossible, since our dad has big old mitts!

What do you long for this Christmas? To be loved? You have that in Jesus. To be rid of guilt and shame, to be forgiven and at peace? You have that in Jesus. To be assured of the future, that everything will be ok? You have that in Jesus. He has given us all that we need and beyond, which goes way beyond any gift we can open, any sentiment we long for, or expectation that lingers unfulfilled. And how does Jesus secure all of that?

The Ultimate King

Finally, we have secure assurance that everything WILL BE ok, that the darkness will lift and justice will come when Jesus returns and sits on the **throne of David in Isaiah 9:6-7**:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the **government shall be upon his shoulder**, and his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ **Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom**, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

David was given a throne, a kingdom, and a family that would be eternal. The covenant that God made with David was **unconditional**, meaning David could not disqualify it. The prophesied child would reign on the throne of David, not just in a spiritual way, but a physical one. Just as David brought rest to Israel by pushing out his enemies and conquering the borders, so Jesus will one day reign and rule in a political kingdom on this earth before the New Heaven and Earth, bringing justice and peace. This will be *literal, earthly, political and lengthy* and in the same way David ruled. (see Zech. 14:4, 9; Jer. 23:5-8; Dan. 7:13-14; Rev. 20)¹

I love talking with my neighbor, as he has good questions about life and the Bible. Often, the conversation drifts to the fact that this world is dark and not getting better. He asks how I feel about raising girls in a world that is crazy and dangerous. The answer is that we trust the Lord who is sovereign overall with the lives of those we love. But the answer also resounds that one day Christ will reign and rule, will set everything right, and the Lord will lead with justice. Until then, we walk by faith and obedience, calling others to do the same.

This Christmas and the end of this year, it is a time to evaluate our life and where we stand with the Lord. Do we know and love Him? Have we confessed our sin, asked for forgiveness, and humbled ourselves before Him, yielding our life in repentance? Are we still looking for this world to somehow satisfy or get fixed so that everything will make sense? Or are we looking to the Good Shepherd who will reign and rule one day. May this Christmas be one that is truly peaceful, and though our troubles may not be out of sight, they can make sense as we fix our gaze on the Shepherd of our soul.

¹ For further reading on the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, I'd recommend the short article by Renald Showers. <https://israelmyglory.org/article/the-fulfillment-of-the-davidic-covenant/>