

The Shepherd's Anointing

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* Psalter 111: 1-4 * Psalter 144:1-2

Scripture Reading: Romans 8

Psalter 297 * Psalter 6: 1-6 * Psalter 52: 1-4

"The LORD is my Shepherd!" The reason that David is singing about his shepherd is to attract our attention to his Shepherd. For none less than that Jesus the Shepherd will do us any good!

Why is that? The reason is because we are like sheep! It was not without good reason that God chose the sheep as the animal to compare us to. Did you know that no sheep will survive in the wild without a shepherd? Did you know that a sheep is only animal that can get lost a mile away from its own home? They become so disorientated and confused, that they will run in circles without finding their way back.

Isn't that a truthful picture about us? We are so lost that we can never find the way back to God. We need David's Shepherd to find us and to lead us. Are you learning this fact about yourself as sinner? Do you believe that without the divine Shepherd we are and will remain lost? The best religious education or best preacher cannot restore us with God. In order to be born again, to have our eyes opened, to have our hearts changed, to have our feet led into the right path, we need this Shepherd. David's Shepherd is among us today. For Jesus is where is Word is preached. Hear His call to us today, *"Unto you, oh men, I call and my voice is to the sons of man."* (Proverbs 8:4). He calls us to

consider the richness and treasures of Himself and what He brings. He calls to allure you out of the dry, barren and parched pasture of the world. Hear Jehovah's voice again in Isaiah 55:3, *"Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."* Aren't those truths the greenest pastures in the Word, His covenant mercies? Will you hear Him?

There is another reason why God compares us to sheep. Children, when you see sheep on a picture, what kind of animal do you see? Usually you see a nice, fluffy, cuddly, white animal, right? Is that really what sheep look like who aren't taken care of by the shepherd? No, they don't. A sheep left to take care of itself, is a dirty animal. It is one of the dirtiest animals because they can't clean themselves. A cat and dog lick themselves clean, birds peck themselves clean, but a sheep cannot clean itself. As they rub through the pasture and bushes, they gather grease, dirt, seeds, vegetation and insects in their fleece. This is especially true at their back end which tends to become one big black dirty mess which they can't clean. I do not know of any other animal that has that problem. That's another reason why God chose the sheep as our picture. We also cannot clean ourselves. We cannot make ourselves acceptable in the sight of God. We cannot ever polish ourselves up! We need the Shepherd Jesus to do this. Only He can make us acceptable in sight of our glorious God. His Work as prophet, priest and king alone can save us. Are you learning this also? Is God showing you the helplessness and uselessness of your own shepherding efforts? Is He showing you the vanity of every attempt to cleanse yourself from the guilt and filth of sin? Are you seeking the Shepherd and calling upon Him to be your Shepherd like He was for David? Oh, neglect not so great salvation or such a great Savior.

A third reason why we are like sheep is that there no animal as defenceless as a sheep. Other animals have teeth, or claws, or horns to butt with. Some are heavy and tall, fast or smart. Others have shells to hide in or poison to spray, or have a good camouflage. But a sheep has none of these defences. When a sheep is in danger, they start running away, they panic and may even run right into the claws of their predator. Draw the line to yourself. We are also defenceless against the great enemy of our soul. We are no match to our own sinful power or the powers of Satan and his agents. Here we are in a hostile world without shelter, without defence and without ability to survive. Where shall we turn? What can help us? Is there One able to save us to the uttermost? Yes, there is One upon Whom the LORD has laid all His might. It is David's Shepherd. Let's consider His work in vs. 5b,

"Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over." It speaks about:

The Shepherd anointing the Sheep.

1. Why does He need to anoint them?
2. How does He anoint them?
3. What is the result of this anointing?

To understand this 'anointing of the sheep' let's recall where we are in the sheep's journey as pictured in Psalm 23. In verse 5-6 David described the shepherd's work in leading his sheep through the valley floor via the table lands to the summer heights or ranges. The 'table lands' are like a 'rest-area' on the way up. The shepherd prepared these lands so that they would be safe and restful for there are *enemies* on these table lands. This is clear from the text words, *"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."*

What are these enemies on the table lands? Was it hunger or thirst or lack of necessary minerals? That would be the case but we learned in the previous sermon that the shepherd has taken care of these needs. So wouldn't these table-lands, these rest-areas, be as a little paradise for the sheep for them to graze and rest contentedly? Wouldn't it be a place that is above all the strife and fear?

