

The Shepherd Psalm

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For over 30 centuries the 23rd Psalm has been read, loved, and memorized by millions of people. The 180 words of this Psalm are very penetrating to the hearer. They describe in very vivid detail the leadership, security, compassion, and blessings that belong to those who call Christ their Shepherd.

The person of the shepherd

Psalms 23:1, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

The Lord God is our Shepherd. For Christians it is Christ who is our shepherd. The term shepherd tells us a great deal about what God is like. The shepherd is known for his tenderness, gentleness, and loving care. The 136th Psalm is full of extolling the loving kindness of God.

Jesus was full of kindness and compassion; He said in John 14:9, “... Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” Thus, as we look at Christ we see what the Father (Shepherd) is like. When we look at the Father we see what Christ (Shepherd) is like.

Jesus said, “*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*” (John 10:11). Then in verses 14-16 he said, “*I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*”

This is not referring to the Mormon Church. They claim the original sheep were those Christians that were started in Jerusalem from the day of Pentecost, and the Mormons were the sheep referred to as “*not of this fold*”. What this passage referred to was the original sheep were the Jews, and Christians were the sheep which were not of this fold.

The Lord is “my shepherd,” said the psalmist. God and Christ are not the shepherds of the world; but they are interested in each individual. During the Mosaic era, Israel was God’s people, and looked to Him for guidance. Today, those of the kingdom of Christ are God’s people. Ever since the Day of Pentecost when 3000 souls

were added to the church, untold numbers of people have been able to call Jesus “my” shepherd.

“I shall not want” (Hebrew: “contented”). One of the primary responsibilities of the shepherd was to provide for the needs of the sheep. If the shepherd does not have a good pasture for them to graze, the sheep will want to stray for better. The following verses show us God’s provision for man’s needs:

He knows our needs. Matt. 6:32-33, *“(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”*

He gives to them who ask. Matt. 7:11, *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”*

But not if we ask amiss. James 4:3, *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”*

Only if we abide in him. John 15:7, *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”*

And He will not forsake the righteous. Psalms 37:25, *“I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.”*

Our needs will be taken care of. Phil. 4:19, *“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*

Sometimes a sheep can be in a perfectly good pasture and not be satisfied. A shepherd once remarked that he had an ewe that kept looking for a way to get to another pasture that was inferior to the one she was placed in. She kept getting out, and eventually led others astray, as well. The shepherd said he had to kill her to protect the rest of the flock.

There are those in the church who are not satisfied with Christ. They also want something of the world. The Bible tells us we cannot follow God and mammon. The good Shepherd takes care of us. We don’t need to worry about what the world has to offer.

Every good gift we receive comes from our heavenly Father. James 1:17, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”*

Truly, every Christian can say, *“I do not want.”*

The provision of the shepherd

Psalms 23:2, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.”

Sheep begin grazing about 4:00 a.m., and they continue to graze until about mid-morning; then they would lie down. Sheep do not lie down when they are hungry; they lie down only when they are satisfied. If they are hungry, they will continue to hunt for food.

They also will not lie down if they are fearful or irritated (such as from predators or peer pressure). If the shepherd is not present, sheep will fight among themselves (Like chickens that have a pecking order; sheep, if left to themselves, will form a butting order). The good shepherd disciplines the sheep who abuse others.

Sheep will drink after being satisfied with food and rest. But they are not always careful about what water they drink. Left to themselves, they would just as well drink from dirty water, infested with parasites. A good shepherd knows these waters, and prevents his sheep from going there, and supplies them instead with good water.

There are many drinks in this world that are harmful to Christians; and the Good Shepherd gives us better to drink. Masses of people in the world are hungering and thirsting for something. They don't quite know what; they are restless. If they will only allow Jesus to be their Shepherd, and feed of God's Word, they will be happily satisfied. They will find the spiritual calmness that their souls so desperately cry out for.

Matt. 11:28-30, “*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*”

The pathway provided by the shepherd

Psalms 23:3, “He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”

How does He restore our souls? When sheep stray, he seeks them and brings them back to the fold. When sheep are ill, he does not leave them to die. Instead, he carries them in his arms back to his home, and ministers to them.

