

## THE SHEPHERD PSALM

### Psalm 23

**Intro:** The title, shepherd, carries a lot of meaning for David. I say that because in his early years that is what he was, a shepherd. He knew that a shepherd is one who cares for sheep. He knew that Abraham was a shepherd. He knew that Isaac was a shepherd. And he knew that Jacob was a shepherd. The dictionary definition of a shepherd is “a herder of sheep,” and more specifically one who “gathers, guards, herds, or drives sheep.” One thing I would add is that he feeds sheep. In Bible times shepherds would be gone for weeks at a time finding pasture for their sheep. This is what Joseph’s brothers were doing when Jacob sent him to see how his brothers were doing, and they sold Joseph as a slave to traders who took him down to Egypt, and sold him there.

In a Biblical sense a pastor is a shepherd. That is a special meaning of the word shepherd. What a shepherd does for his sheep, a pastor is to do for the people of God who are under his care.

In Isaiah 40 the prophet Isaiah had this to say about the coming Messiah:  
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 (Isa. 40:11).

Ezekiel, in chapter 34 of the book of the Bible that bears his name, had this to say about the future regathering of the people of Israel. You will find these words in Ezekiel 34:11-16a:

11 For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.

12 As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

13 And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.

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15 I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.

16 I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: . . .

When we get into the NT we find the title. Shepherd, used three special times with reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Most of you will remember that wonderful truth which our Lord declared about Himself in John 10. There are two passages in John 10 where we have the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in which He claimed to be the Shepherd of his sheep. The first is in John 10:11-14:

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

And then the second is in John 10:27-30:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

So our Lord here in John 10 identifies Himself as “the good Shepherd.” In both verses where the Lord used this expression, the word that He used for “good” (**καλός**) means that He is the ideal Shepherd. He is the standard to Whom all other shepherds must be compared. He, more than any other, is all that you would expect a shepherd to be. He is truly “good.” There are no imperfections in Him. He never has been, nor ever will be, guilty, or even capable, of any wrongdoing.

The second NT passage I would call your attention to is in Hebrews 13: 20-21. These verses tell us that our Lord Jesus Christ is “that great Shepherd of the sheep. Listen as I read those two verses for you. This is

one of the great benedictions of Scripture:

20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).

So, not only is our Lord “the good Shepherd,” but He is “that great (**μέγαν**) Shepherd of the sheep.” What does this mean? Thayer says in his lexicon that it means that the Lord Jesus is greater than all in His Person which includes His being “eminent for ability, virtue, authority, power.” There is no one greater than He is regardless how you consider Him. No one can compare with Him in any way, and here, especially, as a Shepherd. He surpasses them all.

The third passage I would direct your attention to is found in 1 Peter 5:4 where our Lord is called “the chief Shepherd.” Listen to what Peter wrote beginning with the first verse of 1 Peter 5:

1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Again I ask the question what does “chief,” “the chief (**ἀρχιποίμενος**) Shepherd” mean? It means that the Apostle Peter, whom some claim to be the Head of the Church, is declaring for everyone to understand that not he, but our Lord Jesus *Christ is the Head of the Church. Final and supreme authority rests in Him!* He is Lord of all, but especially of His people. But how tender and loving it was of the Apostle Peter to call Him, our Lord, the Chief Shepherd.

But now let us turn to Psalm 23 which predates the three passages that I have given you in the NT: John 10, Hebrews 13, and 1 Peter 5.

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How does the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm begin? You all can answer that question. It begins with the words that tell us about King David's relationship with our Lord. "The Lord is MY Shepherd." Now I have to ask you a question before we go any farther. And here is the question: **Can you say, truthfully say what King David said?** Is the Lord your Shepherd? David knew better than any of us knows, what a shepherd is, and what a shepherd does, and he confidently said, "The Lord is MY Shepherd." He did not say it boastfully; he said it humbly. He said it undeservingly. He said it thankfully. He was acknowledging that he could only say it because of the grace of God.

By God's grace I can say it. And I know most of you well enough to know that we could make a real chorus of praise out of this by sainging together, "The Lord is my Shepherd." And it is all to God's glory, not ours.

But let me graciously say this to any of you who can't say this from your heart, that if you can't say this, then you need to close your Bible because the rest of the Psalm belongs only to those who are the Lord's sheep. But before you close your Bible, I have a better idea. Why don't you ask how you can become one of the Lord's sheep? And let me answer that question for you.

If we go back to John 10 we find we find that when the Lord was teaching that He was the good Shepherd, there were people who did not understand what He was saying. And so they said, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." You will find that in John 10:24. Then the Lord said according to verse 25, "I told you, and ye believed not." And then He went on to explain in verse 26,, "But ye believed not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." And then in verse 27 He went on to say, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

You see, we don't choose to be the Lord's sheep; the Lord chooses us to be His sheep. And He did that before He created the heavens and the earth. And as time has gone on, God is calling those to Himself Whom He has chosen to be His sheep. They hear His Word. They don't argue with it; they believe it. For whom did the Lord give His life? He gave His life for the sheep. He knew who they were. I don't know. The people the Lord has chosen are just marked in one way: they believe the

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words of the Lord Jesus. And when they do, they are given eternal life with the promise of our Lord that they will never perish. Have you found in your heart that you are being drawn by the Word of God? Do you believe that what you have heard this morning from the Bible is true? Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd, the great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd? If so, God is working in your heart, drawing you to Christ, so that you can go out of here today knowing in your heart that Jesus Christ is your Shepherd, that He has called you, and you have come to Him. You see, we don't make the Lord our Shepherd. He has chosen us to be His sheep, and He calls us to Christ through hearing the Word of God which we believe. And you will know when the Lord is calling you. Sheep always know and respond to the voice of the Shepherd. Perhaps you came here this morning without the Shepherd, but the Lord is calling you now. All you need to do is to come, not to me, but to the Shepherd of the sheep.

You know, it is not a very exalting thing to be a sheep. A sheep is probably one of the most defenceless animals that there is. Sheep really need a shepherd. And the Lord has made us His sheep because He knows how much we need Him. And after we realize who we are by the grace of God, we know that only because of our relationship to the Lord can we also say, "I shall not want." These two statements balance the scale perfectly. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." This does not mean that we will never have any trials or troubles. You will notice that David mentioned in this Psalm that he had some enemies. Sometimes even sheep try to run away. But if you are really one of the Lord's sheep, He will never lose you; you will never get away from Him. He loves you too much to let you go.

So "I shall not want" means that I have in my Shepherd all that I will ever need to make sure that, as the Psalm ends, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Now you realize that I haven't gotten very far into Psalm 23 this morning. I will come back to it next Sunday to see what follows from verse 1. But this morning I want to make sure that we all understand what it means to be one of the Lord's sheep.

**Concl:** As far as we know Paul's letters to the church in Thessalonica were the first two letters he wrote which were written under the direction of the Holy Spirit. In both of them Paul made some glorious

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statements about our salvation, or using the figure we have in Psalm 23 of the Shepherd and His sheep. And one of the clearest statements of the Gospel and of Salvation he made in the thirteenth and fourteenth verses of 2 Thessalonians 2. Listen to his words of praise to God for what God had done in the hearts of many of the Thessalonians. He wrote,

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

You see, salvation is not what we do for God, but it is what God does for us – from the beginning to the end.

That is why, as you continue on in Psalm 23, which we will see next week, it is not “I” and “Him,” what I do for Him, but “He” and “me.” He is the Giver, and we are the receivers. That is true when we first learn that we are sheep, and it continues until we are in “the house of the Lord” for eternity.(2 Thess. 2:13-14)