

"MY SHEPHERD"

Psalm 23:1

Intro: When you speak of the best known and the most loved of all OT passages, it seems that Psalm 23 would rate very high on the list, and perhaps at the top. People who know practically nothing about the Bible will usually have some knowledge of the twenty-third Psalm. It has always struck a responsive chord in human hearts, but it is a tragedy that it has not become more than a sentimental piece of literature to many of the people who can quote it from memory.

Years ago I heard the story which I think was a true story of a well-to-do family who had given a dinner party. Among the guests there was a well-known actor and an old pastor. The hostess felt that it would be enjoyable for the two men to repeat the twenty-third Psalm in their own way. The actor was asked to go first, and he gave a very stirring and dramatic presentation of the Psalm. When he had finished the guests applauded very enthusiastically, obviously delighted with the performance of the actor. Then the old pastor stood up, faced the guests, and repeated the twenty-third Psalm out of his heart. When he finished there was no applause. Everything was quiet, but here and there tears could be seen in the eyes of the guests, or running down their cheeks. The actor himself was very moved by the way the old pastor had repeated the Psalm, and he explained the difference between the reaction of the people in this way. He told the pastor, "I know the Psalm of the Shepherd, but it is apparent that you know the Shepherd of the Psalm." The actor was undoubtedly right. The Psalm itself is inspiring to read, but it means so much more if you know the Shepherd about whom King David was speaking.

I have spoken on this Psalm many times, sometimes in church services, sometimes even at funerals, but when I felt led to speak on it again tonight (because it is impossible to consider verse 1 by itself), I asked myself, "Where did the idea come from that the Lord was a Shepherd? Did it come from David who had been a shepherd boy, or did it come from someone before him? And so I took my Bible and my concordance, and began to look for the answer.

I. IS THE LORD A SHEPHERD?

I discovered that the first time the word shepherd appeared in the Bible where it is used of the Lord, was in Jacob's prophecy concerning his sons which is recorded for us in Genesis 49. There we find in verses 23 and 24, when Jacob got to Joseph, he said (and I am reading from the translation

given by Keil and Delitzsch in their commentary on Genesis),
 Archers provoke him, and shoot and hate him;
 but his bow abides in strength,
 and the arms of his hands remain pliant,
 from the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob,
 from thence, ~~from the Shepherd~~, the Stone of Israel.

Now we need to remember that Jacob was speaking as a prophet,
 and so his prophecy came under the direction of the Holy
 Spirit. And the point that I am making in quoting this verse
 is that, because Jacob spoke the Word of God, this title of
 Shepherd is one that our Lord took for Himself!

And then I discovered another thing. In the chapter just
 before that, Genesis 48, we find Jacob speaking of the sons
 of Joseph, claiming them as his own sons because they were to
 be heads of tribes in Israel. He is prayer for them is
 recorded in verses 15 and 16 of that chapter. This is the
 way verse 15 reads in the KJV:

God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk,
 the God which **fed** me all my life long unto this day.

In the margin of my Bible it tells me that the word "fed"
 means shepherded. And with a little investigation I found
 that it is the same word that is used in Gen. 49:24, as well
 as in Psa. 23:1. The word is used many times in Genesis
 before that, speaking of various men who were shepherds, but
 these two occurrences in Gen. 48 and 49 are the first times
 they are used of the Lord. However, the point that I am
 making is that this is a title which God took for Himself.
 Men would have no right to assign any title to the Lord which
 the Lord Himself had not authorized.

So, therefore, we can say that the word "shepherd" does not
 just describe what David had found the Lord to be to him, his
 Shepherd, or his Pastor, but this describes what the Lord
 intended to be to His people. He appointed Himself to be the
 Shepherd of all who know Him.

This is confirmed by our Lord's words found in John 10,
 verses 11 and 14:

I am the good shepherd:
 the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...
 I am the good shepherd,
 and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

This ought to be an encouragement to all of us. Giving the
 Lord a title which He has not given Himself would be like
 stating some promise as the Lord's promise which He Himself
 had not made.

Years after David's time, the prophet Isaiah confirmed this

wonderful fact that the Lord is our Shepherd when, under the direction of the Holy Spirit he wrote in Isa. 40:11,
He shall feed his flock like a shepherd:
he shall gather the lambs with his arm,
and carry them in his bosom,
and shall gently lead those that are with young.

We must remember, too, that when David wrote the twenty-third Psalm, he was speaking under the direction of the Holy Spirit when he said, "The Lord is my shepherd."

And so both in the OT and in the NT it is well documented that the Lord is a Shepherd to His people.

