

Christ the King

**IT'S NOT OUR JOB, IT'S NOT OUR
RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Christ the King

Analysis by Eric W. Evers

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. 2 Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. 3 Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. 4 I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

5 The days are surely coming, says 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. 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

DIAGNOSIS: We're Not Shepherds

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *It's Not My Problem!*

Pastors in conflicted congregations will probably flee from this text. After all, it places the clergy in the crosshairs! Yes, “shepherd” is an ancient Near Eastern image for “king,” and few pastors have kingly prerogatives. But the image surely extends to the spiritual leadership of Judah. And, history aside, we almost reflexively think “pastor” when we hear “shepherd” in a church setting. So, the average layperson will be tempted to begin imagining all the shortcomings of pastors they know, or perhaps of bishops and denominational leaders whose stances are different than their own. “Those inattentive shepherds! It’s their fault!” If only the church scheduled worship and Sunday School at a more convenient time, there would be more kids around. If only the pastor visited more people, or preached better sermons, attendance would go up. If only the pastor were more diligent, then those parents would really be bringing their kids to worship after they were baptized. ... But it’s not my fault, thinks the church member. I’m no shepherd!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *We’re Not Shepherding*

However, if “the priesthood of all believers” is true, if the doctrine of vocation is true and if, in fact, we are all stewards (“managers”) of a God-given life with all its possessions, relationships, and opportunities, then we are all most certainly shepherds! The problem is, we just don’t exercise our shepherding offices. We have been created and redeemed to live as active participants in God’s saving work, but we (meaning all of God’s people, all the baptized shepherds) act as though that’s a burden belonging to someone else. And so, as parents, grandparents, godparents, and caring adults, we have not passed the faith on to our children. As neighbors, we have not reached out with the Gospel to those around us. As parishioners, we have shamed and shunned sinners. At the same time, we also water down hard teachings, replacing the Law and

Gospel with “niceness” and “minding our business.” We believe it is someone else’s responsibility, but we are actually evading our calling from God.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *We’re Un-shepherded*
“‘So I will attend to your evil doings,’ says the Lord” (v. 2). Is there any more fearsome promise to hear? God will deal with our evildoing. We have scattered, driven away, and neglected his flock. We will be scattered and driven away from his presence. Our blessing will be overshadowed as we are visited with a curse for our inwardly-curved ways.

PROGNOSIS: There Is a Shepherd for Us – the Lord!

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *It’s Not Our Righteousness*

But the Lord’s way of dealing “wisely” (v. 5) does not end with wrath. He will raise up a righteous shepherd, one whose righteousness consists in redeeming the ungodly. The crucified and resurrected King of Kings, Jesus, gathers the scattered with love, ransoms the driven-away with his blood, and tends to the dead with life-giving mercy. Our righteousness? It’s nothing. The righteousness that Jesus gives? It’s everything. He is our righteousness, and so we are forgiven, and brought back into the Lord’s good, life-giving pasture.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *It’s Our Role, Not Our Responsibility*

Just as Jesus shepherds us out of wrath, so too is it his vocation to shepherd those whom we have neglected, scattered, and driven away. We cannot gather them back; only he can. However, he still deigns to do this work through earthly means. He speaks his Word and extends his love through flesh and blood like us. Redeemed sinners are commissioned again as shepherds. But, where before we thought “it’s not my job, it’s the pastor’s,” now we realize “it’s not our job” in a different way.

The responsibility, the ability, and the power all belong to the King. We simply receive his love and are carried along by it. Offering ourselves to him, we will find, to our amazement, that he will do incredible things through us that we could never do on our own.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Saved and Living in Safety*

What does this look like? Jeremiah tells us that the Lord will bring back those who have been scattered. His people will live in safety, both physical and spiritual. What about those complaining parishioners in step one? Once the love and joy of the shepherd King starts overflowing in his people, contagious changes happen. The grumpy satisfaction of finger-pointing and excuse-making gets replaced with an eagerness to tell the great Story, to mentor and nurture the immature, and to love the unloved. Instead of assigning blame, we get to share in opportunity to let Christ's goodness overflow. The righteousness that has been given to us wants to spread. Aren't you excited to see where it will go through you?