That's often also what God's children expect spiritually? When Jesus Christ as Shepherd begins to handle a sinner, our fears increase at first. Fright and oppressions fill our heart as we come face to face with the reality of being lost, guilty, unholy and therefore undone. Experiencing the truths of God's law bring darkness and despair. Yet, when the Shepherd leads us in the green pastures of His Gospel righteousness and makes us to rest at the still waters of His Gospel, we expect that this rest will never end and the peace never be disturbed. Now the strife is over and the journey in following the Shepherd will be smooth. For when the LORD is our Shepherd, we shall not want.

All that would only be true, friends, if we didn't live within this world and if we didn't have the old man still living within us. It was therefore true to life when the early Christians welcomed a young believer into the church with the words, "Welcome in the strife." Why did they do that? Wasn't that discouraging? Wouldn't that put them off? Though it may have been somewhat bewildering to them at first, soon they would find how truthful it was. Isn't it better to be prepared? It is like us who make journeys. After hours of traveling we reach a rest-area and look forward to stretching out our legs and refreshing ourselves. We step out of the car and suddenly we are met by the heat along with a cloud of mosquitoes! That picture is the reality of the table-lands. Though a place

meant for rest, with plenty food, they weren't such quiet and sweet pastures as we imagine. It was time to be assaulted!

Assaulted? Who are the assaulters? The enemies are the flies, bugs, gnats, mosquitoes and all those little predators. Summer time is fly season. These tiny creatures fly in hoards around sheep and are first-rate torturers. They pester them so badly, that they know no rest. Those of you who are hunters, may think that the worst time for the animals is when you take out your gun and go hunt. Instead, the worst season for deer is the summer time when flies and mosquitoes pester them. Sheep are also not exempt. As a matter of fact, sheep are especially susceptible to nose flies. The fly is attracted to the wet membrane of the nose and lays its little eggs there. As the eggs hatch and become little larva, they crawl right into the cavities inside the head, and there they begin to inflame and irritate the head. As result the sheep goes absolutely crazy. They run around the paddock, hitting their heads against the rocks. They can be seen jumping up and down for three or four hours, thrashing around in the bushes. They panic and run to escape the irritation in their head. Finally, they drop down dead. What a small insect can do!

Besides these flies there is scabies. This is a highly contagious and extremely irritating disease that develops on the skin of sheep, and again, only in the summer time. It is very contagious and spreads when sheep rub their heads together, which they like doing in an affectionate interaction. Health is never contagious, but sickness is. This is not only true in nature but also spiritually. To fight these threats and tortures of the sheep, the Shepherd anoints the head of his sheep with oil. This only protects them, it also heals them. Without the shepherd doing this, the sheep would be doomed to torture.

Now let us think about this spiritually. Living in this world, we are like sheep in a wilderness full of demons and evil people pestering us, even without realizing it. We are exposed to all kinds of toxic influences that come into our mind and stir our hearts. And beside all these external influences, our own sinful heart is also cage of unclean imaginations. And what is man doing about this? Exactly as the sheep do. We run all over the place to escape the reality, maybe to quiet the voice of our conscience. We hit our heads and stubbornly keep returning to the things that hurt us. We want to run away from the reality of death. We do not want to think about death, so we surround ourselves with pleasures to distract us or escape the sour reality of life. But the truth is that *“The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest.”* (Isaiah 57: 20).

Do see you own picture? Can you see that none of the things that the world offers delivers us from the nagging guilt, restless hearts and broken relationships? It doesn't cure you, it doesn't protect you from sin, it doesn't cancel out the constant assaults of the devil and his agents. My friend, if you are unsaved and you have not been brought under the Shepherding love of Christ, you are like this.

The fact is that the pestering insects don't only assault the wild animals on the table lands, the sheep also are in the fire-line. So it is in this life. Jehovah's sheep are not exempt from the pestering insect Satan, sin and self. That is why the saying, “Welcome to the strife!” is accurate. Don't ever imagine that once you are a child of God that all the strife is over. Once you have learned to bow your knee before the kingship of Jesus Christ, you in essence have declared war against the kingdom of Satan.

Congregation, look at this sheep. It has made quite a journey so far. He has been led into the sheep pasture. It has been led beside the still waters and

experienced the restoration of the soul. The sheep has been led into the path of righteousness for His name's sake. When we look at these phrases Biblically, we can see that God has been teaching His child in the beautiful chapters of His grace. There is justification by faith, peace in the heart, leading beside the still waters in the eating and drinking those wonderful promises of God, restoring the soul, taking away of the burden of the heart, showing the way of salvation and the blessedness of those whose sins are forgiven and iniquity is covered. The sheep may have experienced such beautiful truths. It is joyful indeed! They have been delivered from the crushing guilt and curse of sin. They have learned that the demands of the law are all satisfied and yet they are constantly pestered and tortured by the enemies that are still present.

