

### **Psalm 23 The Lord is My Shepherd**

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

# **The Good Shepherd**

## **Pray**

You may be surprised to hear that after the theme of God's rescue plan that invades every thought in Scripture with the person and work of Christ, the motif of sheep and shepherding is the most overarching message in the pages of Scripture. From where we're told in Genesis 4:2 that "*Abel was a keeper of sheep*" to *Revelation 7:17 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.*" There is an underlying story of us and our Creator. To understand the significance the kindness of a Shepherd and our needs, I want to start by making sure we really understand sheep.

Sheep are a sign, and signs point to something beyond themselves, signs in Scripture are there to point to a more real thing. So here we're going to talk about sheep, the animal, created to tell a story, and these animals are stupid, unkind, fearful, selfish animals that need a Shepherd. And I'm suggesting that the imagery of Sheep and Shepherd in Scripture has us as sheep. And keep in mind, whenever we have a picture in the Bible it's always a shadow of the real thing. So what that means is as we hear about how pathetic and needy and helpless sheep are in the Bible that description is a shadow of the more real thing which is us. That's where I'm heading. So when we understand ourselves a little better we'll see the greatness and kindness of God better. In one sense this is a continuation of the Sermon from last Sunday, one of the ways we experience the goodness of our being adopted sons and daughters is in way God acts as our Good Shepherd

While the bulk of the sermon will be looking at the vertical aspects of having a Good Shepherd it's important to note that one of, if not the main way we interact with and experience the goodness of our Shepherd is horizontally through our Pastors. I want to "front load" in the sermon what would normally be the final thought or application. I want to put it in early because as we continue to the passage, I want us to be aware of how these things work out in the life of the church, particularly our lives and interactions with our Pastors and each other.

I've had one interaction with sheep in my life and it happens to be with Ryan. Greg sheep story.

In Latin, Pastor = Shepherd, that is both a noun and a verb, both a title and an action. As a title it gives us a picture to how Christ feels about his church and how the men who are called to lead it, from an earthly perspective, are called to act. As an action our Pastors are told in Peter 5 to *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.* Both a title and direction for how to carry out the charge to care for Christ's flock. Pastors are under-Shepherds, we're not owned by them, and they only have authority to "shepherd us" because they've been granted that charge by our Chief Shepherd. That's why

when we talk about the formal role of Pastor we say they're called to it, it's something that is recognized by others and they're invited to step into the position. So, if you think about the story of Robin Hood, Prince John was a steward for King Richard. King Richard went to fight in the Crusades, and he called Prince John to steward the kingdom in his stead. And in reality, Prince John only had the authority to lead the Kingdom in a way that would continue to point to the benevolence and greatness of the king, but as you know in that story, Prince John became a terror to that kingdom until King Richard returns. Pastors in the same way are to act as a steward, and in all their activities point to the benevolence and goodness of our Chief Shepherd. They are to image forth the heart, the actions and the attitude of the Eternal Shepherd whenever possible in their leadership of a church. Keep in mind not being an infinitely kind and long suffering being makes it very difficult to accomplish when dealing with selfish skittish sheep.

I want us to be aware that we're both experiencing the kindness of our Chief Shepherd through the men appointed to "shepherd" us *and* we, as the flock, when we act like the sheep I've described, we're acting out against God through these men. God experiences our rebellion and wickedness as the Chief Shepherd of course and our primary sin is against Him and his Holiness, but our Pastors experience it horizontally as well. Spiritually we're acting against God, horizontally we're often carrying out our rebellion against the men charged to care for us as stewards.

I believe sheep were created to tell a story; sheep were created exactly as they were to tell the story of us. And particularly to help us understand ourselves and how kind God is towards us how great our need is for a careful loving shepherd to intercede on our behalf. I believe that the life of sheep and man we're a purposeful act of creation by God because sheep were created to be cared for by man. Their life is tied to humanity. In the beginning in Genesis 4 Able was a keeper of sheep (specifically shepherd not any other sort of animal husbandry), sheep cannot survive without a human presence in their lives.

Here's a list of facts about sheep that helps capture the inability of sheep to be wild. Sheep were created to be cared for by man. Here's where I get that.

