

Jesus Recommissions His Disciples Part 3: Feed My Sheep cont

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Gospel of John

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Bible Text: John 21:15-17
Preached on: Sunday, July 17, 2016

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Please turn with me in your Bibles, if you will, to John 21. We're continuing our study of the 21st chapter of this Gospel and what we have said is something of an epilogue coming as it does after John's closing argument in the last two verses of the 20th chapter where he reaches sort of the zenith of his argument, convincing his readers that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that believing, you can have life in his name. He adds this epilogue which is one more appearance of the Lord Jesus to his disciples that he wants us to see and to hear. This particular appearance of Christ, this last one recorded by John here in the 21st chapter, has the express purpose of recommissioning his disciples and so we titled the messages in this chapter in general, "Jesus Recommissions His Disciples." Jesus recommissions his disciples. We looked at the first week and we said, "Go Fish," was the first message on the passage, the first 14 verses, and then last week we began a second message which has turned into two parts and that is, "Feed My Sheep." He's basically telling them what they are called to do: they are called to continue fishing for men and they are called to feed the sheep of God. We're going to see there's one more after this but last week we began looking at these three verses, verses 15 to 17, in which Jesus focuses in particularly on Simon Peter and asked him some very piercing questions, probing questions, and so that his focus is on Peter in particular but all the disciples have application from this and truly, all shepherds, all elders, all pastors have direct application from this passage, and then beyond that, we as Christians are all called to shepherd one another, and so it has application for all of us.

We looked at the three verses last week, the first half of this message, "Feed My Sheep"; we looked at the first half of it and we titled that little subsection: the Good Shepherd at work. The Good Shepherd at work. What we saw was, and that was a capital "G" and a capital "S" speaking of Jesus himself as the Good Shepherd, he is at work in these verses to reclaim and restore one of his own sheep and we see him working in this passage as a shepherd. Peter had wandered. Peter had sinned grievously. He had denied Christ three times. He had fallen from his height and his stature as leader among the disciples. You might say he had wandered away.

So here the Lord Jesus continues his restoring work of Peter. We noted that already he has appeared to the disciples a number of times before this and we know, we put all the

New Testament accounts together, that Jesus appeared to Peter on the day of his resurrection, so undoubtedly he dealt with those denials then but now he is continuing to do his work of shepherding Peter back completely into the fold. He does this in the presence of six other disciples; there are seven disciples total here in the presence of Jesus for this appearance. We noted last time how the Good Shepherd at work, we see that Jesus has re-created in his sovereign glory the circumstances of Peter's original call to ministry. Peter and the disciples didn't know what was going to happen when they went out to fish but Jesus was re-creating that initial circumstance. They go out and they fish all night and they catch nothing, just like the night that Peter met Jesus back in Luke 5. They went out all night, they caught nothing. In the morning, Jesus says, "Put your nets out here." They did and they caught a big catch. The same thing happens here in John 21.

So you see Jesus is, in a sense, recalling Peter to the ministry. You see that there. And he also re-creates another key moment in Peter's life and that is he re-creates the circumstances of his denial because on the night that he denied Jesus, the night before Jesus' crucifixion, they were by a charcoal fire and he was asked three times about his own relationship with Jesus. "Are you not one of His disciples? Do you know Him?" Peter three times by that charcoal fire denied Jesus and so here by a charcoal fire, Jesus asked him three times a question about his relationship, Peter's relationship with Jesus, he says, "Do you love Me?"

So in this we see a beautiful restoration. We saw the Good Shepherd at work in that as we looked at that side of this passage, now this morning we're going to look at the second half of this particular message which is, we saw the Good Shepherd at work last time, this time it's the work of a good shepherd. The work of a good shepherd. Now, in a title you have to capitalize Good and Shepherd anyways, but you understand that this is actually a little "g" and a little "s" and it's talking about the shepherds, a good shepherd today, particularly a pastor, a good pastor or a good elder because elders are pastors, they are shepherds. So our church has a plurality of elders, we have seven men set apart by God to shepherd the church and so it applies directly, most directly to each of us, but it also applies to all the body of Christ in the sense that we are all called to shepherd one another. In fact, that's actually one of the ways you could sum up, remember we talked many times about all the "one another's" in the New Testament: encourage one another, admonish one another, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, one another, one another, one another. Well, you could sum them up by saying: shepherd one another. That's really the message of the New Testament. Help each other. We're all sheep. We all need to be shepherded.