No sheep of Jesus can escape and rise above the reality of being sinful in a sinful world. None pictured that more clearly than Paul in Romans 7. Though he is man who has been in the third heaven, a man who seen the glory of Christ risen, who has been delivered from the crushing load of sin, yet he groans about the pestering reality of his indwelling sin. Hear him in his own words, "*Oh, wretched man that I am.*" (Romans 7:24). Paul suffered under that and he could not escape it. "*Who shall deliver me from this body of death?*" It is as though he says, "It assaults me when I pray, when I read the Bible. Thoughts, feelings, desires, imaginations, distractions are with me when I go to church. Horrible things come up when I dream in my sleep. I feel a barrage of assaults when I walk in the street. It is with me when I see other people. I can't get away from these insects of my sins. Oh, who shall deliver me from this pest of my old man or indwelling sin?" You see, God's children are not going to escape the reality of this fallen world even though they may graze on the table lands under the very care of their Shepherd.

Do you understand this? Does this bewilder you? Is this reality of the sheep of Jesus unexpected? Children, when I was young, I thought God's children didn't have struggles with sin anymore. When I listened to them or watched some of them in church, I thought that those people don't have evil desires or wrong thoughts. A former minister used to say, "Children, if I would write the things that live in my heart on these white walls next to me, you would never listen to me anymore." You know, I thought, "That can't be true, it's just pious talk." I was wrong; it is true! Now I understand him now. But I didn't realize that then. I thought that once you are converted you are beyond the attraction to sin. You are beyond the pesky influences of sin. But, no, that is not the truth! We will only be delivered when we are taken away from this earth and delivered from this body of death that is clinging to us like poisonous ticks. The Psalm speaks about this in verse six. *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* Then, there will be no more "pesky insects" assaulting us from within our hearts and from others around us.

But, gladly, this is not all the truth. There still is the Shepherd and if He is our Shepherd, we shall not lack. David confessed it, *"Thou anointest my head with oil."* But first we will sing.

Psalter 6: 1-6

We just sang the words, "I have more joy than great abundance could impart." When did David write this psalm that we just sang? It was when he was fleeing from Absalom. He is in circumstances of dire need. His own son is his enemy.

And yet he experiences a greater joy than any earthy abundance could ever give him. How come? What is happening? Well, it is one of those moments that David's Shepherd was anointing his head with oil.

How does the Shepherd do that, children? Remember I told you about those nose flies? They crawl into the nose cavities, and dig into the sheep's head. What does the shepherd do about that? Well, the shepherds in the Bible times had developed some fly oil. It was made of olive oil. They would add sulphur to the oil and some very strong spices. A shepherd would then rub that oil mixture over the head of the sheep throughout the journey, especially in the summer time. It wasn't done once a summer; no, the shepherd had repeat it every seven to ten days. Sometimes when the fly infestation in the sheep was really bad a shepherd would give the whole sheep a bath, not only his head. They would dip the sheep into a bath of this mixture. The hardest part of this process was to put the sheep's head in the mixture. They had to push it down all the way to ensure the sheep's head would go under. It's just like us when we were young when we hated putting our head under the shower.

"Thou anointest my head with oil," was thus a loving act of the shepherds to defend his sheep from the flies and to heal them from those irritating itches that the scabies cause. The shepherds reported that this treatment would bring an instant change in behaviour. The flies might still be buzzing close but now they are not bothersome anymore. Instantly after those sheep have been anointed or dipped in the oil, they begin to quietly graze in the fields. There is a sense of deliverance and protection.

What a beautiful spiritual truth this contains. In Scripture, oil is always the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Without Him and His ministry no sheep will survive the journey through this world. Did you notice as we read Romans 8, how often the apostle Paul makes references to the Holy Spirit? This is a chapter where Paul's cup is running over. Romans 8 is one of the most beautiful chapters of the whole Bible and yet it is written by the same man who feels tortured in chapter seven. In chapter 7 he said, "The things I would, I don't, and the things I don't want, I do." This man is pestered by all the enemies and all the opposition and yet his cup is running over. Why? How? It is because the Holy Spirit is anointing him. The Spirit enables any sheep to live, to walk, to be fruitful in this terribly ungodly world with an inner sense of security and peace. They are walking through the same world that all mankind walks through and often they may even be in worse outward circumstances than most. Blessed is the Holy Spirit in His Personal work. It is His power, His presence that subdues our hearts of iniquity. No self-discipline will cure your heart, no resolutions will subdue your heart, and no past experiences will help either. Our heart needs the constant and abiding presence and power of the Holy Spirit to subdue the indwelling sin. Even in the heart of God's dearest sheep, dwells pride, unbelief, covetousness and a host of other sins. We will carry this reality with us for the rest of our life until God delivers us from this wretched body of death at the end of our journey. God will then bury it forever and we will rise as a perfect man.

