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The Good, Great and Chief Shepherd

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

John 10:11 NKJV; Hebrews 13:20-21; 1 Peter 5:1-4

The theme of shepherding

It runs throughout Scripture. Abraham, Jacob, Moses and David were notable shepherds in the Old Testament. In different ways they each pointed forward to the Lord Jesus, who protects, feeds, tends and guides His sheep. In contrast to the irresponsible leaders of Israel who were supposed to shepherd the people of God, the Lord Jesus is the true Shepherd who cares for the flock (Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34).

Psalms 22–24

These psalms are collectively referred to as the “Shepherd Psalms” and highlight the Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd. He suffered and died to save us (Ps. 22); He lives to direct and provide for us (Ps. 23) and is soon coming back to reign as King (Ps. 24). The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gave His life; He is the Great Shepherd who rose from the dead, and He is the Chief Shepherd who is coming again.

As the Good Shepherd He died for the sheep; as the Great Shepherd He lives for the sheep, and as the Chief Shepherd He will reward the sheep. As the Good Shepherd He has saved us from the penalty of sin; as the Great Shepherd He is saving us from the power of sin; as the Chief Shepherd He will save us from the presence of sin altogether. He is “the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5). We have been saved by His work on the cross; we are being guided by His crook (staff), and we await His crown!

Goodness, greatness and glory

In Christ’s earthly ministry and sacrificial death we perceive His *goodness*; in His resurrection and priesthood we perceive His *greatness*; in His future appearing and kingdom we perceive His *glory*.

Acts 10:38 says, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil.” He is the great Prophet (Luke 7:16), High Priest (Heb. 4:14) and King (Ps. 47:2). Yes, He is the “Chief among ten thousand” (Song 5:10) – of all the redeemed!

Notice that as the Good and the Great Shepherd, Christ stands alone. No one else could die for our sins or be raised for our justification. We could not participate or contribute toward our salvation in any way.

But as the Chief Shepherd, we will be with Him for eternity and share His glory. “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4). The very title implies there are others, among whom He is Chief. Although we had nothing to do in the work of salvation, we can now partner with Him in service, which will be rewarded at His coming!

Is the Lord Jesus being magnified in our lives? Is He becoming greater and more profound to our hearts as we follow Him? Are we seeing more of His beauties as

time goes by? As a sinner I first saw the Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd; as a saint I see Him as both the Good and the Great Shepherd; and when He is revealed I shall see Him as He is – in His glory as the Chief Shepherd.

In the narrative about the apostle Paul's conversion, Luke wrote: "A light shone around him from heaven" (Acts 9:3). When addressing the mob at his arrest, Paul himself described it as "a great light" (22:6), and later to King Agrippa he spoke of "a light from heaven, brighter than the sun" (26:13). Over time, Paul became increasingly aware of how glorious this light was.

Likewise, may the value of our Good, Great and Chief Shepherd shine brighter and brighter to us, from our initial perspective as sinners saved by grace (Jn. 10:11), to children of God doing His will (Heb. 13:20-21), to the ever-nearing prospect of eternity (1 Pet. 5:1-4) – that in all things He may have the preeminence (Col. 1:18).