So with that, let's read these verses. To get the context again, I'm going to go ahead and read from verses 12 through 17. John 21,

12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord.
13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise.
14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.
15 So when they had finished

breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that you would grant us the fullness of your Spirit and that he would illuminate for us the precious words of Christ. We pray that you would search us and know us and lead us in paths of righteousness for your name's sake. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The work of a good shepherd. The work of a good shepherd. What is the nature of the pastoral ministry? What is the nature of an elder's ministry? What really are we called to do for one another? We're going to consider this topic under two points this morning. First, we're going to look at one essential requirement and then we're going to look at one primary responsibility. So one essential requirement for the ministry and one primary responsibility that I think flows out of this passage. This is not to say that there aren't other things that are required. Yes, there are, we have other passages like 1 Peter 3, Titus 1, that talk about what an elder is to be or a pastor is to be, and those all apply but Jesus in this passage seems to distill down to the essence of what is required for the pastoral ministry or the ministry of elder, and what really is required to be a shepherd to someone else in this life to which we are all called.

One essential requirement, that's the first point. One essential requirement. It is seen in the question that Jesus asked three times, "Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" Spurgeon comments on this passage in a sermon that he preached on this passage and he says that in a sense you have here Jesus examining, like the examination for ordination of a minister. You have him examining a candidate for ordination. Spurgeon shares that as he is preaching to a group of potential pastors at the pastor's college there. This is really what's happening, is an examination of an aspiring minister, and when you put it in that context and you also put it in context of what's going on in Peter's life at that moment, there are two things that I think we'll see about this question. So there are two sub points to our first main point. The main point is one essential requirement. We're going to say that you love Jesus, that's the essential requirement, but there are two sub points to help us unpack this essential requirement and the first is, about the question, it's first of all a surprising question. It is a surprising question. I mean, think about from Peter's standpoint, Jesus is restoring a sheep who had wandered greatly; who had sinned grievously. Would we not have expected possibly this question, "Peter, have you fully repented?" Would that not have been more in line with our expectations? "Have you fully repented? Are you repentant, Peter? Are you repentant? Are you repentant? Are you

repentant?" But that's not what he asks. Now, repentance is necessary, it is essential, but Jesus gets to the heart and he knows that if you love the Savior you will be broken over your sin, so he asks that question. We might have thought he might have asked the question, "Are you trusting in Me for your salvation? You've seen that you used to have too much self-reliance, you had too much self-confidence and now that has been dashed. Are you trusting, are you believing?" He could have asked that three times but he did not because the one who loves Jesus is the one who has come to believe in Jesus. Or as a pastoral examination, he could have said, "Peter, let's talk about your knowledge. Let's examine your knowledge of the mysteries of God." But he didn't go there. He said, "Do you love Me?" And he said it three times, "Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" It shows that it's of first, second and third importance, the all-important question, "Do you love Me?"

It's a surprising question but secondly it's also a searching question. It's not just a surprising question, it's also a searching question. Spurgeon says this, he said, "How would you feel under such a question? Would you not be struck with it, and perhaps with shame begin to tremble and think over a dozen reasons why such a searching question was suggested to you just now?" "Do you love Me?" He goes on, "And if the Lord were to repeat that question three times, and each time put it distinctly to you, singling you out of the company, he gazes on you fixedly, and says, 'Your name, do you love Me?' - you know why there is such a cause to question you. Answer for yourself for he puts the inquiry only of you. Never mind Nathanael or Thomas or the two sons of Zebedee. He says to Peter, 'Do you love Me?'" And so never mind those around you, Spurgeon is basically saying, Jesus is saying to us, each one of us, "Do you love Me? Does your heart beat true towards Jesus of Nazareth? Come Peter, yes or no. You say yes but is it so? Is it so? Is it so?" Spurgeon writes, "I want the inquiry to come to my own soul and to yours this morning as if Jesus really stood before each one of us and said, 'Do you love Me?' May the Lord grant us grace to make solemn inquiry as to this matter, to bear honest witness and to give a true answer which shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