But now let us pursue this idea further:

II. IF THE LORD IS A SHEPHERD, WHAT DOES THIS MAKE US?

Charles Simeon once preached on this passage, and he spoke of the pedestal upon which we are often inclined to place King David. After all, he was the mighty King of Israel. He was a very wealthy man. He had a strong army, and he himself was an experienced and well-trained leader of his own army. He was a man of strong convictions, and seems to have faced what appeared to be unsurmountable difficulties with a great deal of courage. All of this is very true.

But when we read that David said, "The Lord is my shepherd," we immediately have a completely different picture of him. If the Lord was his shepherd, then we see that he considered himself to be nothing more than a sheep. To say that the Lord was his Shepherd was a statement indicating that this great King of Israel was in his heart a very humble man. A sheep is to say the least a weak animal, and probably among the most defenseless of animals.

When Lucille and I visited Frank and Carolyn and Allison in England a couple of summers ago, we made a trip to Wales and stayed in an old farm house which is now being rented out to anyone who wants to spend some time there. One day we went over to see them shear the sheep. We had sheep all around us. They were afraid of us, but not even Allison was afraid of them. She loved them, and I have a picture of her holding a little lamb on her lap.

There were times when David was more like a lion than a sheep. Perhaps that is the way he appeared to his enemies. But before the Lord, he knew that he was like a helpless sheep, who needed someone to feed him, to protect him, and to guide him, and so it was with great joy that he sat down and wrote, "The Lord is my shepherd."

I remember seeing a book years ago entitled, A Nation of Sheep. And it spoke of the American people in this way. The message of the book is that we are not too smart as a nation, and we will follow almost anyone if they promise to meet our needs. And sometimes we find that we have been following the wrong shepherd.

So people do not have to be Christians, or the Lord's people, in order to be sheep. That is what we really are by nature. We are not too smart. We often get into the wrong situation. We cannot defend ourselves. We cannot take care of ourselves. How thankful we can be if we can truly say with King David of all, "The Lord is my shepherd." Somebody is going to be our shepherd, and we are in the best hands when we realize that the Lord has chosen us to be His sheep, as amazing as that is, and that we can look to Him to supply our needs.

But notice another thing about this verse. David said,

III. "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD."

This is the Name that is used over and over again in the OT to identify our God. It is that wonderful name JEHOVAH. How does this add to our blessing.

Well, as you know, this means that our Lord is the ever-living One. Every other shepherd I know about has died, or will die! But not our Lord! And so He will never need to be replaced. No generation of the Lord's people will ever find that they have to find a shepherd who is different from the Shepherd which David had. That is especially good to know, isn't it?

But also in this Name we have the idea that the Lord lives on just like He has always been. He can't get any better because He is perfect. And He can't get worse because He is God, and God never changes. If He could change, He wouldn't be God. So all through David's life, while David changed, sometimes for the worse, his Shepherd remained the same.

So, when David said, "The Lord is my shepherd," he was saying that we can have the same shepherd, and that all that the Lord meant to him and did for him, He would do for us.

There are two more things that I want to mention about what David said.

Notice the personal relationship which David had with this Shepherd:

IV. "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD."

Illus: The little Scotch boy who was dying, and the town minister told him about Psalm 23:1, and illustrated it with the five fingers on his hand.

But what right do we have to claim the Lord as our Savior? Do we make ourselves His sheep, His children, His people? No. And this is what makes this statement even more wonderful. We do not make the Lord our Shepherd, but He is the One Who makes us His sheep. He is our Shepherd (if He is) because He has made us His sheep. And He made this decision before the foundation of the world. To be sure, we turn to Him; we receive Him. But that is only the result of His having chosen us. In John 10:16 we learn that the Lord said this, "Other sheep I have..." We are too dumb to come ourselves, and so He has to bring us.

And He is a Shepherd who not only feeds us, and guides us, and protects us, and heals us when we need it, but before any of those things He is our Shepherd who saves us.

Now for the last point which actually includes the other five verses of the Psalm which I am not going to deal with tonight except to remind you of what they say.

Since the Lord was David's Shepherd, he could say,

V. "I SHALL NOT WANT."

Now this means, I shall not lack anything! How could we, if the Lord is our Shepherd. He is Jehovah. There is nothing too hard for Him. There is no situation that ever gets out of His control. The rest of the Psalm tells us what David had in mind when he said, "I shall not want." (Read.)

Concl: Aren't you thankful that you are His sheep?

We are coming to our national Thanksgiving Day. But every day should be thanksgiving day to us as the Lord's people. And among all of the other things that you and I have for which to be thankful, let us not forget to thank our Lord that we can say with David, and know that it is just as true for us as it was for Him, "The Lord is my shepherd."