

MICAH 5:2-5
“HE WILL STAND AND SHEPHERD”

If the lions didn't get us, maybe the crocodiles would get us.

At the end of our mission trip in Tanzania two years ago, we spent a day in the Serengeti. At one point, we were taken to a place where we could get out and stretch our legs, without worrying about the lions.

Below us, in a deep gorge, was a small river. Over the river was a rope bridge - much like the kind of bridge you see in stories like "Jungle Book." Below the bridge, in the river, were big, hungry crocodiles.

Our guide said, "Let's take a walk across the bridge!" Three of the four of us courageously did so. One of us chickened out and stayed behind.

But I took some good pictures!

How do you walk across one of those bridges? You extend your arms, and you hold the "rail" with each hand. That way you remain steady, so you won't lose your balance and become lunch for the crocodiles.

In Micah 5, we are reading of a Ruler. We believe this is Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

We have learned that:

* He will be born in the little town of Bethlehem.

* He is externally existing, and he always performs what he purposes.

* Micah's people had to wait for his first coming, and we must wait for his second coming.

Yet Micah writes, "And they will live securely." Those who follow this Ruler, will live securely. But how?

How could Micah's readers dwell securely, with the threat from nations around them?

How can we dwell securely, in a world of suffering and death?

The answer is found in the word "shepherd." Micah writes that this Ruler "will stand and shepherd his flock."

We think of the word "shepherd", and we may have dreamy, romantic images of men in white, serenely watching over cute sheep. But this image describes how Jesus meets real needs, in a real world.

In strength, he protects his sheep. In majesty, he directs his sheep.

Let's use Micah's words, and Jesus' words in John 10, to discover the security we receive with this shepherd.

IN STRENGTH, HE PROTECTS.

We read in Micah's words, "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord." With the Lord's strength, this shepherd protects his flock. He protects them eternally, and he protects them every day.

He protects them **ETERNALLY.**

Jesus says in John 10: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus came to lay down his life for his sheep.

But why must he lay down his life? Also in John 10, Jesus says he has come so that his sheep "may have life."

We live in a world of death, and while we may be able to delay it, we cannot defeat it. A few years ago, a prominent musician said, "The last thing that I've been unable to control in my quest to control everything around me is death."

But why is there death? The Bible says we have death, because of sin. We have rebelled against God. Because he is just, he will punish sin with death. As sinners, we face death today, and death forever.

So Jesus came to lay down his life. In his suffering and death, he takes upon himself, God's just punishment for our sins. Through faith in Jesus, we gain the hope of life after this life.

This is all very "cosmic." In John 10, Jesus speaks of a "wolf" who longs to kill and destroy his sheep. This "wolf" is Satan. He is a real, fallen angel who wants people to spend forever apart from God, in a place we call "hell."

But the strong shepherd has come to rescue his sheep. Because he has died to take away our sin and reunite us to God, we have the hope of life after this life. We are eternally secure.

He protects eternally, and he protects **EVERY DAY.**

In John 10, Jesus proclaims, "The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it."

The sheep are in the field. A wolf approaches. The hired hand thinks, "Hey! I'm just here for a paycheck, not to fight wolves! I'm out of here!"

But Jesus the Good Shepherd owns his sheep. If you are one of his sheep through faith in him, he has purchased you for God, by laying down his life for you. So when this "wolf" Satan attacks in everyday life, you can be sure Jesus will not run away. In his strength, he protects.

That raises a question. How does Satan attack, every day? It's a huge question with lots of answers, but

here is the heart of it: he lies.

* He lies to us, about our hope. Can you have eternal security? No, Satan lies. If you sin, he lies, Jesus won't love you anymore.

Yes, Jesus hates your sin. He does not want you to sin. But he loves you despite your sin. That's why he came to die! Jesus came while we were still sinners. Our security is not rooted in what we do, but in what he has done.

* He lies to us, about our help. Can Jesus protect you in the everyday trials of this life? No, Satan lies. Your trials are a sign that he no longer loves you, cares for you, or will protect you.

Yes, trials are real, and trials are hard. But Jesus loves you through the trials. He ministers to those who suffer, for he himself suffered. Our trials are not a sign that Jesus does not love. They are a time for us to experience his love in new and profound ways. Our security is not rooted in what may be happening to us, but in how Jesus cares for us, no matter what happens.

The apostle John writes in his first letter, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome...because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."

Our missionaries to Zambia, David and Terri Wegener, recently told a story, not about African lions or crocodiles, but about African snakes.

They were riding along a road with tall grass on each side, when a huge snake came onto the road and reared up about a foot and a half.

David knew this snake would be a danger to people walking along the road, so he turned around, everybody rolled up their windows, and David drove over the snake. The snake was hurt, but still snarling, so David ran over it again. And again. Then someone else used a spear to finish it off.

David says this little adventure reminded him of the words of Romans 16: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

In his death, Jesus crushed Satan, and secured eternal life for his people. Every day, Jesus is crushing Satan's lying attacks in our lives.

In his strength, he protects. How do those true words need to seep into your heart and life today?

* Maybe you have done an awful thing. Can God forgive?

He can, and he will, through Jesus. He will do this, not because of any good in you, but because his Son is the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep.

Confess that sin. Turn to Jesus for forgiveness. For you, there is hope.

* Maybe you are facing an awful struggle. Maybe it's your fault. Maybe it's someone else's fault. Maybe it's no one's fault. Can Jesus help?

He can, and he will, for he is the Good Shepherd, who does not run away, but will bless you and keep you, for his face is shining upon you.

Maybe you hear these true words with your ears, but they are not getting down into your heart. Think carefully. Pray desperately. Satan would love to flip your soul into his river.