- Sheep have no defensive or offensive capabilities, can't protect themselves, they are soft, furry and delicious: they are very low in the food chain, from wolves and cougars all the way down to a fly as we'll see, there is something trying to kill them.
- they must be shorn periodically.
- can't right themselves, the term is cast down, and if unshorn for too many years or if another sheep head butts them and they fall on their back, they can't roll back over and get on their feet.
- will eat food dangerous to their systems that will potentially lead to death.
- to avoid drinking running water, which scares them, they will drink from pools of still water, full of parasites and make themselves sick.
- if not watched, they will destroy their food supply by tearing up and eating the roots, they must be moved from pasture to pasture.
- they're so skittish and scared that a jackrabbit running by can cause them to scatter.
- they're so "not smart" that a well-trained dog can take better care of them than they can of themselves, we've all seen the amazing work a good sheep dog can do in moving a flock of sheep, it's important to note the way a sheep dog accomplishes its job is by motivating through fear. A sheep dog does its work by exploiting the natural fear in sheep to move them to where they should go.

Here's a modern-day examples of the skittishness of sheep

Dateline: ISTANBUL, Turkey – First one sheep jumped to its death.

Then stunned Turkish shepherds, who had left the herd to graze while they had breakfast, watched as nearly 1,500 others followed, each leaping off the same cliff, Turkish media reported. In the end, 450 dead animals lay on top of one another in a billowy white pile, the Aksam newspaper said. Those who jumped later were saved as the pile got higher and the fall more cushioned, Aksam reported.

Sheep were created to tell a story, a story about our need for a most infinitely patient Good Shepherd.

I had a couple of thoughts for our Big Idea this morning

The Big Idea is..... All sheep are stupid  
We are sheep  
WE ALL ARE STUPID SHEEP!

We'll take our Big Idea directly from the Shepherd King David

The Big Idea is..... The Lord is your Shepherd, you shall not want

### ***1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.***

- Psalm 23 is a Psalm of David. He's credited as the author and that makes sense based on what we know about him. It's interesting that the two most prominent OT leaders of Israel, Moses and David, were prepared for their roles as leaders of Israel by the Lord making them shepherds for a season in their lives. More evidence making the case for the purposefulness of God in making sheep a sign to help us understand ourselves a little better.
- The first thing Psalm 23 tells us is that we have a Shepherd. We are owned by Him, and from this side of the cross we understand that we were bought with the price of God's blood, the Lamb of God for His flock. His blood shed because of us and for us. This means if Rev ceased to exist tomorrow you would still have a Pastor, a shepherd who loves you and cares for you more than any earthly being could. He cannot love you more and will not love you less.
- In antiquity, many rulers (especially in the Middle East) used this imagery when referencing their position as leader over a people. In fact I would say until the modern era leaders saw their lives and the nations life tied to that of the people and so they would deal in a kind, compassionate way that met the needs of their people, that didn't exploit them, didn't take everything from them. We see Jesus talking this way about himself in *John 10.11-13 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 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. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.* Who's going to care the most for the sheep? The owner, only he truly understands their value because he is the one who paid the cost. Our Shepherd is an eternal Shepherd, who needs no rest, who will not flee and abandon the sheep but has in fact already laid his life down for us and we have no needs, we shall not want.
- You have an owner who purchased you at the price of his own life and has made every good thing available to you. The Lord is your Shepherd. We are owned by our Shepherd, we're cared for by someone who loves us, so how is it that our needs are met and how does that allow us to rest? The

second part of verse 1 says ***“I shall not want”***. The bulk of the rest of the passage explains what it means to have your needs met and not want.

## ***2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.***

- By either seeing him in the field or hearing his voice the sheep can best rest with their needs met and the shepherd's presence. Verse 2 starts with “He makes me”, we are commanded to rest, since the establishment of the Sabbath on day 7 of creation we have been told we need rest. *Exodus.20*  
*“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.....For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.* He makes us lie down....he commands us and watches over us so we can have rest in Him. And pointing back to last week's passage we can rest because *Ephesians.1* *he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.* There's no striving or laboring on our part to get to Him or earn anything, we just get to rest, because he has done everything.