What Jesus is concerned about, what he is looking for is for his people to love him, that is the truest fruit of a converted heart, and it's interesting that he asks this to Peter. If you think about this, he asks it to the exemplary disciple. Yes, he had fallen from a great height but he was the one who in every way was exemplary. I mentioned earlier, "Do you know the mysteries of God?" He could have asked that, you know, as a question, in essence something that pastors should be examined on. Do they understand the truth of God? We're not saying that's not the case, that's part of it but the most fundamental question is, "Do you love Jesus?" But he says to Peter, "Do you love Me?" He could have asked him, "Do you know the mysteries of God?" And it shows that someone who did grasp the mysteries of God needs this question asked because it was Peter who alone was able to say when Jesus said, "But who do men say that I am?" Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Remember what Jesus said to him? "Blessed are you, Simon, son of John, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." So Peter understood the mysteries of God in an exemplary way but that didn't separate him from the need to have that question asked, "Do you love Me?"

Or position doesn't exclude us from this inquiry. Here the leader of the apostles, the leader of the disciples is not above this question, "Do you love Me?" All manner of zeal and fervor and religious involvement does not exclude one from this question because Peter was the most zealous. Here again we saw his zeal when he jumped out of the boat to swim that 100 yards to Jesus, not having time to wait on the boat to get back there. But zeal, position, knowledge, do not exclude us from this question, this all-important question, "Do you love Me?"

When we read the New Testament carefully, we see this is a very serious and solemn issue. Jesus says in Matthew 7 that in that day, the day of judgment, there will be those who say to him, "We have prophesied in Your name. We have cast out demons in Your name." What will Jesus say? He will say to them, "Depart from Me. I never knew you, you who work lawlessness." So it's not enough to be active and involved in ministry, we each need to search our hearts and see do we love Jesus, is there a personal connection with a living Savior.

By asking it three times, he raises it, as I said to the first, second and third importance, and he shows us that in one sense this is really all that matters. All else is summed up in this. "Do you love Me?" That's the foundation of everything else. He's saying to Peter, "Peter, if you'll just be assured of your relationship with me, your right relationship with me, loving me, you will bear fruit." He's essentially saying what it means to abide in Jesus, abide in the vine.

What's going on here, we talked about it last time in the sense that even with the way Jesus varies the words or John in recording what Jesus said varies the words that are used, "Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" The first two times Jesus uses the word, the verb agapao from the noun agape, and then the third time he changes his word to use the word that Peter had answered him back each time. Now, I mentioned last time most New Testament scholars are of the opinion that Jesus spoke Aramaic or some form of Aramaic Hebrew when he was on the earth and doing his ministry. Probably he did speak Greek at some level because it was the international language of commerce but that with him and his disciples, he would have been speaking Aramaic and so that he wouldn't have been saying agapao and phileo, he would have just been saying the Hebrew word for love. But John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit records for us the tone and the tenor of what Jesus said so that he uses the words agape the first two...he asks Peter, "Do you agape Me? Do you love Me with agape?" Peter says, "I love You with philos." And he asks the second time, "Do you love Me with agape?" And Peter says, "I love You with philos." He asks him the third time, "Do you love Me with philos?" And Peter says, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you with philos." So he changes the last one to meet Peter's term and we talked about, I'm just going to summarize real quickly and if you want to look at it last week, you can go online and look at the message, but essentially I believe that what's happening is Jesus was saying, "Do you love Me?" in a formal way because the word agape can be used in that sense of the direction of the will. He was saying it in a formal tone. "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Because he was reiterating that threefold questioning, "Do you love Me?" in

kind of a formal tone. Peter was replying with philos which is from the heart an expression of affection. "Yes, Lord, you know that I love You as my dearest friend." And then Jesus would say that again, "Do you love Me?" in that formal way, the second time. "Yes, Lord, you know that I love You." So Peter is shooting over, in a sense, what Jesus is asking which would be what we would expect from Peter. And then the third time, Jesus meets him with the term, "Do you love Me as your dearest friend?" "Yes, I love You as my dearest friend." So there is this sense of full restoration so that the right relationship of love with Jesus is the foundation; that the one thing that must be maintained for us to be fruitful is our love relationship with Christ; that when that is right everything else will be right. Peter was not yet there and Jesus is restoring him to that and it shows us that is the foundation of everything else.

