

HOW THE SHEPHERD CARES FOR HIS SHEEP

Psalm 23 - Part 2

Intro: John Calvin, in a sermon on Psalm 23, reminded those in his congregation that prosperity usually takes its toll on our lives as Christians. He likened it to being drunk. A drunk thinks that he is having a great time while at the same time he shows scorn for anyone who tries to restrain him. Calvin estimated that, in his day, only about one Christian in a hundred would be able to produce any evidence in their lives that they really feared God.

And then he said this about David:

So much the more carefully then must we mark the example of David, who, in the highest degree of his dignity, in the glory of his riches and honor, in the abundance of his wealth, and in the midst of his princely pleasures, not only testifies that he is mindful of God, but also makes himself ladders of His benefits, where to climb up nearer to Him. And by this means he not only bridles the wantonness of his flesh, but also spurs himself on more sharply to thankfulness, and to the exercises of godliness; according as it appears by the close of the Psalm, where he says, he will dwell in the house of the Lord all his life long (*Commentary on the Psalms, Vol. I, p. 269*).

So in David we have a rare example of humility, and faith, and wisdom, unmoved by his great wealth and power, but recognizing that he is just as dependent with all of His position, wealth and power as any sheep is upon his shepherd. And so when we think of the man who under the blessing of God wrote this Psalm, it should become to us more amazing than ever.

Calvin spoke of making ladders of God's benefits. By this he meant the "He" and "me" statements which make up most of the Psalm which I pointed out to you last week. It is good to think of them as rungs on a ladder leading us closer and closer to God.

Now, of course, you know that we are not really sheep, and God, or Christ, is not really a Shepherd. But the Spirit of God employs these terms to illustrate that we are just as dependent upon the Lord as sheep are upon their shepherd. *And that means completely dependent! Sheep cannot survive without a shepherd. And it is hard for us to believe that when prosperity abounds. This is undoubtedly why Americans have*

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departed so far from the Lord. Using Calvin's illustration, prosperity makes us behave like drunks. And yet when we actually see a drunk we are at the same time repulsed by his behavior and yet filled with pity that a man, or a woman, would get himself in that condition.

So Psalm 23 is a beautiful picture of our relationship to the Lord as His people, and yet a warning that we allow the prosperity and comforts of this life blind us to our great need of our Shepherd Lord. And nothing could be more beneficial to us than to see ourselves as sheep, helpless and defenseless in ourselves, but totally secure in the care of our good, great, and chief shepherd, as we learned last week.

So if it may add to the statement that I emphasized last week, it is not only extremely important that we be able to say like David did, "The Lord is **my** Shepherd," but we need to live like He is truly our Shepherd! In Calvin's estimation, there may be one or two in a congregation our size who is really living like one of the Lord's sheep. I would hope that our average might be much higher. But the Lord knows exactly what our percentage is. I am for aiming at 100%. But this is a life-long project for all of us, just as it was with David.

Now let me read this Psalm again while you follow the reading in your Bible. **(Read Psalm 23.)**

Now the life of a shepherd and his sheep, is not, according to this Psalm, a record of what the sheep do for the shepherd, but, on the contrary, it is a record of what the shepherd does for the sheep. Remember that there is practically no possibility that real sheep could survive without a shepherd. Neither can we survive without the care of our Shepherd, Who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does the Lord do for us, His sheep?

I. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" (Psa. 23:2a).

"Pastures" are where sheep feed. And "green pastures" are where there is abundant food for sheep, food which God provides for them. In hot weather it is next to impossible to find "green pastures." But for God's sheep there always are "green pastures."

Now one of the primary needs of sheep is for food, nourishing food. And

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it is one of the shepherd's chief responsibility and great joy to find pasture for his sheep. But when sheep are grazing they are not lying down; they are standing up. When do sheep lie down in green pastures? It is when they have eaten and are satisfied.

Bringing this point to us in our relationship to the Lord, what do the green pastures refer to? I believe it refers to the Word of God. The Word is our food, and our Bibles provide abundant food, far more than we can eat at any one time. So this has to speak of the satisfaction that we find in the Word of God just as sheep find satisfaction in green pastures when they have quit grazing, and lie down to rest. Perhaps even the idea of meditation can be found in this illustration, because this is an illustration of us when we have really been feeding upon the Word, meditating on it, not just reading it. This is a picture of contentment. I hope that all of us know the great satisfaction that the Word of God brings to us. If you don't, then this is where you need to start.

Millions of people all over the world will watch the Super Bowl today, and the total amount of money that some will pay to be there will amount to millions of dollars. Advertisers will pay over a million dollars for thirty seconds on television. A lot of people will enjoy it all. Some people will win a lot of money because they have bet on the winning team. Others will lose a lot of money. But if this is where people are looking for green pastures, they won't find it at the Super Bowl. The green pastures which God has given us are free! The most it can cost you is the price of your Bible, and you probably already have one, and maybe more than one.

The Lord has many ways of getting us into the green pastures of God's Word, and oh what blessing await us there. And if you know the blessing of being in the Word, then thank God, because just as He waters the earth to give sheep green pastures, so He has given us His Word which truly satisfies those who eat it. Cf. Jer. 15:16, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them . . ."

But let us go on to the second rung of the ladder.

II. "He leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psa. 23:2b).

Did you know that rushing water is dangerous for sheep? I can't say this with real authority, but I have been told that rushing water will get in their

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noses, and can cause death. But they know enough not to drink of it. However, the Lord provides “still waters,” restful waters, refreshing water, life-giving water.

