

1 Samuel 17:34-37. But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, ³⁵ I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. ³⁶ Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. ³⁷ The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

Our Good Shepherd is Strong to Save and Protect.

- 1. He keeps us from harm.***
- 2. In his love he delivers us.***



Happy Mother's Day! Throughout the past weekend you may have seen images like this one. It's the stuff of greeting cards and more than a few commercials during this time of the year. It is an image that is warm and welcoming and touching. But we all know that motherhood is more than just kisses and smiles and warm fuzzy moments. No, motherhood includes a lot more. It includes a woman caring and providing for her children. It means making sacrifices, many of which go unnoticed or underappreciated. It is a big responsibility that calls for serious dedication. It calls for vigilance and protection all carried out in love.

And so a mother gently takes that newborn in her arms and she makes sure to protect that child and keeps it from harm. She carries and caresses her child, she is gentle yet her grip is steady and sure, and that child is kept safe. As that child grows and the newborn becomes a toddler mom has to be vigilant. She swipes the small objects from her child's hand before the boy puts the tiny toy in his mouth. The mother protects her child from choking. As the child grows, mom is there to steer the young lad in the right direction. She warns him about the danger of playing too close to traffic and touching the hot stove. As the boy grows she does all she can to keep him from making bad choices. She is there to keep her child from harm. She is called upon to love, care for, and protect her children. A mother, especially a mother who carries out this duty in Christian love, is a great blessing.

Yes, she is there to hug and kiss and comfort the child. The warm greeting card moments are wonderful. They melt our hearts. They bring a soothing rush of happiness, but they don't last forever. The clean quiet moments shared between mother and child are often too few and much more time is spent in the reality of life and the perils and hassles and the noisy clutter of a typical day. If only every moment can be like this! But there is indeed much more to this role.



The picture of Jesus as a Good Shepherd has a similar effect. What great comfort we find in this picture! A soothing rush of happiness comes over us as we consider the gentle embrace of a shepherd holding his sheep and gently leading the rest of his flock. The words of Psalm 23 make our hearts swell with peace. The shepherd supplies my needs; he leads me beside quiet waters; he restores my soul. If only we could dwell in this tranquil place forever!

But the imagery of the shepherd is much more than a one dimensional picture of comfort. Much like a mother there is plenty more to this role. The role of a shepherd is much more than the gentle glow of a painting done in soft colors, it is much more than the glossy greeting card moments of a shepherd with a sheep gently resting in his arms or draped over his shoulders. During bible times the position of shepherd carried much responsibility and called for serious dedication. More than just gently leading a flock of sheep through quiet pastures there were also moments of great peril and distress.

David makes mention of some such moments that he himself experienced in our lesson for today. As David tries to convince Saul that he should let him fight Goliath, David recounts some of the dangers and perils of watching his father's sheep. ***"Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, ³⁵ I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it.***

Suddenly the picture of a shepherd has turned from warm and fuzzy to something much more rough and rugged. And David sounds like he was much more than your average shepherd. David took on lions and bears to protect his sheep. He ran after his dear sheep to rescue it from the mouth of the lion. Incredible!



The picture of a shepherd, especially the way David describes it here, depicts both comfort and strength. The shepherd delivers his sheep from violent danger, and he also gently leads them through tranquil pasture. In her painting of *David the Shepherd Boy*, Elizabeth Jane Gardner (1837 – 1922) beautifully captures both the strength and the comfort that the picture of the shepherd brings. David the shepherd boy is victorious over the ferocious lion. He has rescued a lamb from the lion's mouth and now holds that dear little lamb in his arms. Horrible danger and wondrous delivery; gentle comfort and mighty strength; impressive protection and victorious peace, are all powerfully conveyed in this painting.

As David goes out to fight Goliath he draws on his experience as a shepherd. He knows he has the LORD, who is both his comforter and a mighty deliverer, on his side. He steps out to meet this cruel giant trusting that the Lord is strong to save him from his

powerful enemy just like he delivered him from the paw of the lion and the bear. And we know how the story of David and Goliath ended. We know that in faithful love and power God delivered his servant victoriously.

