

Jeremiah (13): Shepherds to Rest Their Flocks

(Jeremiah 33)

I. Introduction

- A. When I was a kid, we had this huge maple tree (*still there on satellite map*)
 - 1. Now as far as I can tell, that maple tree was only good for three things.
 - a. It was good for breaking arms—I wasn't a very efficient tree-climber
 - b. It was good for making whirly-bird, helicopter seeds go everywhere.
 - c. It was good for spreading roots out into places like sewer lines.
 - 2. I remember a time bathtub filled up with stuff bathtubs ought not to have.
 - a. Roto-Rooter came and did their smelly job; things returned to normal
 - b. I thought, "*Not a job I want when I grow up.*" Was glad they had it!
- B. People in the first century may have thought the same thing about shepherds.
 - 1. Sheep provided important things for ancient people— like wool and meat.
 - a. And in order to be provided those things, you also had to have shepherds
 - b. When we think of "shepherd," we probably think of a breed of dog
 - c. We aren't familiar with role of shepherd, especially in the ancient world
 - 2. First century people needed sheep, but they had little use for shepherds.
 - a. They were seen as low-class ruffians who were smelly and uncooth.
 - b. They were gypsies, outsiders and nomads who had "sticky fingers."
 - c. They were seen as unreliable—weren't allowed as witnesses in court.
 - d. Most of all—they were ceremonially unclean and therefore were unholy.
 - 3. People didn't want shepherds around, but they really needed the sheep.
- C. Maybe all that gives more meaning to Luke story of the shepherds in [Luke 2](#)
 - 1. They were riff-raff who were not permitted to be witnesses in court
 - a. They were first witnesses in opening scene of greatest story ever told
 - b. They were just shepherds "*keeping watch over their flocks at night*" ([2:8](#))
 - c. They were first to hear a proclamation of "*good news of great joy*" ([2:10](#))
 - 2. Today we praise God for that same message— good news that is "*gospel*"
 - a. Christmas is purely tradition—season is neither Biblical nor historical
 - b. But the story that the season proclaims is both Biblical and historical.
 - 3. The story begins with riff-raff shepherds (**Reading:** [Luke 2:8-15](#)) *Songs*

II. Shepherds to Rest Their Flocks

A. Today we end our study of the book of Jeremiah with a very seasonal text

1. The basic message of Jeremiah was one of gloom and doom for Judah
 - a. God's call to repentance was ignored, so Jeremiah foretold a coming end
 - b. We know him as "Weeping Prophet." He had plenty of reasons to weep.
2. Beginning in **Jer 29**, he changes his focus—to the return from exile
 - a. He tells the Jews to settle into their lives in Babylon (**Jer 29:4**)
 - 1) The exile would not be a temporary arrangement—last a lifetime
 - 2) They were to bless Babylon by their lives as God's people (**Jer 29:7**)
 - b. Even they prepare for exile, they were to focus on promise (**Jer 29:10**)
3. Much of Jeremiah looks past Babylon to what God would do in future
 - a. The prophet Micah speaks of those who gloat over exile (**Micah 4:12**)
 - b. Those plans of God had been revealed through Jeremiah—the return

B. **Jeremiah 33** gives three signs of the return, all beginning "*the word of Lord*"

1. **First**, there would again be the festive sounds of weddings (**Jer 33:10-11**)
 - a. Weddings are happy times of celebration—times for family & friends
 - 1) That's especially true the less money is spent (*Hey, I have 2 daughters*)
 - 2) More than just the party, weddings are times to look to the future
 - b. Judah was not a place for wedding in first part of Jeremiah's message
 - 1) Jeremiah himself was told not to married or have kids (**Jer 16:2**)
 - 2) Times would get dreadful; this was not the time to make a future
 - c. That changed in Babylon, they were to marry (**Jer 29:6**). *That was exile.*
 - d. Promise here was that the sounds of weddings would be heard in Judah.
2. **Second**, it would again be place for shepherds to rest flock (**Jer 33:12-13**)
 - a. Psalm 23 paints a pastoral picture of green pastures & quiet waters
 - 1) Judah hadn't been a very pastoral place as Jeremiah writes (**16:4**)
 - 2) That is why Jeremiah was not to marry and raise children—not safe
 - b. But the time was coming when Judah would be pastoral once more
 - 1) There would be peace and safety—shepherds would rest their flocks
 - 2) Image of shepherds/sheep conveyed a return to normalcy after exile
 - c. But there is something else here as well—more on shepherds later