Be secure in Jesus, who is strong to protect, eternally, and every day.

In strength, he protects. **IN MAJESTY, HE DIRECTS.**

Listen again to Micah's words: "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God..."

He is not just strong. He is majestic. And in his majesty, this Shepherd directs his people, with awareness, and with authority.

He directs, **WITH AWARENESS.**

Jesus says in John 10: "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father..."

The shepherd is supposed to be aware of where his sheep are, and what they are doing. How else can he help them?

In the same way, Jesus is the shepherd who knows where we are, and what we are thinking, saying and doing.

I read recently that more and more government agencies and businesses are using a machine that scans your eye. Apparently, these scans are better than fingerprints at identifying you. Once they are sure it is you, then they can access all the other information they have about you.

As we think about governments and businesses, that's a little scary. As you think about Jesus, how do you respond?

Maybe that is also scary. Indeed, the shepherd knows everything about his sheep. He knows your history, your habits, your thoughts, your actions, your everything.

Yet if you know this shepherd as Savior from sin and Lord of life, that truth is ultimately comforting. He knows!

How often have I had to remind myself and others of this!

Maybe it is in a hospital room. The medical problems are usually complex, and the solutions are rarely simple.

Maybe it is in a living room. The relational problems wind back through three or five or ten or twenty years, and through ten or twenty or a thousand different events.

The more I know, the more I know that I don't know! But I know Jesus is the eternally existing, purposeful and performing Son of God. Even when I must wait on him, I know he knows.

So I come to him, and I say, "Jesus, you know. I don't know. I don't have any medical answers. I don't have many relational answers. I don't have the wisdom to sort through this physical or spiritual mess.

"But you do. You are fully aware of all that has been, all that is, and all that will be. So I ask that in your majesty, you will shepherd me, and us, as you direct our thoughts, our words, and our actions.

"I cannot trust myself. But I trust you. Direct us."

It's like with cars and computers. I don't know. I don't understand. It makes no sense to me how that car starts or how that computer runs. But I am glad someone understands. I am glad someone is aware of how it works.

In majesty, he directs, with awareness. And...WITH AUTHORITY.

In John 10, Jesus declares that he has sheep "that are not of this sheep pen." He is thinking of non-Jews who will believe in him. As Micah has said, this Ruler's greatness will be known to the ends of the earth.

Then Jesus says, "They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

Sheep are not wise. They are rather dumb. They need the shepherd to direct them to food and safety. He will do that, if they will listen to him.

The same is true for Jesus' sheep. We can be so foolish. We need our shepherd to use his awareness and his authority to direct us in his paths.

Author Calvin Miller tells of going into the inner city of a big city with a friend who serves there. Before they left, his friend asked Miller to take off his watch, his coat, and his tie, and to leave his wallet behind.

As they wandered through half-lit streets and smelled the stench of the city, Miller admitted he was scared.

"Stick close," his friend said. "You're going to be all right."

Miller later wrote, "I did not find my security in his physical size; I was bigger than he. I found my security in his wisdom..."

Do you know there is security in following the wisdom of Jesus Christ?

There is security, in following his wisdom regarding our sexuality.

There is security, in following his wisdom regarding our finances.

There is security, in following his wisdom regarding our relationships.

There is security, in following his wisdom regarding our daily labor.

There is security, in following his wisdom regarding our...everything!

Sometimes we hang on the edge of that rope bridge and hold on for dear life, because we have not stuck close and listened to the wisdom of Jesus.

The image of the shepherd is indeed more than just a warm, romantic, pastoral image. This shepherd is majestic. He possesses all awareness, and all authority. He challenges his sheep to ask if they are wandering on their own, or whether they are sticking close to him, listening to him, and letting his authority rule their lives.

Let's be honest. We struggle with this. Who likes to be told what to do? In our hearts, we want to go wherever we want, and do whatever we want.

But this shepherd, who is aware of all and has authority over all, will not just let his sheep wander into harm's way. He asks his sheep: will you follow yourself, or him?

Whom will you follow, as you face a decision that would be pleasant but wrong, or painful but right?

Whom will you follow, as you give in to your desire to hurt that person, or give up your desires and serve that person?

Whom will you follow, as you wander to temptation, or flee from temptation?

Whom will you follow, as you love your money, or live for the Lord?

Whom will you follow, as you harbor bitterness, or offer forgiveness?

Whom will you follow, as you live out of control, or with self-control?

Whom will you follow, when no one seems to be looking, though you know he is looking?

Whom will you follow, as you seek your desires, or as you seek the truth of God's Word and the wisdom of God's people?

"They...will listen to my voice," says the shepherd. When we listen to his voice, we will dwell securely.

Early in the last century, a man was going through hard times. He was hated for loving Jesus, and he was discouraged. A friend knew of this, and he offered these words of encouragement:

"How thankful we ought to be that there is one person who knows our life even better than we do ourselves, and that knowing it in all its darkness he has yet made it possible for us to live in the light and blessings of His love."

Jesus knew the darkness in Israel. He knows the darkness in your heart, and my heart. Yet he has come, and he has secured eternity through laying down his life for his sheep. Now he protects them every day.

The blessings of his love extend to his majestic directing of his sheep. He knows them, and he calls them to follow his authority and dwell securely.

Are you one of his sheep? If not, I call you to trust in this One who has laid down his life to secure eternity and every day.

If you are - how would Satan love to flip you into the river today?

Extend your arms, and take hold of the shepherd who protects in his strength and directs in his majesty.

You will dwell securely, even to the ends of the earth, and even to the end of time.