

## The strong hand of Christ and the gentle embrace of his believers.

David Ude - In Jesus' Name

**Isaiah 40:9-11** <sup>9</sup> O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift *it* up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" <sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong *hand*, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward *is* with Him, And His work before Him. <sup>11</sup> He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry *them* in His bosom, *And* gently lead those who are with young.

My dad has big hands. Seriously, they're huge. Go shake his hand later and you'll know what I'm talking about. All little kids think their dad is the strongest. When they get older they realize that's not true. I'm still pretty sure my Dad could beat up all your dads. As one of his children, I've had the birds eye view to see that strength on many occasions. I've also had the perfect perch whence to witness how gentle those strong hands are.

There are plenty of men in the world who are strong. Sadly, there are plenty of husbands who use that strength to abuse their wives; plenty of fathers who use it to mistreat their children, far too many men who think strength is the entire sum of manliness. I can never be thankful enough to God for a father who is a real man - strong and gentle.

There's just something perfectly poignant about that combination. What's cuter than a strong father holding a tiny baby? Or a husband's large, rough hand, tenderly holding his bride's smooth and slender one? I have seen my Dad's big hands doing both of those things. Every night he and Mom went for a walk, hand-in-hand. And as Mom's body wasted away, Dad's strength gently carried her. Now my little daughters cling to "Opa." And he gently holds them.

It is the same with Christ.

Isaiah 40:11, *"He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young."*

Verses 9-10 show us Christ's victorious strength: a conqueror coming for recompense, reward, and revenge. Verse 11 shows us a different side, or rather a different view of the same thing. It shows us what that victory was for, what those big powerful hands were made to do: tenderly hold little lambs in his bosom. And that is all about the resurrection.

### The Good Shepherd Lives

A great number of passages in which Jesus is called "Shepherd" directly speak of His resurrection. All the rest do so indirectly.

John 10:11-18 is one of my favorites:

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

Hands don't get any bigger or stronger than that. This is something only Jesus can say. *"I have authority to lay down my life and I have authority to take it up again."* The Father cannot say that because the Father cannot die. He did not take on human flesh. But Jesus did. This man Jesus is God. In this man, God died. At the same time no other man can say this because none of us can say "No one takes my life from me" or "I have authority to take it up again." It is an entirely unique statement. And it is why Jesus says "I am the shepherd, the **good one**." There is no other like him. Because He is God and man. Because He is powerful and tender. Because He is strong and gracious. Because he is exalted and humble. In this verse Jesus is saying that the essence of what it means for Him to be Shepherd is His death and resurrection. He is the Good Shepherd because He died for us. But that alone would not be enough. A dead shepherd is no shepherd. Which is exactly why death and devil so gleefully thought to devour him on the cross. With the shepherd dead, they could snatch and tear the flock with ease. Fools! Didn't they know what happens when death swallows life? Didn't they know exactly what sort of Shepherd this was? Man and God. Gentle and strong. Humble and Exalted! When Jesus says "I am the Good Shepherd" He is applying every passage which speaks about God as Shepherd to Himself and He is also teaching us that "Shepherd" means "Lamb." The one who was dead and now lives forevermore.

At the very heart of every passage which calls Jesus our Shepherd is both the cross and the empty tomb. Every Christian can say with David *"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me!"* (Psalm 23). The book of Revelation beautifully declares *"For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"* (Revelation 7:17). He is with you! Both strong and gentle. As lamb and lion. By crucifixion and resurrection.

***I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.***