3. **Third**, there was the witness of sunrise and sunset (**Jer 33:19-21**)
 - a. Judah did not believe Jeremiah when he predicted the fall and exile
 - 1) And they seem also hesitant to believe the promise of the return
 - 2) So Jeremiah here has to do a little coaxing to get them to believe
 - b. God will forget covenant with sunrise before His promise to Israel
 - c. Jeremiah sings “*Sunrise, Sunset,*” but not from *Fiddler on the Roof*
 - 1) That song was once *required* for weddings (*in ours, done very badly*)
 - 2) This was more like the Paul Wright song “*From Sunrise to Sunset*”
From sunrise to sunset help me not forget all that you've done for me
From sunset to sunrise help me keep my eyes upon your glory
 - d. If the sun came up in morning, then God would restore His people.
 - e. Well, the sun came up... and God was working to bring His Son!
- C. Go back to the part on the shepherds and sheep that we skipped (**Jer 33:14-16**)
 1. There was something deeper going on in these words about shepherds
 - a. There was the coming restoration from exile, but something else
 - b. God would bring the Branch of David back to the throne of Jerusalem
 - 1) This imagery of “Branch” is prophet-speak for “Messiah” (**Isa 11:1**)
A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
 - 2) Jeremiah had used the same imagery earlier in his book (**Jer 23:5**)
⁵ *“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.*
 - c. Jeremiah says of the time of Messiah, “*In those days Judah will be saved*”
 - 1) In **Jer 23**, the Messiah would be called “*Lord is Our Righteousness*”
 - 2) In **Jer 33**, he causes Jerusalem to be “*Lord is Our Righteousness*”
 2. This prediction of the Messiah follows that of shepherds resting the flocks
 - a. Do you think this was one of those accidently of history? Hardly.
 - b. Shepherds were resting their flocks in Judah one night 600 years later
 - c. The peaceful night sky suddenly became bright with the light of heaven
 - 1) An angel proclaimed to them a message of “*good news of great joy*”
 - 2) Angelic choir sang, “*Glory to God in the highest, and earth peace...*”
 3. And all these years later, we sing about shepherds, angels and the Christ
 - a. These shepherds may have been by the world as low class riff-raff.
 - b. They fulfilled Jeremiah’s prediction and became the first to hear gospel!

III. Conclusion

A. The details of this “Christmas story” are a familiar to us all.

1. We seem it represented on Christmas cards and in people’s yards
 - a. We know all about Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and angels
 - b. Sure, some mess up and put the Magi at the manger (or maybe Santa)
 - c. Roger has T-F test on Christmas story fact on his blog (*test yourself*)
2. While facts are familiar, the meaning and message are incomprehensible
 - a. This is the story of God among us, the Creator becoming creature
 - 1) Creator of the universe was wrapped in flesh, and swaddling clothes
 - 2) Familiar story is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma
 - b. Augustine mused over the divine mystery of the incarnation—

He so loved us that, for our sake, He was made man in time, although through him all times were made. He was made man, who made man. He was created of a mother whom he created. He was carried by hands that he formed. He cried in a manger in wordless infancy, he the Word without whom all human eloquence is mute.

He who was God was made man by taking on what He was not, not by losing what He was... Let Christ, therefore, lift you up by that which is human in Him; let Him lead you by that which is God-man; let Him guide you through to that which is God.

3. That is not a simple story, but it is my story, and I’m sticking with it!

B. Is that your story this morning? One thing is certain about this story.

1. If it is true, then it can’t be a story that is important once a year!
 - a. If God truly did come into our world, that that changes everything
 - b. If you will follow this story at all, then you must follow it all the time
2. We end by singing the story one more time in the carol “Silent Night”
 - a. As we sing it, hear more than just the pastoral setting and quiet peace
 - b. Hear the mystery, the enigma of God in the flesh who came to save you
 - c. This isn’t the end of the story of grace—it is only the beginning
3. Jesus is not just the reason for the season—He is the reason PERIOD!

*Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light!
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.*