And so we would do well to add this picture of a shepherd to our mental database. Not only is a shepherd a figure of soothing comfort but let us also remember that the shepherd is an image of rugged strength, constant protection, and fearless deliverance. This picture of a strong and capable shepherd is a source of much needed encouragement for us Christians today. As we go out to daily meet our spiritual enemies, it might seem like an impossible mission. Temptations and trouble and pain and death stand like giants who daily come out to taunt us, but then we remember that we have the Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the Sheep on our side. His tender yet powerful presence comforts us in our distress. He fills us with peace. He is strong to protect and save.

As temptations crouch around every corner our Savior is with us and protects us. The rod and staff of his word keep us on the narrow way and close to our shepherd. We delight in his law as he shows us the path on which we are to travel. He helps us defeat temptation. We listen to his tender voice as he forgives our sins and speaks in love to us and we are put at ease. For we know that we are loved, and cared for, we know that he protects us. We are confident of this because our Good Shepherd went above and beyond the call of duty for us, his dear sheep. Our Good Shepherd Jesus went out and risked and gave his own life for us. He sacrificed his own life to give us victory. He has defeated that terrible beast that prowls around *like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*.

As so we see David's remarkable love for his sheep as a precursor to the incredible love that David's greater son would show for us. Through Jesus, who is our Good Shepherd, we have been delivered from the mouth of the lion, we have been snatched from Satan's grasp, and now we are safely held in our Savior's arms. And one day this wonderful picture of peace and comfort will indeed last forever! He will guide us through life of danger and he will deliver us to the tranquility of heaven and we will dwell within the house of the Lord praising our God and King for all eternity!

Until the dawn of the eternal day of bliss, we live under his care. He gives us life and life to the full. We do not have a life that is filled with fear or uncertainty or guilt or despair, but in Christ Jesus we have a life that is full of comfort and strength. As Christians, who are in the care of the Great Shepherd, we live lives of confidence and peace and joy. Jesus is that tender shepherd who warms our hearts with his presence and he is also that fearless one who has delivered us in his great love. He saves us. He protects us. He keeps us from harm. He has defeated our great enemies of sin and death and even hell itself. This great shepherd was sent from heaven to live among us. He put his life on the line to save us from Satan, that roaring lion. And he rose from the dead to take away our fears even as the dark shadows of death surround us. Our risen and eternal Good Shepherd still protects us through his word. He keeps us safe from

those who would try to trick us and rob us of our joy. He guides us with his word so that we are not deceived by false teachers who are nothing but wolves in sheep's clothing. Our Shepherd is strong to save and protect us from harm.



Our Savior is even there to deliver us from our own unfortunate mistakes. By nature we are sheep who love to wander. Despite the incredible care of our Savior so often we go our own way. We wander into trouble. We carelessly walk into danger and sin. There are these times that we may even wander so far away that we no longer hear his voice and yet he seeks us out and finds us. He rescues us from our own mistakes and missteps and sins and he forgives us. He goes above and beyond and he calls us back to himself. He searches us out and finds us. He rescues us from the trouble that we so often make for ourselves. He stretches out his arm to save us and he gathers us to himself. He keeps us close to his heart. What incredible love! What tender care and reliable protection!

And so today we give thanks to God for two wonderful examples of love and protection. We thank Him for the gift of Christian mothers and all that they do. We thank Him for the tender touch and loving care, the dependable protection and the warm security that he provides through mothers. But today above all else we give thanks to our God for our Lord Jesus Christ. Through the powerful imagery of a shepherd God beautifully conveys both the tender love that he has for us and his gracious power to save. What incredible love! What tender care and reliable protection! Jesus is our Good Shepherd who not only laid down his life to save his sheep, but he has risen from the dead and now rules over all things with his mighty power. He has delivered us from the powers of hell. He is strong to save and protect us! And one day he will guide us to the green pastures of heaven where we will dwell with our Good Shepherd forever! Amen.

