

The Timeless Voice: Shepherds, lead us into dark valleys

Commentary by Greg Baker

America has built perhaps the most powerful empire in the history of the world. It has accumulated wealth and influence well beyond what the Founders could have ever envisioned. But this has not come without challenges. Throughout history, America's shepherds have risen to meet these challenges, and if America is to thrive in the new century, it will need its shepherds of today to rise to their calling and lead the sheep ... **not where we want to go, but where we must go.**

God has raised up shepherds in His creation. The shepherd is essential, often unliked, and as a result has the most difficult job in the world. The shepherd's role is to guide sheep who do not wish to be guided to the path of life. They are a guide, a guardian, and a protector. God calls His shepherds to lay down their life for their sheep, even when the sheep don't notice and will seldom thank them for it. The shepherd rarely looks out for his own interests, but for the interest of others.

God's institution of government also has shepherds. That role traditionally rested with a king as lawmaker, judge, and executive. In America, these roles rest with U.S. Congress and state legislatures, the president and governors, and supreme court justices. These are America's shepherds of government.

America is in a challenging place as a nation, yet the sheep are very comfortable. Sheep do not like to be moved from their comfort zone, even if the zone threatens their lives. They will just continue to lay where they are unless someone moves them. God often compares people to sheep, because it is in our

nature to pursue comfort and stay there, even when we know it is killing us. The shepherds, therefore, must move the sheep, or they will die. This is not easy, and the shepherd is rarely liked, but the shepherd must do his job.

America's challenges will require its shepherds to lead their people into dark, uncomfortable valleys. Healthcare costs, growing deficits, the immigration crisis, the breakdown of the family, and so much more will not take easy solutions and will require great sacrifice, but America needs its shepherds to lead her people through the dark valley.

Solutions will not be simple, and it will require forsaking partisanship to come together to find real solutions. Solomon wisely understood that he needed wisdom from above to govern the great people of Israel. America's shepherds in government must come together and beseech the Lord for His wisdom to solve America's crises. Then after the wisdom is received, they must act on it. They must lead the sheep through the valley.

Unfortunately, the sheep will not move easily, joyfully, or peacefully. The sheep want to stay comfortable. They do not understand their comfort is their doom. They do not understand that in that dark valley are sweeter and better waters. They don't understand that the dark valley leads to life. Instead they will fight the shepherd. But God has called His shepherds to lay down their lives and lead them anyway.

In America, this can be difficult because in America the sheep vote. These dark valleys will cost many of our elected officials their jobs. It will require them to lay down their careers, and they may never be thanked for it. It will be very important for the shepherds of the Church to encourage America's government leaders through this valley. Pastors understand these things, because they too lead the sheep through these valleys.

The shepherd is an extremely difficult job, but it is a rewarding job. The Chief Shepherd, Christ, has gone before you, and He literally laid down His life for the sheep. He is cheering for you, and He will reward you for your sacrifice. Don't seek to please the sheep, because what pleases them often leads to death. Instead seek to please the Chief Shepherd. For what He desires brings life. Be the shepherd that God has called you to be. Be the shepherd the nation doesn't want, but desperately needs.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:1-4).

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

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