

# The True Shepherd and the False Shepherds

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[ 0 : 00 ] Now, in our Bible reading, we are returning to the prophet Jeremiah, and we'll be with Jeremiah the next few Sunday evenings. So if you turn to page 650, we're going to read most of this chapter, read down to verse 32.

Jeremiah chapter 23, and we're reading verses 1 to 32. I'll probably refer to the other verses later on, but we'll read verses 1 to 32.

These are the words of the Lord and the words of Jeremiah, as I said at the beginning of the book, the word of the Lord, which came through the words of Jeremiah.

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, declares the Lord.

Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people, you have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them.

Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

[ 1 : 18 ] I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely, and this is the name by which he will be called, the Lord, our righteousness.

Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when they shall no longer say, as the Lord lives, who brought up the people out of the land of Egypt, but as the Lord lives, who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country, and out of all the countries where he had driven them.

Then they shall dwell in their own land. Concerning the prophets, my heart is broken within me, all my bones shake, and like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the Lord and because of his holy words.

[ 2 : 30 ] For the land is full of adulterers. Because of the curse, the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil, and their might is not right.

Both prophet and priest are ungodly. Even in my house I have found their evil, declares the Lord.

Therefore, their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, to which they shall be driven and fall, for I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their punishment, declares the Lord.

In the prophets of Samaria I saw an unsavory thing they prophesied by a bail, and led my people Israel astray. And in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing they commit adultery, and walk in lies.

They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil. All of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.

Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets, Behold, I will feed them with bitter food, give them poisoned water to drink. For from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land.

[ 3 : 46 ] Thus says the Lord of hosts. Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.

They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, It shall be well with you, and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart. They say no disaster shall come upon you.

For who among them has stood in the counsel of the Lord to see and to hear his word? Who has paid attention to his word and listened? Behold, the storm of the Lord's wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest.

It will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart.

But in the latter days you will understand it clearly. I did not send the prophets, yet they ran. I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.

[ 4 : 46 ] But if they had stood in my counsel, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds.

Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God perhaps? Better not also a God afar off. Can a man hide himself in secret places so they cannot see him, declares the Lord?

Do I not fill heaven and earth, declares the Lord? I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.

How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? I think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal.

Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream. But let him who has my words speak my word faithfully. What a straw in common with wheat, declares the Lord.

[ 5 : 51 ] Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the Lord, who steal my words from one another.

Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the Lord, who use their tongues and declare, declares the Lord. Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send or charge them.

So they do not profit these people at all, declares the Lord. Amen. This is the word of the Lord.

Now, perhaps we could have our Bibles open, please, at page 650, Jeremiah 23, and we'll have a moment of prayer before we look together at this.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, let me meet you in your word. This is our prayer this evening, our Father.

Father, we want to hear your voice. We want to hear that voice, the voice that wakes the dead, the voice that spoke creation, the voice that will one day judge the living and the dead.

[ 7 : 21 ] And we pray that may be our experience this evening. We pray that in the name of the living word himself. Amen. Amen. How do we know who is telling the truth?

There are thousands of churches in this country, and if you went into different ones every week, you would most certainly not hear the same message.

So how do we know who is telling the truth? And often this gets muddled up, doesn't it? Oh, so-and-so is such a nice person. He must be telling the truth.

Oh, so-and-so is so awkward and graceless. He must not be telling the truth. The devil is very, very subtle. I often feel the devil deliberately works through charming people who teach heresy.

And, of course, if he can also make sure, as far as he can, that the genuine gospel is preached by those who are difficult and angular, he's achieved what, to use a theological term, a double whammy.

[ 8 : 35 ] We have a very, very subtle enemy. How do we know who is telling the truth? And in this chapter, Jeremiah uses the metaphor of the shepherd, one which he uses over and over again.

Other prophets use it. I read from Ezekiel a few moments ago. A metaphor that runs right through Scripture. First used, I think, in Genesis 48, where Jacob, towards the end of his life, speaks of the God who has been my shepherd all my life until now.