## ***3a He restores my soul.***

- Here again a Shepherd has insight to the vulnerability and great need of a sheep for a Shepherd. Sheep get “cast down”, their center of gravity is high and it's relatively easy for them to end up on their back and impossible for them to roll over on to their feet once they're in that position. They fall over on their back because another sheep head butted them, or even when the wool is too long and a heavy dew comes that can be enough to cause them to flip on to their back and they have no way to right themselves, or they lay down on a slight grade and that might be just enough to shift the center of gravity. There's hardly a more vulnerable position for anyone. A shepherd must go and restore that sheep. But he can't just flip them back on their feet and send them on their way. He lays them on their side or stands them up and then has to massage their legs to get their circulation going, their hearts aren't strong enough to pump blood into their legs (I'm guessing their poor circulation system comes from wearing wool sweaters all the time). Sheep, when they end up on their backs have to be restored. We all have stories about times that were so dark in our lives that we don't know how we could recover. Events, feelings, a darkness that we never thought we could recover from. I don't know the particulars of your events, but I do know in the macro sense that the Good Shepherd restored your soul in that season. This drives the Shepherd King David to say, about a half dozen times in the Psalms, *Psalms 43:5* *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.* The Eternal Shepherd brings hope. That's what he does for His sheep. The Lord is your Shepherd, you shall not want.

## ***2b He leads me beside still waters. & 3b He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.***

- Another sheep fact is that they cannot be driven because they will scatter, instead a Shepherd walks in front of the sheep, or he leads them and draws them with his voice, and he calls out to them by name. He leads them, he doesn't drive them like you do cattle. Which of us likes being yelled at and driven to what someone else wants us to do? Don't we prefer someone we trust drawing us, being patient with us and calling us by name to come along. Something every good pastor understands. We will scatter if we are being forced to a place we're not ready to go to. If one of our pastors stood up here and yelled at us for being deficient, for not tithing enough, for not serving enough, that wouldn't drive us to serve or give

more. And it's not just the manner in which it's done it's also that it's a voice we recognize. If we are owned by God and we know his voice by studying His word and are at a church that is not preaching and leading as God has commanded, we will be convicted to move on from that place because we don't hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in the voice of the Pastors, Jesus says it this way *John 10. 3-5 The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.* In the story I told the sheep reacted to us trying to help us because they didn't recognize us....

- HE leads me, in paths of righteousness, For HIS name's sake. We are led by our Shepherd, the "right way" for his Glory. Interesting wording but I think we'll see the meaning is quite simple. The motivation of the Eternal Shepherd to do these things is His own Glory, He is the good Shepherd "It is the Glory of a shepherd to watch over, protect, provide for, feed, and return with all the sheep". How does the world see the Glory of God, one of the primary ways is through the lives of those who claim to follow Him. We, who are glory bearers made in His image, we are to display the goodness of God to the nations through our lives through the paths we take and the choices we make. But there's a problem with that, Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.* If left to our own devices we will pursue the path of our own choosing and its end, we are told in many places in the Bible, is destruction. Isaiah 53:6 *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way* our nature, seen in the picture of sheep, will take us every direction but the path the Lord has prepared for us. So just like a sheep our best life comes when we submit to and follow the way the Lord has set for us, listen for His voice and follow him. A path that will be good, instructive and bring Glory to God through our walking it. I don't think I need to belabor that point. He leads us, we follow Him.
- The question is then how do we know the right path how do we recognize his voice? We read, study, meditate and pray with His word open on our laps in front of us, we submit to one another, we seek counsel from our Pastors. We don't go with our gut, we don't take our cues from the burning in our bosom and we certainly don't look to culture. We look at His Word and we do what he commands. Study the words of our Shepherd, every one of them, not just the ones in red. From Genesis to Revelation.

***4a Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me***

- The Lord has provided a picture in the Psalm to deal with the "reality" there will be dark times. Often time the summer pastures would be in the highlands or mountains. And, if you've spent any time in the mountains, you know that sometimes the path is treacherous getting there. That's the picture here, remember when the path is one filled with pain, or sadness, or hurt. That it is purifying pain, in a sense we are baptized in those seasons, and we emerge on the other side a renewed creation. A metamorphosis as we are transformed into the image of the Good Shepherd. Let your prayer be that the next time you enter the valley of the shadow of death you will fear no evil because you trust in your shepherd like a sheep that goes into the dark shadows of the valley, you hear his voice and you remember His promises like Hebrews 13:5b-6 *he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* So we can confidently say, *"The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"* Store that up in your heart for the next time you are in the dark places, so you can confidently say, The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

***4b Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5a You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.***