We need this anointing of the Holy Spirit. Without Him, living within us, we are carnal, proud, back sliding, and we cannot live. Remember that sheep are the most helpless animals. That is our picture spiritually. We can't help ourselves.

Have you discovered that yet? Some people claim this truth only through hear-say. They like to use it as an excuse for doing nothing. There are also people who like to help themselves on the way to heaven without the Shepherd Jesus Christ. No, that isn't only found in false religions. Many among us are self-help-believers. Examine what are your resting grounds? Do we need the Shepherd, Jesus Christ and Him only for salvation? Or are we content to have our feelings and spiritual experiences, our lifestyle and choices we make without any exercises of looking at and trusting in Jesus Christ alone? In self-help religion we don't need the Holy Spirit either.

But God's Word and the experience of all God's children tell a radically different tale. David himself cried out that God would not take away His holy Spirit from him. One older hymns contains the words 'We need Thee every hour!' Is that also your experience?

Jehovah is my Shepherd, I shall not want. The glory of the Shepherd Jehovah is not only the glory of the Father, who eternally elected, or the glory of the Son Who bought His sheep, but also the glory of the Holy Spirit. Do you see how this Psalm is Trinitarian? *"Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup will run over."*

Oh, precious is the work of the Spirit of Truth, He opens the Scriptures and He opens our minds for the Scriptures. And when these come together, we will experience the anointing of the head. Have you ever had the experience when the needs of your heart are met with the Scriptures you read or hear? Well, such is the Spirit anointing your head as He leads you into the Scripture to feed and nourish you. He is called the Spirit of comfort and He administers that comfort through the Scriptures. The needs may still remain the same; the

situation may not alter, but as He sheds His love abroad in our heart we will sing, even though we may still be in a pesky prison or enduring other afflictive dealings.

It is amazing what God's children can do through His empowering and anointing ministry, even though in themselves they are poor, needy, and weak. See Luther standing before a fearful assembly, "I will not bow before the power of darkness." One man standing alone in the eyes of the world. In himself he is a weakling and trembling man, but as the anointing of the Spirit of God is on him, he is like unmovable pillar.

Blessed be the Spirit of God when He fills us with all joy and peace in believing. Paul shared his prayer for the Romans and let's make that our prayer, children of God, *"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."* (Romans 15:13). As the Spirit anoints us and enables us to embrace the blessed tidings of the Gospel, peace and joy will follow as the fruits, filling the heart.

When I may rest my heart, my troubled mind, my broken life, my sinful existence in those very arms of the Saviour, Jesus Christ – yes, then there is peace and joy. And who brings the sheep to this faith? That is the anointing Spirit of God upon His children. Paul wrote, *"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."* (Romans 8:26)

Where would we go, children of God, without the Holy Spirit? Where would we be today without the Holy Spirit? Surely, we must exalt the Father for His electing love and the Son for His meriting love but we are to give equal praise

to the Holy Spirit for His applying love. It is the triune God Who is the Saviour of sinners. That is why Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:16, *“that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.”* We need this as we face this world with all its oppositions, subtle and bold temptations. And above this as we face the sins that still live within us.

“Thou anointest my head with oil.” There is one way that the analogy between the sheep and the Christian, does not fit. Sheep will never seek the anointing of a shepherd. It is the job of a shepherd to come to the flock and decide that it is time to give the sheep a bath again. And upon making the mixture, he goes out among the flock to anoint them. Yet it is not quite like that spiritually, for we are to seek for the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

God anoints His sheep, congregation, through the Word, and we are to make a choice, like Mary made. Martha first thought she could do without the anointing of the Spirit of God and hurried on with her daily labour. Sure, it was good labour to prepare a meal for Jesus and His disciples. But do you know what happened as she omitted to seek His anointing first? It began to boil in that kitchen. No, not on the stove, but in her heart. She became so disturbed by the pestering thoughts within, boiling in her heart, that she became rude and impolite. For she not only interrupted Jesus’ sermon but addressed with unfitting words, *“Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.”* (Luke 10: 40). In other words, she rebuked Jesus as if He didn’t care! And she tries to make Him order Mary to the kitchen!” Oh, how quickly can our hearts and tongues rise up in sin! Calmly Jesus answered her, *“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about*

many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42).