One essential requirement: do you love me? And what makes us love him is that when we have experienced his love, we love him because he loved us. We love him because he looked at us in our sin and loved us in spite of our ungodliness and our wickedness. He didn't lay down his life for people that were desirable, while we were yet enemies, he lay down his life for us. So as we love him because he loves us, we will be fruitful. The essential requirement is met in the question: do you love me?

One essential requirement, one primary responsibility. We come to the second point: one primary responsibility. He is distilling the ministry down to one essential requirement and one essential responsibility and the one, or the one primary responsibility. Again, there are other responsibilities but he is focused on the one primary thing and what he says here, the one primary responsibility is to feed the sheep. To feed the sheep. It is set forth in three verbs. Each time Jesus asked the question, Peter answers and Jesus responds with an imperative, a command. Three imperative verbs, verse 15, verse 16, verse 17. Now, the New American Standard in this case gets it, I think not as well, hits it not as well as the other translations. The two best that get these three verbs are the ESV and the NIV because what it really says, the NASB translates it this way as I read earlier, "Tend My lambs. Shepherd My sheep. Tend My sheep." So tend, shepherd, tend. That's not really the essence of these words, I don't think. A better way is as the ESV does, "Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep. Feed My sheep." The NIV basically it's the same way: feed, take care of, feed. I would actually prefer: feed, shepherd, feed as the translation of those three words. So in verse 15 it would be, "Feed My lambs." Verse 16, the second time, "Shepherd My sheep." Verse 17, the third time, "Feed My sheep." Because in verse 15 and 17 it's the same verb. Verse 16, the middle imperative is a different verb. And in verse 15 and 17, the verb that brackets it basically is the word bosko, which means "to feed." It means a shepherd feeding his sheep. So that it begins and ends, essentially the ministry then begins and ends with feeding. So you could say, feed, shepherd, feed - two thirds of the ministry is feeding. But it's even more than that because the word in the middle, poimeno, is the verb poimeno, which means "shepherd," literal translation would be "shepherd, take care of, tend," other ways of saying the same thing, but really the poimen is the shepherd, so poimeno is to do the work of a shepherd. So he says, "Feed My lambs. Do the work of a shepherd for My sheep. Feed My Sheep."

So I said feed and feed and shepherd means two thirds is feeding, right? But it's even more than that because shepherd, if you were to break down the word shepherd into the work of a shepherd, you would see that there are basically four things that a shepherd does: he feeds, tends, leads and protects so that... I was a math major in college. Forgive me for this but it's not two thirds, it's basically three quarters of the ministry is feeding because if you add the first third is feeding, and the second third is feeding, that's 67 percent or two thirds, but if you take one fourth of the middle and you add it to the account of feeding, it's 75 percent. You can check me on that with your math. Have you got your calculator or your computer, go ahead and do that. But anyway, and I think actually I could argue for more than that because I don't think those four are actually equally weighted but I'm going to stop at 75 percent. Three quarters of the ministry he's saying is feeding the sheep.

Now, you've got to tend, you've got to lead, you've got to protect, yes, and the New Testament lays out all of those things as important responsibilities but here as he's recommissioning, he's saying, "Love Me and feed them. Love Me and because you love Me, as an expression of your love for Me, feed them." That's the work so that the heart of shepherding is to feed. To feed the sheep.

I was doing some research this week and I learned that sheep graze for up to seven hours a day. Eating for seven hours. Now, if you think about it, when we add up how long it takes to prepare a meal and all that, we might get to, you know, we microwave and it's less than it used to be but, you know, it takes some time to prepare. How long does it take to eat one? Isn't it amazing how you fix something really nice, you work hard together and you spend all of this time getting it together, you sit down at the table, boom it's gone. It was like, was that 10 minutes, 15 minutes? I mean, we got the table all set, we got the food put there. You know, you're trying to make everybody wait, let's not pick at things until everybody sits down and we have the blessing, and then bam, the food is gone. I mean, I think we can get most of our eating done, at least for us guys, probably in half an hour a day, you know, of good eating, and you put away a lot of food in half an hour. But sheep eat for seven hours a day. They graze and graze and graze and graze to accumulate enough food. They have to eat and eat and eat and eat.