And the word shepherd really is a verb. Someone who does shepherding. That's very important. It's not a title. It's a task. It's not something that you do as a job.

It's something that's a vocation, a commission. And the true shepherd is God himself. The human shepherd in the Old Testament is mainly seen in terms of David himself.

But in the New Testament, the shepherd is great David's greater son, the good shepherd who dies for the sheep, the great shepherd who rises from the dead, and the chief shepherd who will appear in glory.

[ 9 : 49 ] And the human shepherd, if the human shepherd is feeding the flock, these great truths will be the very center of what's being said. Christ has died.

Christ is risen. Christ will come again. At the end of the Bible, in Revelation 7, 17, the lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd.

Now, when we think of shepherd, there are two elements. One is power and authority. The other is gentleness. And we need to remember both. If we have power only, then the sheep are in for a rough and a harsh time.

If we have gentleness only, the shepherd may not be strong enough to protect them. And in verse 5 here, and in verse 7, there's a phrase used that's very important.

The days are coming. This is projecting us into the future when the chief shepherd appears. There never will be a true shepherd on earth who can do all that needs to be done.

[ 10 : 51 ] This will only happen when the true shepherd, David's greater son, the king who is to come. But there are clear applications. If we look at this passage, I want us to see how we are going to recognize a true human shepherd and how we are not going to be deceived by a false human shepherd.

I'm going to take verses 2 to 8 as the key to the passage. This is the passage where Jeremiah characteristically takes a picture, a bright shining light, and places it against a dark background. I was going to say you remember four weeks ago we saw that in the previous chapters. But I'm realistic. This is Jeremiah's characteristic way of presenting the truth.

This is what the true shepherd looks like. It's what the bad shepherds look like. So that's our subject tonight, the true shepherd and the false shepherds.

The first thing we want to say is this, the true shepherd is sent by God. The false shepherd is self-appointed. Look at verses 4 and 5.

[ 12 : 04 ] I will set shepherds over them who will care for them. And then verse 5. I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely.

So, and contrast that with verse 21. I did not send the prophets, yet they ran. I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.

Very interesting, if you read the book of Jeremiah, the word prophet is used over 200 times. And more often than not, it actually refers to a false prophet. It refers to someone who is self-appointed, who have raised themselves up.

Now, obviously, human agents are involved. But whoever they're appointed, whether it's by a congregation, a presbytery, a synod, a bishop, or whoever, the real question is, are they called by God?

And how do we know? And that's one way we know. The true shepherd is sent, the false is self-appointed. I want to develop that a little bit. The true shepherd is the one who listens to God.

[ 13 : 11 ] The true shepherd recognizes that he has nothing to say of himself. Dick Lucas, who was here a few weeks ago and whose ministry we so much enjoyed, I wasn't at this, I wish I had.

He went to one Christian convention and he stood up and to the horror of the organizer, said, I have absolutely nothing to say to you people. And, of course, you could hear the gasps of horror and he says, well, let's turn to this book here and hear what God has to say to us.

And that is one of the signs of a true shepherd. A true shepherd is not peddling their own opinions. A true shepherd is not selling a line, putting a spin on it. The true shepherd is listening to God and with all the imperfections, with all the weaknesses.

And, of course, there are different shades of opinion, different ways of putting it. But, verse 18 is the key. Who among them has stood in the counsel of the Lord to see and to hear his word?

Or who has paid attention to his word and listened? This is almost a definition of a prophet in the Old Testament. Back in 1 Kings 17, Elijah says to Ahab, Yahweh God of Israel, before whom I stand, has said.

[ 14 : 30 ] The prophet goes into the divine counsel. He sees the Lord. He listens to his word. Another good example, Isaiah 6, in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.

And he is given the message, and it's the same message as Isaiah, go and preach judgment. Because unless people repent, there is no hope. The false, on the other hand, have not paid attention.