- Two tools common with shepherds throughout time. A rod and a staff. One an offensive weapon to protect the sheep from enemies outside the flock one to bring comfort or correction to the sheep, or maybe even use it to rescue them. A rod traditionally would have been a dense throwing stick that a shepherd would, with great accuracy fling at a wolf or cougar that would try to get close to the flock. It's been replaced in most cases by the modern firearm. The other is the traditional shepherds crook that you typically see with a shepherd. It is a tool that has many uses in working the flock and interestingly the "staff of God" that's referenced in Exodus that Moses carries and leads the people of Israel with would have been this shepherd's staff.
- Next, we see the shepherd preparing tablelands or the pasture so that the sheep might have peace. A sheep that's scared that a wolf or lion might jump out and eat them is going to have a hard time eating. Calling out once again the foolishness of sheep, the shepherd protects the sheep from themselves by inspecting and preparing areas for the sheep to graze. There are many things dangerous to the digestive track of sheep, so preparing the grazing land for the sheep must be done so that they don't hurt themselves. It's interesting that the Lord has put into some animals a discernment, of sorts, that allows them to know what plants, mushrooms, or berries to eat and what not to eat. There are poisonous mushrooms in the forest, yet deer and elk know exactly which ones they can eat, and which ones are bad for them. Not so with sheep, they need areas prepared for their grazing and things dangerous to them removed.
- In the Gospels Jesus sends out 72 of his broader group of disciples to preach the Gospel and do signs and miracles in His name and he says this as they're preparing to depart, *Luke 10:3–4 Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.* What could compel a sheep to go out amongst wolves, with no provisions or money or protection? Only the complete comfort and confidence that the Shepherd is eternally good and will protect them from every enemy and will keep them on the right path and will use his rod & staff in our defense. We should love the tender disciplines and mighty protection of the Lord.

**5b You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

- Finally for a sheep to rest they need to be free from flies. Other animals were given tails to help with that, not sheep. There are dozens of flies that can torture sheep into sickness and even death. Nose flies buzz about the sheep's head, attempting to deposit their eggs on the damp nose of the sheep. The eggs then hatch in a few days and the larvae will work their way up the nasal passages into the sheep's head and then burrow into the flesh. This is agonizingly annoying to the sheep and they will deliberately beat their heads against trees, rocks, posts or brush until they're bleeding or until they knock themselves out. Those infections lead to blindness and sometimes death. Once again, we see why ownership is critical for a healthy life for a sheep. With feed and drink the shepherd prepares to protect us from ourselves by really removing the temptation of noxious poisonous food or providing superior water to protect us. But with this picture the Shepherd anticipates attacks and annoyances from outside ourselves and mixes particular herbs and oil and pours it over and rubs it into the wool on the face and head of the sheep. A very intimate and loving thing between the Shepherd and the sheep. In scripture being anointed with oil represents God's blessings and favor and you can see that here with this picture. Something that has no value needs not be protected, but with us he anticipates what is to come and he protects us from it because we have value to Him. *1 John 5:18 he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.* Because we are born again in him, through him, we are protected by Him – Jesus – the Eternal Shepherd, we are His and because of Him and by Him we are protected from the evil one. That is the blessing we enjoy as sheep of his flock.

***6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever***

- And so we end as we began, *I shall not want* was the end of vs. 1 and vs. 6 boasts about the lack of wanting we will have forever. What naturally follows from being a part of a flock that has such a Shepherd? Goodness and Mercy all the days of our lives and that path of righteousness we are drawn down leads to the house of the Lord. Our great heavenly reward for which we strive all our days. We get Jesus, He is ours and we are His. So He says this to those He owns in *John 10:7-11* “*Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. All we like sheep have gone astray but God has sought us out and purchased us at the cost of His own life that we may dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Rejoice that such things have been revealed to you. Rejoice that goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. Thank the Lord that you will dwell in his house forever. The Lord is your Shepherd, you shall not want.*

As we enter back into worship and prepare our hearts for communion think about how our sin, which we should have been punished for is punished in Jesus Christ. Goodness and mercy is following us instead of justice and wrath which is what we deserve. Think on how because you have been adopted as a son or a daughter you get to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That is good news, and if you're here today and you've decided that you want these benefits of being owned by the Good Shepherd, grab someone, and tell them you'd like to hear more about what it is to be a follower of Christ. As we're singing this song if you've already counted Christ as your treasure you may grab the elements and then after the song we'll take them together.

Benediction (Psalm 23)

The Lord is your shepherd; may you want for nothing.

May you hunger and thirst no more.

For He will grant rest and comfort to your soul.

Let Him keep you in perfect peace.

And sustain you in the midst of trouble.

May your life overflow with God's love and grace.

And His goodness and mercy follow you always.

For we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever

