

YOU CAN TRUST GOD

By Terry Jones, October 19, 2008

Christ's Church at Tiffin, Ohio

Psalm 23:1-6

CENTRAL SERMON THEME – Because God is like a good shepherd, we can trust Him to provide all we need.

INTRO. - The present financial problem is being called the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression in the first half of the last century. The Mortgage Bankers Association reports more than four million Americans were at least one month behind in their mortgage payment at the end of this past June. American retirement plans have lost as much as \$2 trillion in the past 15 months, according to a Congressional budget analyst. Our entire nation struggles with this huge economic fall.

The effects are more expansive than just loss of money and retirements but it strikes at our mental and emotional health. In Ohio a 90 year-old-widow shoots herself in the chest as authorities arrive to evict her from the house she has called home for 38 years. Numerous tragedies are being reported throughout our nation as people are not capable of coping with the loss of their wealth and/or the foreclosure of their homes.

Dr. Edward Charlesworth, clinical psychologist in Houston, said the current crisis is breeding a sense of chronic anxiety among people who feel helpless and panic-stricken, as well as angry that their government has let them down." In our state of Ohio, we have experienced the closing of factories, the loss of jobs, and a declining real estate market. The rippling effect of a weak economy eventually reaches our local businesses causing declining profits or losses. Small business owners give their lives to building up their business to see it decline in a matter of months. What a disappointment! The church will feel the impact of a falling economy. What can we do? Is God ready to help us?

We cannot promise "happy days are here again and the sky above is blue again." We cannot tell you that everything will settle down once the election is over. I refuse to think God is judging us for being unfaithful to Him. The future is unknown to everyone. We do not have to remain silent. God sends us a message when our lives unravel, our means of support is uncertain, our hopes are bleak. I invite you to focus on what God promises us.

King David writes, "The Lord is my shepherd." In the ancient biblical world the shepherd's care for his sheep was a metaphor for the care of a king

for his people. David addresses God as his shepherd. During the times of crisis for Israel the people remembered their shepherd God. When Israel is facing the catastrophe of the Babylonian invasion the prophet Isaiah reminds his fellow Jews of God in Isa. 40. "Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes."

After the Babylonians invaded Israel they slaughtered many of the Israelites but they brought many of the captives to Babylon. God sent the prophet Ezekiel to Babylon before the Jews arrived. During this crisis Ezekiel comforted God's people with these words of hope for restoration in Ez. 34. "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and deliver them for all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day."

Jesus identified Himself as our Shepherd. Prior to going to the cross to suffer and die, Jesus spoke these comforting words in John 10. "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." We can say with all of God's people, "The Lord is my shepherd." What does this Scripture mean and how does it apply to our present situation?

I. GOD WILL PROVIDE.

A. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

1. Literally it says, "I shall not lack."
2. God promises to provide our basic needs.

B. David states the advantages of following our Lord.

1. God promises to nourish us.
 - a. Ex. - The shepherd daily led the sheep to eat in green pastures and drink from still waters. The good shepherd found food and water for his sheep each day. God will provide our food for us. Jesus said to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." He also said, "If God feeds the birds of the air, will He not also feed you?"
 - b. Applic. - Our shepherd provides spiritual nourishment. Jesus called Himself a shepherd. Church leaders are instructed to be shepherds. To the elders Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:2 - Shepherd the flock of God among you.
2. God promises to restore us.
 - a. God restores my soul.

- 1). Illus. - The shepherd inspects each sheep as they entered the sheep fold. Thorns or sharp rocks may injure the sheep. The shepherd provided medical aid.
- 2). God will restore you with time and proper care.
- b. God gives us forgiveness and peace.
 - 1). God specializes in healing sin.
 - 2). You can view God as a judge but He is also the Great Doctor who heals our sins through forgiveness.
3. God promises to lead us.
 - a. Ex. - The shepherd knew the right path to the pasture and back home. Sheep are near sighted which cause them to get lost easily. The shepherd walks in front of the sheep so they will follow. You can still see shepherds and sheep on the hillsides in southern Israel today.
 - b. God leads us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
 - 1). As a nation we have lost our moral and ethical paths.
 - 2). We will pay a price for our loss of a moral foundation.
 - 3). Psa. 33:12 - Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.

C. God will provide for us.

1. Psa. 37: 25 - I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.
2. Personally, there have been times I have been without money but I have never been hungry.
3. Applic. - God does not promise us a gourmet meal each day but you can trust Him to provide for you.
4. Illus. - In the Highlands of Scotland, the grass on these mountains is very sweet and sheep like it. They will jump down ten or twelve feet, and then they can't jump back again. They may be there for days, until they have eaten all the grass. The shepherd will wait until the sheep are so faint they cannot stand. The shepherd will put a rope around himself, go over and rescue that sheep. "Why don't they go down there when the sheep first gets there?" you may ask. They would answer, "They are so very foolish they would dash right over the precipice and be killed if they did!" The shepherd waits until the time is right for the rescue. Moody's Anecdotes, pp. 70-71.