They have not listened. When I began training for the ministry, the first guy I was placed with told me, it won't take you very long to preach through all the preachable parts of the Bible.

He had a very slim Bible, indeed. The prophet Jeremiah, for example, never featured, I don't think, in anything he said. You see, this is the problem.

If we don't have the full word of God, then we sit in judgment, the bits we like, and we use these to judge other bits. The false are those who have not seen, who have not heard.

[ 15 : 29 ] In verse 36, we didn't read this verse, but you pervert the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts.

The question is, does the preacher expound the whole Bible? Now, of course, it takes a lifetime to expound the whole Bible. But this is the question, whether it's wanted or not.

Whether it's easy to hear or not easy to hear, as Paul says, in season and out of season, when it's wanted and when it's not wanted. In verse 29, the words that we sang, My word, like fire and like a hammer, a hammer that breaks down stubborn resistance, and the fire of the Spirit that brings life and warmth.

The true shepherd listens to God, and as far as is humanly possible, conveys that message.

Whereas the false shepherds speak fantasy.

Verse 16, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the word of the Lord.

[ 16 : 44 ] And judgment is written out of their message. The one thing a false prophet will never do is tell people they need to change. The one thing a false prophet will never say is judgment is coming.

Judgment written out of the message. And verse 20, They speak only for the moment. Notice what Jeremiah says, In the latter days, you will understand it clearly.

They're not interested in the latter days. They're only interested in the moment. You see, if I have a disease which is going to kill me, I don't want the consultant to say, Go home, take an aspirin, have a good sleep.

And you'll feel better in the morning. That's what these prophets are doing. They're saying, It's all right, God will not judge. God's too kind to do that.

But the point is, If they're speaking fantasy, Nothing will change. Nothing will change God's word. No amount of special pleading. No amount of taking the word love.

[ 17 : 49 ] Emptying it of content. And saying, God is too loving to do this. We'll see a bit more of that next week. The true shepherd tells it like it is. The false shepherd speaks fantasy and delusion.

And we need to develop that, Our antennae, So we can recognize that. Now, The second thing, The true shepherd not only speaks the gospel, But lives by the gospel.

Whereas the false shepherd lives by sin and unbelief. Now, That's coming back to verses 5 and 6. What will happen when the true shepherd comes?

When the chief shepherd appears in glory? He will reign. He will deal wisely. He will execute justice and righteousness. Name be the Lord, Our righteousness.

Here's the very heart of the gospel. These are gospel verses. The Lord, Our righteousness. It's right over the letter to the Romans, Couldn't you? Here it is in Jeremiah.

[ 18 : 53 ] Now, We are only human. But, The point is, It's the righteousness of God, Which changes us, And the righteousness of God, Which is not just the subject of the sermon, But the driving force, Of a person's life.

The righteousness of God, Which alone can save people, From the anger of God. Remember the discovery of, Great discovery of Martin Luther. He was terrified of the judgment of God.

What he did not realize, Is that that same judgment, Was a forgiving righteousness. That there was a way, Back to God. It wasn't by penance. It wasn't by legalism.

It wasn't by moralism. It was by forgiveness. So, You see, The true shepherd, Will preach, Righteousness and salvation, Growth in grace, And in holiness.

This is, This is a point, That always marks, The ministry of a true shepherd. There will be growth. Now, It may be small growth. Let's not, Let's not get ourselves, Into thinking, Oh, There's not very much happening, In such and such a place.

[ 20 : 03 ] Therefore, God can't be blessing. Imagine what we'd have said, If it had been in, Sixth century Jerusalem, When Jeremiah was, Well, We know exactly, We know exactly what people said, God has not sent him.

Look, He's not having any success, Nobody's listening to him. Nevertheless, We learn later on in the book, There were one or two, Particularly his scribe, And friend Baruch, Who probably was the one, Who preserved and wrote down, These prophecies for us.

And just as in chapter, In the previous chapter, 22, The good king Josiah, Had been described in these ways, And contrasted with the false kings, Who followed him.