You may have heard the expression “cast sheep.” The meaning is they are “cast down,” and cannot get up. Occasionally, a sheep, when lying down, may roll over in a depression on the ground, and rest upon its back. For most animals, this is no problem; they just

roll back over, and get up. But, for the sheep, this is critical. Its dispersion of weight makes it nearly impossible to roll back on its feet. It will soon die if the shepherd doesn't find it, and roll it back over.

When the sheep are injured, the shepherd also tends to their wounds. Jesus treats those of us who are sheep in His fold in the same way. Listen to these scriptures:

Isa. 53:6, "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*"

Luke 19:10, "*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*"

When we are sickened or injured by sin, Jesus will provide the spiritual medicine needed to begin the healing of our souls. James 5:16, "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*"

Notice in that 3rd verse of the 23rd Psalm that the shepherd will "lead" his sheep down the path of righteousness. The good shepherd will move his sheep from one pasture to another, periodically, to prevent overgrazing. If the pasture is poor, the sheep will damage the roots by eating too close to the ground. The good shepherd will have a series of trails in which to lead his sheep to these various pastures.

In the East, shepherds do not drive their sheep. They lead them because they know best which pasture they want their sheep to feed in. In like manner, God will not drive us; He will lead us to where we ought to go, because He knows best. Jer. 10:23, "... *it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*"

We, as Christians, need Christ's leadership. Sheep, left alone, will go astray. They have no good sense of direction; their eyesight is limited. Prov. 14:12, "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*"

The shepherd's presence is promised to the sheep

Psalms 23:4, "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."

When David tended sheep, "*the valley of the shadow of death*" was a narrow place between two mountains. It was 4 ½ miles long,

1500 feet high, and 10 to 12 miles wide at the bottom. Wild dogs lurked in the shadows, looking for food, and were ready to pounce on the sheep as they came through. The sheep were not afraid because the shepherd was there to ward the dogs off with his rod. The rod was used as a weapon to club wild animals, and to beat the bushes to scare them off. The staff was used in the care of the sheep. The shepherd could hold a sheep still, while checking their condition, or administering medication.

Whenever we encounter dangerous or troublesome periods in our life, we too can be comforted with the thought that our Shepherd is there guiding and protecting us. There is another valley that we will all have to face, one day. We, too, one day will walk literally through the valley of the shadow of DEATH. Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:22, *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”* He also said in Heb. 9:27, *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”*

Christians do not fear death, because they know that Christ will be with them. Rev. 1:17-18, *“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”*

Jesus destroyed the sting of death for us. *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”* (Heb. 2:14-15).

One of the most wonderful words in this Psalm is *“through.”* Notice that we will go *“through”* the valley. We will not stay there. This means that we will not remain in the grave, the hadean realm. There will be a resurrection. John 11:25, *“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:”* 1 Cor. 15:57, *“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

The preparation made by the shepherd

Psalms 23:5-6, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

The shepherd “prepares a table in the presence of our enemies.”

The table-land for the sheep was a mesa — a flat piece of good pasture-land in the mountains. The Grand Mesa near Delta, Colorado, is like this, only a lot bigger. The Grand Mesa is the world’s largest mesa with 300 lakes, and a lot of deer and other wild animals. From a distance, the predators could watch the sheep eating as they were being protected by the shepherd.

“Anointing one’s head with oil.”

With sheep, this application was for medicinal purposes — mostly to protect them from flies and parasites, but also for healing scabs. Their body, except for the head, was immersed in this oil. The oil for the head was applied by hand with care. Different regions of the world used a slightly different formula than others, but they all used Linseed oil and sulfur in the mix.

With humans, anointing one’s head with oil was done as an act of refreshment, and it was an act of joy. This was often done with guests, or with people who deserved honor. The ointing filled the room with a pleasant smell. The sinful woman in Luke 7 anointed Jesus’ head with precious ointment. In doing so, she showed her love for Christ. God will provide gladness for the sheep that follow Him.

“My cup runneth over.”