In the last two chapters of the book of The Revelation are three verses which speak of “the water of life.” The first is in Revelation 21:6:

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

The second is in Revelation 22:1:

1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

The third verse is in Revelation 22:17:

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

When the Lord Jesus was here on earth, on one occasion He and His disciples left Judea to go north to Galilee, and He had to go through Samaria. While they went into the city of Sychar to buy food, He was sitting beside a well when a Samaritan woman came to draw water out of the well. So He asked her for a drink of water. She did not know who the Lord was, but she knew that He was a Jew, and was surprised that He, a Jew, would make such a request from a Samaritan, and especially from a woman. Then this conversation followed as it is recorded in John 4:10-14:

10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

11 The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?

12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?

13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

You see again that we are brought in Psalm 23 to the Word of God, and

especially to the word of salvation. Sheep don't just take one drink of water, and then never take a second drink. They need water every day. And so do you and I as the Lord's sheep. And the living water found in God's Word will never harm you; it will only do you good. In fact, you can't live forever without it. And oh how wonderful it is when you are reading your Bible, or hearing it taught, as you are this morning, and take in the living, life-giving water of the Word. Our great Shepherd always makes sure that we have "the still waters."

But what is the third rung in this ladder?

III. "He restoreth my soul" (Psa. 23:3a).

Sometimes sheep get sick, and the Shepherd gives special care to get the sheep back to health. Sometimes they run away, and the shepherd will leave the whole flock in the care of others to go after the lost sheep. To restore means to bring back, to bring back to health, or to bring back to the flock. I suppose that most of us can tell how there have been times when we have wandered away from the flock, but the Lord has brought us back. Or we have drifted away in our hearts, and the Lord has restored us to spiritual health and strength again. He may use people to help us, but this great and good Shepherd of ours is always involved. You see, our Shepherd not only restores us geographically some times, but He restores us inwardly and spiritually. "He restoreth my soul." He will never give up on any of us if we really belong to Him.

But let us move on to the fourth rung as we climb higher.

IV. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake (Psa. 23:3b).

Guidance is another chief responsibility of a shepherd. And so it is that our Shepherd leads us. And He leads us whether we ask Him to, or not! And there are just two paths that we can take. One is the path of righteousness, and the other is the path of unrighteousness, the path of sin. We all know what that path is because there was a time in our lives when we knew no other path. But the Lord never leads us into sin. He can't sin, and He doesn't even tempt us to sin. And where do we learn about "the path of righteousness"? There is only one place, and that is the Word of God. So again we learn how important it is for us to have the Bible and to know what is in it.

Did you notice the words, “for His Name’s sake.” The Lord has a lot invested in us, His sheep. He paid the highest possible price for us. He bought us with His blood. And He is not going to let us wander into sin and stay there. The Apostle John makes it very clear that a person who lives in sin, is not one of the Lord’s sheep. True sheep can sin, but they are never happy until they are restored to the path of righteousness. The Lord’s Name is involved in what happens to us, and so if we fall, He will raise us up. If we go away, He will bring us back. He never leads us in the path of unrighteousness, for His sake as much as ours.

But we are not through. The next rung is in verse 4.

V. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (Psa. 23:4-5)

I have looked at a number of commentaries on this verse, and even among good, reliable expositors, there are differences as to the meaning. Many say that it is a trial which actually leads to physical death. Others say that it is “the shadow of death,” a death-like experience, like Peter faced in jail. Some say that it is a terrible experience which leads to death. So they look upon it as a combination of the first two.

Obviously the verse must include both. The point is that whatever we experience, even to death, we need not fear because, as David said, “I will fear not evil: for Thou art with me.” Surely the worst of troubles that we face is death, but even death is softened by the presence of our Lord: “for Thou art with Me.” So whatever the sheep may experience by way of trials, which may even lead to death, the Shepherd will not abandon the sheep.

The thought that sheep find hope and comfort in the Shepherd’s rod and staff, points to a deep and death-like trial. The shepherd’s staff with its crook was used to lift a sheep out of a steep place or even a crevice, and his rod to ward off an attack from a wolf or bear, brought comfort to the sheep.

And so it seems that verse 5 belongs to the fifth rung because enemies can be the cause of severe trials for the sheep. As David often experienced,

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surrounded by his enemies, even there the Lord supplied his need preparing a table even when he was being pursued by his enemies. This is a testimony to the providential work of the Good Shepherd. Even in the worst of circumstances the Lord is there, and the needs of the sheep will be met, sometimes by lifting them through death into heaven.

“Anointing the head with oil” does not speak here of the priest’s anointing for his task, but of the honor given to guests in Bible times, which was accompanied by the greatest of joys. So this is joy assured for the Shepherd’s sheep in the midst of deep trials.

And so we come to the:

Concl: Here David as one of the Lord’s sheep, having spoken of the past and the present, now looks at the future in verse 6. He knew that nothing of the good that was past would be exhausted, but that the great Shepherd of the sheep would actually pursue him, run after him (which is the meaning of “follow,” all through his life on earth, and he would dwell “in the house of the Lord forever.”

So all who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior can truthfully say, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” But it is very necessary that we live like it, looking to the Lord to provide for us, to guide us, to protect us, to restore us when we fail and fall, and to count always on His presence and power in meeting all of our needs.

One writer tells of a widow lady who had nothing, but she invited a servant of the Lord into her home for a meal. As she placed only bread and water before him, she said, “Just think, we have all of this, and Jesus Christ too.” Let us continue to believe if the Lord is our Shepherd, we shall not be lacking in anything that we really need.

**“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psa. 23:6).**