This anticipates the new creation. When the gospel is preached, When the gospel is lived, The new creation, Is anticipated. That's the point. The, Does this ministry, Point to Christ?

Does it point to the new creation? Or is it self-serving, And self-promoting? Because the false shepherd, Will preach lies, And will live a lie.

[ 21 : 10 ] Verse 11, Both prophet and priest, Are ungodly. You notice verse 6, Israel will dwell securely.

Notice verse 12, Their ways shall be slippery paths, In the darkness. There is no hope, In this gospel.

And it's desolating, When you hear this non-gospel preached. It's desolating, If you go to a funeral of someone, You have every reason to believe, Died an unbeliever, And you hear some minister, Pretending, They had been a good and godly Christian.

Now by the way, Don't misunderstand me. The Lord can speak to people, In their last moments, And we don't know. What I am saying though, Is that, This kind of fantasy, And delusion, Does not lead to security, And salvation.

It leads to slippery paths, In the darkness. And it leads, Verse 14, To a lifestyle, Indistinguishable, From the world. In the prophets, Jerusalem, I've seen a horrible thing, Commit adultery, And walk in lies.

[ 22 : 19 ] They strengthen the hands, Of evildoers, So that no one turns, From his evil. All have become like Sodom, To mean inhabitants like Gomorrah. A lifestyle, Which simply repeats, The world.

A few weeks ago, At disastrous general assembly, A senior figure said, Every opinion poll, Taken, Is in favor of the gay lifestyle.

Is that gospel? Or is that not just simply, Living the lifestyle, Of the world? If you get rid of the panel, Doctrine, Well, It wouldn't do any harm.

And then simply, Simply decide what doctrine, Is going to be, By commissioning opinion polls. In an opinion poll, How many people believe, That Jesus was born of a virgin? I imagine, I imagine, The result would be, An overwhelming defeat for that.

How many people believe, He rose bodily from the dead, And ascended to heaven? You see, This is what happens. And of course, It's always a gradual thing. People don't go overnight, From a strong, Vigorous belief, To believing nothing.

[ 23 : 31 ] It all happened, A long, Long time ago. In the 19th century, 18th, 19th century, When godly, And sincere men, Believed they could preach, Christian ethics, Christian lifestyle, And soft pedal, The supernatural elements.

You see, When that happens, It's not very long, Before you get rid of the gospel, Altogether.

Because the only dynamic, To keep people living, The gospel lifestyle, Is the gospel salvation, Which, Which transforms, And once again, There's a key in verses 13 and 27, They prophesied by Baal, And verse 20, Sorry, That's verse 13, And then verse 27, Even their fathers forgot, My name for Baal.

Baal is always a popular god, Because Baal is the god, Of self-indulgence, And bogus spirituality. Baal isn't interested, In godly living.

He's not interested, In keeping the commandments. He's interested, Only in people, Living for themselves. That's always going to be, A powerful combination.

You see, In every, Everything the devil does, Is so subtle. The devil understands, Human nature. The devil knows, Very well, That you can pervert, God-given things.

[ 24 : 58 ] He really will win victories. After all, It is, It is, A deep truth, That God has placed, Eternity in our hearts.

That's what Ecclesiastes says. And therefore, Spirituality, The sense of the other, Appeals to us. It's also true, That God has, That God has said, Through the sermons, At your right hand, There are pleasures, Forevermore.

So you see, These two very deeply rooted desires, Desire for God, And the desire, For pleasure. They are God-given. What Satan wants us to do, And what the false prophets want to do, Is to achieve these, By illegitimate means.

Sex is a great gift from God, Therefore Satan will use it, In a perverse way, And so on. So the true shepherd, Lives the gospel, As well as preaches the gospel.

And those who listen, To the ministry of true shepherds, Will themselves grow in grace, And grow in holiness. The false shepherd, Lives in a world of fantasy, And delusion, And leads people into slippery, Paths.