It was customary to fill the cup of a guest to overflowing. David, here, talked about the abundance of blessings that come to followers of the good Shepherd.

Luke 6:38, *“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”* The goodness and mercy in the text represent the blessings of God that cause the cup to run over.

“*Dwelling in the house of the Lord forever*” is reference to dwelling in heaven for eternity.

Matt. 25:46, *“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”* Jesus is preparing a place for us in His Father’s mansion. John 14:1-3, *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”* Rev. 21:4, *“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”*

Have you ever picked up a handful of sand at the beach? How long do you think it would take you to spread that sand out on a table and count them? A very long time — a lot longer than you might realize. Visualize how long it would take you to count the numbers of sand in a bucket. I gather that it would take you more than your lifetime. Now, visualize all of the sand on all of the beaches around the world. Just think, if you lived long enough to be able to count all of the grains of sand on all the beaches in the world, when you are finished eternity is still going on! Don't waste your life. No sin is worth spending the same amount of time in hell.

Conclusion

Our Shepherd (God/Christ) can provide for our needs in this life, and in the life to come, but for this to happen we must be of His flock.

How can a person become one of His flock? One must become a Christian. The following are the steps necessary to make that happen:

- **Faith.** Heb. 11:6, *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* When I was in high school (I was about 17 years old), a neighbor boy my same age told me he was an atheist. Since I had been baptized, I took the opportunity to talk to him about the scriptures. He told me that he could see that living the life of a Christian was good, but he wasn't sure if he believed there was a God. But to be on the safe side, maybe he should go to church, and when he dies and stands before God (if there is a God) on the day of Judgment (if there is a Judgment), maybe if God sees that he has gone to church and lived a good life that God would send him to heaven (if there is a heaven), and not to hell (if there is a hell). I told him, “It doesn't work that way. You have to believe in Him with all your heart or you cannot please Him.”
- **Repentance.** Acts 2:38, *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* Acts 11:18, *“... Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”* If while you were sleeping, you heard a noise in the other room, and you think to yourself, “There's a burglar in my house!” So you reach for your cell phone, and as quietly as you can, you call the police, tell

them there is a burglar in your house, and you give them your address. Soon, you heard them arrive and capture the thief. He yells, "I'm sorry; I'm sorry!" What is he sorry for? He is sorry that he got caught; not that he stole. In true repentance the thief would be sorry that he ever stole and wants to change his life so that he would never steal again. That is true repentance. It is a change of mind that brings about a change of action. That is what we have to do before we can become a Christian.

- **Confession.** Rom. 10:9-10, "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" What do we confess? That we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Note that in the above scriptures that faith (believing), repentance, and confession are "**UNTO**" righteousness, life, or salvation. "Unto" means toward something; not that one has already attained.

- **Baptism.** It is baptism where righteousness, life, and salvation are attained. Jesus, himself, was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, "*But John forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" (Matt. 3:14-17). Jesus was baptized because God said it was the right thing to do. Did you see how pleased God was about Jesus being baptized? Jesus also said "*it becometh **us** to fulfil all righteousness.*" We are baptized because it fulfills His righteousness, not because it is of our righteousness.

In fact, if we are not baptized, we are still in our sins. "*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" (Acts 2:38). Peter, what did you say the reason of baptism is? "*for the remission of sins*". Why would anyone want to leave out the step that removes our sins?

Jesus commanded that to reach salvation we must be baptized. *“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth **and** is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* (Mark 16:15-16).

Ananias told Saul (before he was rename Paul) the very same thing, *“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”* (Acts 22:16). Baptism is a requirement given by God.

Baptism is called a burial. *“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* (Rom. 6:4). Our old man is to be dead to us. *“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”* (Rom. 6:3-6). Baptism is God’s blueprint for applying the blood of Christ in our lives by baptism. We are free from our old sins only when we are baptized.

This doesn’t mean “sprinkling. The scripture above says baptism is a burial. We don’t take a dead body to the cemetery and sprinkle a little dirt over it; we bury the body.

If you have not yet become a member of Christ’s flock, won’t you consider it today?