See, congregation, Christ calls His children to seek His anointing first. We must not just to wait for it to happen. When we struggle with the “flies” of temptation and feel those “scabs” of infesting sins, thoughts and desires, we must ask ourself, “Have I been seeking the nearness of my Shepherd? Have I been seeking the anointing of the Word of God in my heart? Or have I been running on without sitting at the Shepherd’s feet?”

Hear the Word of God instructing us, children of God. Colossians 3:16 *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.”* Are we making use of the Word of God? We need to be in the Word so that the Word will be in us! One person wrote in the inside cover of their Bible, “This book will keep me from sin, or sin will keep me from this book.” When we are not in this Book, and when the words of this Book are not dwelling in us, we will miss the anointing influences of the Holy Spirit. Then all the pesky sins and temptations of this world will have access to us.

Even Paul felt that need as he was in his prison in Rome. He was not only cold but also hungry for he sent Timothy the request: *“The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.”* (2 Timothy 4:13) He apparently owned Old Testament Bible books and he longed to read them again. Now, consider this well. Here is a man who has been in the third heaven; a man who has preached for about twenty years, a man who has known Christ, who has felt so much of Christ’s teaching, and yet he yearns for the personal copy of a few Old Testament

books. Why? Because he longed for a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit which the Spirit brings through the readings of the Scripture. God can overrule the circumstances but if we are not in circumstances that bar us from the Scriptures, then we must not tempt God to minister His anointing without the use of Scriptures. Tempt God? Yes, we tempt God when we separate what He has joined together. God has always put together the means and the fruit. He has given us the Word to read and meditate on. Friends, are we doing that? Are we exercising ourselves daily to read and mediate upon the Word of God? The anointing of the Holy Spirit is also experienced through the sacraments. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us that Holy Ghost confirms faith by the *use* of the sacraments. Let us not look at the Lord's Supper in any a different way, it is the visual means of grace that God has given to strengthen the faith in His children. But then it must be used by God's children and not neglected for then we will not experience Holy Spirit's anointing.

"Thou anointest my head." What a blessing when that happens, friends. When the Spirit anoints your head, you will know it. How do you know? Because *"my cup runneth over."* Notice that this is a personal reflection. David wrote, *"my cup"*. It is not the Shepherd's cup, but the sheep's cup that runneth over. The psalmist speaks about the delight and the joy that he feels in his heart when God, the Holy Spirit is anointing him. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty to speak and to declare the greatness and goodness of the Lord to such a sinner as we are. When that Spirit is anointing you, my friends, you cannot keep your mouth closed. You must speak as it pours out of the heart to those that are there. There are so many beautiful Psalms written when the cup is running over. For example, David wrote Psalm 34 after he had behaved like a fool. He had acted like a mad man in front of Abimelech, the Philistine King. He

had been terrified and pestered with so many fears within and without. He had been driven to use a strategy to escape the hands of the enemy. But once delivered, he came back to write this psalm. His cup is running over. *“I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall be continually in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof and be glad.”* So he calls everyone to come and hear what God has done to Him. *“I, (despite my failings and unbelief) I sought the Lord and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”* (Psalm 34:4). And if it is possible for me then such a salvation is it is possible for you.” That is his cup running over.

We listened to Romans 8 this morning. That is one of the best examples of a cup running over. You could almost consider the chapter Paul’s Psalm of praise! How much this chapter has encouraged and ministered sinners through the centuries is known to God only! But undoubtedly the fulness of the cup of Romans 8 hasn’t been emptied! The cup is more than full and still running over. When is the last time, dear followers of the Lord Jesus, that you couldn’t stop talking about Him and how great He is? When did we call others to listen to what the Lord has done to you?

Let’s therefore make David’s petition our own, *“Touch my silent lips, oh Lord.”* Or use the words of this Psalm, *“Anoint my head with oil, oh gracious Shepherd.”* Let’s confess by name each pesky sin and temptation that swirls around you. The Shepherd revealed that He didn’t come to be ministered unto but to minister. Therefore, fear not to *“Open your mouth wide”* for He has promised to fill our every need.

Amen.