So God is saying that the people of God, they need to eat. In fact, if you think about this, the idea of the need of the sheep to eat is seen also in the nouns. I have talked about the verbs, the three verbs when we're looking at this one primary responsibility and the three verbs really emphasize feeding, but the three nouns are important too. The first noun in verse 15 when he says, "Feed My lambs," and the second noun in verse 16, "Shepherd My sheep," and then the third, "Feed My sheep." I think they've got that exactly right in the NASB. It is lambs, sheep, sheep but you could actually translate it slightly differently than the New Testament translations do because each of these words is a diminutive form. Lambs could be translated, "Feed My little lambs," and it could be "Shepherd My little sheep. Feed My little sheep," so that Jesus in the nouns is communicating that we're sheep, we're lambs and we're little lambs and little sheep. It communicates the helplessness of us all as sheep and we're just little lambs, we're little sheep. Being a sheep is enough, but being a little one is even weaker. We talked about a number of times in

different messages that we see this come up again and again for the Lord to say that we're sheep is to say that we are needy. You know, sheep can't defend themselves. They can't provide for themselves. They need to be shepherded. They need to be cared for. And so that's what all of us are, we are sheep.

It shows the helplessness but it also shows the preciousness of those who belong to Jesus. The helplessness of those who belong to Jesus and the preciousness of those who belong to Jesus. Helplessness seen in lambs, sheep. Sheep, little sheep, little lambs. But the preciousness in the pronoun that's repeated each time: my. "Tend My little lambs. Shepherd My little sheep. Feed My little sheep." The sheep are precious to Jesus. He refers to them, they are his so he's saying to Peter, "Feed My sheep, not feed your sheep." Acts 20:28, the Apostle Paul in exhorting the shepherds in Ephesus, he says, "Watch over yourselves and also the flock of God, all of the flock which He purchased with His own blood." They are precious because he has purchased them with his own blood.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about feeding kind of under three little sub points. We're still on this last point, one primary responsibility to feed. We're going to talk about the what, how and where of feeding. What, how and where because this really is a summary of the essence of ministry. It's the essence of pastoral ministry and it's really the essence of what our ministry should be to one another. What do we feed them? How are we to feed them? And where do we feed them?

So first of all, what, what do we feed them? Of course Jesus means the word of God. We feed them the word of God. John 8:32, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Deuteronomy 8:3, Jesus is basically alluding to this in John 6 where he does the miracle feeding of 5,000 and then announces that he is the bread of life. He's basically saying there that, "God fed you with manna from heaven and now I've come down." In alluding to that, he's alluding to what happened in the exodus, after the exodus when the people of God were fed every day by manna that came out of heaven. God sent down bread. I mean, they had no food, they had no means to make food, to provide for themselves, and for 40 years God fed them from heaven. Each day it rained, as it were, their food. In Deuteronomy 8:3, Moses looking back on that 40 year period says, "This is why God did this. God gave you manna from heaven for 40 years to show you, to teach you in a visible, powerful, living metaphor that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. That every day you got up and you received what came from heaven and this is what fed you and sustained you, to teach you that what you really need more than anything else in your life at any moment is that which comes from heaven, the word of God. That's what you need."

So what do we need to be fed? We need to be fed the word of God. That is our great crying need. This is one of the problems that we see and one of the reasons that the church is in the state it is at large in America. There has not been the emphasis on feeding, most of the training of ministers is more on leading. Leading is a part of it but the emphasis of the New Testament is on feeding and so these guys trying to lead, gaunt, thin, malnourished sheep. That's not God's way. And beyond that then, what are you

feeding with? Are you feeding them what they really need or are you feeding them what they think they need? This is the whole foolishness of the felt needs ministry. We're going to give people what they think they need. Well, sheep will think they need poisonous grass. Shepherds talk about how if sheep, you know once a sheep starts eating poisonous grass, he gets sick and he falls down and he's dying, the other sheep just think, "Hey, I'm glad he's through eating. I can have some of that now." And you've got a shepherd, you've got to make sure there is no poison around because they won't discern that the poison is poison. That's what shepherding is, it's going and making sure that the pasture is safe and good. So why would you try to appeal to felt needs? You appeal to the real needs that God says are there and where do you find that? In the word of God.

So what needs to be fed? The word of God. How? How do you feed people the word of God? You know, the Lord gave us in his word, this hit me after I graduated seminary. I went to a good seminary, I mean, I'm very thankful for the place I attended. I don't think it's the best now. I think the best seminary now would be the Masters Seminary or Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, but anyway, I went to Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi and it's a good school and I was taught some very good things. I'm very thankful for what I learned there but later on after I got out of seminary, it occurred to me: why in seminary do we not just spend time in three books of the Bible in particular? I don't mean exclusively, we need to be in all the Bible absolutely, but how do we get through seminary and not spend time in the three books that are called the pastoral epistles: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. These were three books that the Apostle Paul, three letters he wrote not to churches, usually he's writing to churches: the letter to the Corinthians, the letter to the Romans, the letter to the Thessalonians you see. But 1 and 2 Timothy are written to Timothy, the pastor. Now, he's at a church but Paul writes directly to the pastor. Titus, the same way. Titus is at a church in Crete. He's on the island of Crete and he writes directly to Titus. Why don't we spend a lot of time learning what that's about if you want to be a pastor? Well, we touched on it but just like everything else, there was no major emphasis given to it.

I want to look at what we're talking about feeding because it comes through in these books, these three books of the New Testament: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, and it speaks particularly to how do you feed.

Well, let me say a word about "what" for a second. I just said what, we did what first, one of the things, a key word that is repeated in Timothy and Titus, 1 Timothy and Titus, is the word "sound." You'll find the phrase "sound doctrine, sound words, sound teaching." That adjective, sound, the English word translates the Greek word from the verb hugiaino. Hugiaino is a word which we would transliterate a letter for letter rendering, a translation is meaning for meaning rendering, you know? A transliteration is a letter for letter rendering and you transliterate hugiaino into hygiene, our English word hygiene. So the word that translates "sound" is actually a word which could be translated even "hygienic; that which promotes health and wellness and well-being." So that in the word itself the idea that sound words, sound teaching, sound doctrine, are those things that promote health in the flock with the implication if you don't give them sound words,

sound teaching, sound doctrine, what's going to happen? They're going to be unhealthy. Well, that's a key phrase of what.

But I want to show you now how and what he says about how in these three epistles. First of all, 1 Timothy 5:17 and 18, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." So it's the responsibility of elders to work hard at preaching and teaching. How do you feed? You have to work hard at it. It's not something that comes easy. It's working hard. And look at the metaphor he uses next, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" That working in the word is like an ox threshing the grain. That is a very helpful metaphor. You know, this is what pastoral ministry is being an ox tied to, yoked and threshing the grain so that the grain will become food for the people that you're working for. It's kind of not a glamorous image there, you big dumb ox, but it's really an appropriate one. It's work and so that we as Christians if we're going to feed other people, we have to work hard at it. That's the right image.

Then 2 Timothy 2:15, his second letter to Timothy, I'm just giving you a few high points here, it's all throughout these books but verse 15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Be diligent, the word is *spoudazo*, it means "to speed ahead; hurry toward." It means the kind of focus you have when you're in a hurry somewhere. You know, you're at the mall and you've only got so much time and you are walking, you're not walking through the mall looking around like this, you are making tracks because you've got to get to the place you've got to get and get to the birthday party or whatever it is. That's the word here. It is, "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman," and what you are is a workman. You're a skilled laborer but you're a laborer who has learned to cut straight the word of truth.

2 Timothy 3, look at that, he talks in the first 13 verses about how bad things will be in the end. He says, "realize this," in verse 1, 1 Timothy 3, "that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power." And he goes on and continues to talk about the opposition that comes. Then he says, in verse 13 he kind of ends up this section, "But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." But this is what the pastor is to be doing in that time, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them." What is he talking about? You just continue in the word. Look, he's going to explain it, "and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." You look at the culture, he says, and it's falling apart. The world is falling apart around

you, what are you to do? Are you to try to fight all the battles out there? No, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of. Continue in the word. That's what he then says and he tells them how wonderful and powerful the word is, it is God breathed; it is profitable teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness. In verse 17 he's basically saying, "It's all that you need. If you have this, you have everything. You are adequate, equipped for every good work."

Then he goes on in chapter 4, it flows right out of that, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom." Do you hear the solemnity of this charge? "I'm telling you, Timothy, what is it you're called to do? I solemnly charge you, I'm invoking the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is going to judge the living and the dead. This is what you're to do," verse 2, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but will want to have their ears tickled." It's clear the work is hard but the work is clear, it is the word of God against opposition.

The same thing in Titus, Titus 1:9. What is an elder to do? He is, "holding fast the faithful word." He is holding fast to the word. Everything is trying to knock it out of his hand. It's like the ball carrier running for the end zone, tacklers trying to strip the ball. He's holding fast the word of God as he goes on his mission, "so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced." It's the word of God that silences error. He says in verse 13, "For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith." Preach the word, verse 2, chapter 2, verse 1, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

So how? It's working hard at preaching and teaching against opposition, holding fast, continuing in the things that God has called, and then where? What do you feed the sheep? You feed the sheep the word of God. How do you feed them? Through labor and work against opposition, willing to suffer for it. Where? What's the where of feeding? When we look at this in context, the where of feeding, the where of shepherding and feeding the sheep is that you lead them to Jesus and you feed them Jesus. It's all about Jesus Christ. I mean, in his Gospel he's laid it out. He said in John 10, "I am the Good Shepherd." So when he says to Peter in verse 16, "Shepherd My sheep," what is he saying? "Lead and tend and guide them to Me," and Paul would say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." That's essentially the calling of the elder, "Follow me as I follow Christ. I'm here to lead you but don't keep looking at me. I want you to learn to look past me to look to the Good Shepherd and follow Him."

And not only lead you to him, that's in John 10, but in John 6, Jesus said, "I am the bread of heaven. I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger. He who believes in Me will never thirst." He's saying, "I am the bread," so what do we need? We are hungry every day for the bread which has come down from heaven and as God was teaching the Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness that they should not live by bread alone but by every word that comes down from heaven, he was teaching us

ultimately that what we need more than anything else every moment of every day is Jesus. We need Jesus. We need to see his glory, to see the one who left the glory of heaven and did come down and took upon himself human flesh; lived a perfect life, a sinless life, tempted in every way yet without sin; and offered himself in the place of sinners and became sin on the cross, receiving the full wrath of God against our sin; that as he shed his blood, he was giving life to those who trust in him.

In every moment of every day for the person who belongs to Jesus, the one who has become one of his little lambs, what we need is to be fed and to be fed that which produces faith in Christ and that which leads us to Christ which is the word of God. That's exactly what the word of God does. When the word of God is rightly explained, rightly expounded, it leads us to Jesus. It's not just about ten steps to a happy marriage, five steps to even overcoming sin. Now, those are important things we have to talk about, yes, but the goal and aim of all of Scripture is to present Jesus. Jesus himself in John 5:39 says to the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures diligently for you believe that in them you have life but these they are that testify of Me." The whole Old Testament he's saying, all the Old Testament Scriptures, what is the message? The message is Jesus Christ. The New Testament Scriptures, what is the message? The message is Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven who has come down. All that we need ultimately in every moment is Jesus Christ and that is the calling we as Christians have. We are sheep and what we are hungry for, what we're dying for is more of Christ.

So the question then: do you love him? And if you love him will you feed others? Because you love him, will you share him? That's what he's called us to do.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we marvel that you are a God who would seek sinners in the first place and we understand the magnitude of our rebellion and disobedience. We realize that we're so unworthy to even keep breathing, to keep living, and then to see in your word that you have been working a plan of salvation from the beginning is just so glorious and so wondrous and it came to its fulfillment and its majestic purpose in the coming of your Son. Father, open eyes, open hearts that don't yet know Jesus today and let them feast on the bread of life to see that he is a loving and tender Shepherd, that to take his yoke upon you, to take that yoke of submission upon you is to find rest and to find life and life abundantly. Help us all, Lord, to truly love you, to truly see you as our nearest and dearest friend and the one that we long for every moment. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.