[ 26 : 11 ] But thirdly, The true, And this is the most important thing of all, The true shepherd, Knows the true God. The false shepherd, Creates God, In their own image.

And in this chapter, Are two of the great, Biblical truths about God. God the creator, And God the Lord of history. Verse 23, And a man hide himself, In secret places, Do I not fill heaven and earth? And then back, And then back in verse 7, The Lord who brought the people of Israel, Out of the land of Egypt. So let's take these. God is both up there, And down here.

No Cornhill student, Worth their salt, Doesn't know about the God of Genesis 1, And the God of Genesis 2. And here it is in this chapter, He is up there, And he is also down here.

It's so important we hold both of these truths about God. If he's only up there, He becomes remote and distant. You can't think of any relationship with him.

[ 27 : 18 ] If he's only down here, Then he becomes the cozy God, Kind of God celebrated in songs, Kind of Jesus is my boyfriend kind of songs. But if we hold both together, The powerful God up there, And the God who becomes incarnate down here, Then we have the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, He is big enough not to fail, But he is tender enough to care. Now this is not a theoretical doctrine. This revolutionizes lives.

When we realize that, My help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. Then nothing in heaven and earth, Can ultimately destroy us.

Oh, there's plenty of things in heaven and earth that are dangerous. Remember Paul says in Romans 8, If God is for us, Who can be against us? Now of course the answer is, There's all sorts of things against us.

And Paul mentioned them, Tribulation, Persecution, Peril, Sword, Heights, Depths, Any other creature. It's who can be against us and win. Who can be effective against us?

[ 28 : 26 ] Now that wholly revolutionizes our faith and our prayer life, Doesn't it? Our God cannot fail. And then, It also means there is no part of heaven and earth where I am outside of his control.

In the great Psalm 139, When I was in my unformed substance in my mother's womb, Your eyes saw me. That Psalm is going to say, From the cradle to the grave.

It's far more than that. It's from well before the cradle, From the fetus in the womb, To the eternal home, At the other end. Read that great Psalm 139. It also means we can't divide our life into segments.

That was the essence of paganism. There is one God looks after my relationships. Another God looks after my work. And God controls the weather. Another God is the God of the sea, of the wind, and of the storms, and so on.

And a lot of pagan religion results in playing these gods off against the other. It results in a muddle and in a fantasy. Like these false prophets.

[ 29 : 33 ] They don't think clearly. And therefore, they don't teach clearly. So, he is the God of creation. The created order belongs to him.

And one day, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. And these things will happen. Verse 6. Judah will be saved. Israel will dwell securely. Now, the immediate context of this, of course, is the return from exile.

And the uniting of the two kingdoms. Now, the prophets never accept the divided kingdom. I don't mean they don't accept it as a fact. It was actually there. They never accept that this is what God wanted.

And they look to the time when they'll be united again. So, he is the God of history. But notice what it says here.

In verse 7. Therefore, the days are coming. So, no longer say, as the Lord lives, who brought up the people of Israel out of Egypt. Now, does that mean they forget the Exodus?

[ 30 : 33 ] Of course not. What it means is they don't trap God in the past. There was a great danger of trying to trap God in the past. The problem about that is nobody lives there now.

If we want to receive the grace of God, we can only receive it in the present moment. C.S. Lewis says the present moment is the only moment in which any grace can be received and any blessing given.

Hankering for the glory days of the Billy Graham crusades in the 1950s. Hankering for the days of the Wesleyan revival for the Reformation. These were great works of God.

These were great works of God. And we must not despise them. These are wonderful works of God. There are many in the kingdom of God now who were converted during these times.

Both more recent and further away. What it means though, what this verse means is God is going to do greater things. Now that does not mean that we can therefore say on our lifetimes and the lifetimes of some here, there's going to be spectacular revival.

[ 31 : 41 ] The Lord has never promised that. But what he has promised is that one day he will bring in the new heaven and the new earth to which any previous revival, movement of the Spirit will seem only an anticipation, which is what it is.