II. GOD WILL COMFORT.

A. Though I walk through the valley of deep darkness I will fear no evil.

1. God is with us.
2. His rod and staff comfort us.

B. Applic. - God will comfort us in all our troubles.

1. God's people will endure deep sorrows and pain.
 - a. Illus. - I stood beside an eighty year old man who had lost his house and his store in the tornados of 1974. All he had was his clothes he wore and his car. We stood there on that dark rainy night in tears over their losses. He said for several of us to hear, "I have lived long enough to not question what has happened. I know God will take care of us."
 - b. The valley of deep darkness can stretch our limits.
 - c. Quote - Our extremity is God's opportunity.
2. God will be with us.
 - a. The greatest promise of the Bible is "God with us."
 - b. The name for Jesus, Emmanuel, means "God with us."
 - c. Illus. - A small ant received instructions from its boss to carry a piece of straw across a concrete floor. The piece of straw was long and heavy for such a small ant. The ant staggered under the weight of the piece of straw. As he is about to despair over the burden he is carrying suddenly he encounters a crack in the concrete he cannot cross. The weight is too heavy and now he had to cross this crack in the floor wider than the length of his body. In this discouraged moment he had a thought. He pushed the straw across the width of the crack to form a bridge. The little ant walked on the straw to cross over to the other side. This ant used its burden to form a bridge to overcome an obstacle. Our burdens can become our bridges to help others.
3. His rod will protect us.
 - a. The shepherd used his rod to protect sheep from predators.
 - b. God keeps the devil away from us to prevent evil.
 - c. The Sun, a British newspaper, reported the work of devil worshipers in Russia. Satan worshipers stabbed to death three girls and one boy 666 times each. After cooking parts of their bodies they became cannibals. Cops in Russia arrested eight Satan worshipers in connection with the killings. One of them said, "I tried to turn to God, but it didn't bring me any money. I

prayed to Satan, and things improved." (Source - The Sun, 15 Sep 2008, Internet, by Lynsey Haywood)

4. His staff will guide us.
 - a. The staff was a long walking stick.
 - b. The shepherd used his staff to guide the sheep.

III. GOD WILL BLESS

- A. God prepares a banquet table for us.
 1. The scene is now a banquet prepared for us.
 2. The transition from the shepherd to the banquet is difficult.
 3. God invites His sheep to His palace for a banquet.
 4. Applic. - One of the greatest joys in life is eating. The greatest joy in life is to receive the blessings of God.
 5. Illus. - After watching the movie Cinderella, five-year-old Sarah started using her pinwheel as a magic wand, pretending she was a fairy godmother. "Make three wishes," she told her mother, "and I'll grant them." Her mom first asked for world peace. Sarah swung her wand once around and proclaimed the request fulfilled. Next, her mother requested for a cure for all ill children. Again, with a sweep of the pinwheel, Sarah obliged. The mother, with a glance down at her aging body, made her third wish, "I wish to have a trim figure again." The miniature fairy godmother started waving her wand..... madly. Her mother says... "Well?" "Oh, I'll need lots more power for this!" she exclaimed.
- B. God shows His goodness.
 1. He brings the enemies before His people who are now friends.
 - a. Illus. - When we men were little boys we fought with our playmates and friends. I would fight with them one day and we would be best friends the next day.
 - b. Illus. - One of our nation's most bitter enemies was the nation of England. Our founding fathers hated the British Empire of the late 1700's and early 1800's. They are now our best ally in the world. Most of the nations we fight become our friends eventually. We have hope for the Middle East.
 2. He anoints our head with oil.
 - a. Ex. - Middle Eastern hospitality is wonderful. Both Arabs and Jews are great hosts. Muslims are hospitable as well as the

Hindus. God invites us to His banquet table with anointing our heads with oil, a symbol of friendship and love.

b. Worship is the banquet table of the Lord.

C. We respond in faith.

1. Goodness and loving kindness will pursue us every day.

a. God searches for us like a shepherd looks for a lost sheep.

b. The entire church is your shepherd.

2. We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

a. After a difficult day with the sheep a shepherd would love to be worshiping in God's house.

b. Eventually we will be with God in Heaven.

CONCLUSION - Elisabeth Elliot tells the story of a young girl who was very ill but learned to recite Psalm 23 on her fingers. Starting with her pinkie, she would grab a finger as she said each word, "The Lord is my shepherd." As she said "shepherd" she would clasp her thumb to remember God's care for her. One morning she died after a hard fight against a terminal illness. Her family found her with her hand holding the thumb on her other hand. "The Lord is my shepherd." Whatever happens in our future, the Lord is our shepherd.