Because one day, not only will the gospel go to all the nations, we'll sing in a few moments, all the lands will worship. That's what Jeremiah said this so often throughout his prophecy.

It's a big vision. The true prophet always has a big vision. The true prophet knows what the end of the story is. The end of the story is not continual decline and defeat and exile.

The end of the story is a great multitude whom no one could count around the throne of God and of the Lamb. That doesn't mean it's easy at the present moment. That doesn't mean there are not dark and difficult days to come.

It doesn't mean there won't be apparent defeats. You know, God's got a good record of bringing his people back from defeat. What happened because the great churches of which John writes to, or which the risen Lord writes to through John, the book of Revelation, these great churches disappeared.

[ 32 : 58 ] Antioch, Ephesus, and so on. The candlestick was removed. What happened to the gospel? What happened to the kingdom of God? Well, it kept on going. Whatever happens on this side of eternity, the kingdom will come.

God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So the true shepherd presents the true God. The God of creation. The God of history. The God who came down as the Lord Jesus Christ.

One with God who became one of us. The one who made that great and perfect sacrifice to which nothing can be added and can never be repeated.

Whereas the false shepherd does not take God seriously, ultimately. Because he doesn't take the word of God seriously. He doesn't take God seriously. You see, verse 33, which we didn't read earlier.

One of these people, or a prophet or a priest, asks you, What is the burden of the Lord?

Remember, burden is this word used throughout the prophets. Of a message. A weight that lies on the prophet until he's had the opportunity to liberate.

[ 34 : 07 ] You see, you are the burden of the Lord. The message you are giving, which you proclaim to be liberating. Which you proclaim to be life-giving.

It's actually untrue. It's actually a burden. You see, if we don't believe in grace. If we don't believe in righteousness that comes through grace by faith.

Then we're shut up to moralism, aren't we? We're shut up to trying desperately to imitate Christ. Of course, if we do that, that's our hope of salvation.

One of two things is going to happen. One, we're going to feel we're doing rather well. The other thing that's going to happen is we're going to be in great despair. As we know, we're not doing nearly well enough.

This is the problem with religion. Religion is deadly. Religion cripples. Religion is a burden. The gospel liberates.

[ 35 : 06 ] Religion says, do good and God accepts you. The gospel says, God accepts you and therefore do good. It's not a world apart, light years apart.

You see, this judgment is going to be set up for these false prophets. We think, verse 40, the last verse of the chapter, I will bring you everlasting reproach and perpetual shame.

It will never be forgotten. You see, there is a judgment day coming when we will know beyond any doubt who spoke the truth and who didn't.

There will be a day when the true gospel will be revealed and when the world will know it. So just as we finish, just three brief comments.

First of all, in back to verse 5, I will raise up for David a branch. In other words, this is living. This is growing. Rather like the metaphor of the vine.

[ 36 : 05 ] Not stagnation and death like verse 12. Like slippery ways into darkness. Secondly, we need to know the difference between... You see, false teaching isn't something which on the whole the church would be better without, but can actually manage.

False teaching is deadly. False teaching destroys. False teaching leads people to hell. That is the ultimate issue and the problem.

We need a worldwide vision, don't we? How all the lands will worship. The great multitude that no one could count. Different times. Any of us may be in very small struggling places.

Some of you may have been in the past in churches which struggle to keep alive. Others may be in the future. But the future is bright. Because the future belongs to the good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep.

To the great shepherd who was raised from the dead. And to the chief shepherd who will return in glory. And that is a gospel worth believing. That's a gospel worth proclaiming.

[ 37 : 14 ] Amen. Let's pray. Our Father, we praise you. You alone are the shepherd.

We are the sheep of your pasture. We've also raised up in your kingdom people whose task it is to shepherd your flock. And we pray, Lord, that those under-shepherds may be given grace, may be given vision, may be given courage to lead the flock.

So that when the chief shepherd appears, they may receive the crown of glory that will not fade away. Amen.