

“The Lord Is My Shepherd”

Introduction. This text, without doubt, is the most familiar Bible passage. It is often read and quoted at funerals, but it is a psalm of life rather than death. Since it was penned it has had a huge impact in the lives of God’s saints.

The psalm begins with an affirmation of faith for time and ends with an expression of hope for eternity. Its message is couched in figures in which the psalmist sees himself first as a journeying sheep in the hands of a gentle shepherd (vss. 1-4) and then as a permanent guest in the house of a gracious host (vss. 5-6).

I. ***A Textual Consideration Of Psalm 23***

A. Verse 1.

1. These words declare the simplicity of David’s faith in God as the One who laid the foundations of the earth, yet He always remembers His creatures (Psalm 138:6).
2. David knew that the divine shepherd who had delivered him from the paw of the lion and the bear would deliver him from every affliction (1 Samuel 17:37).

B. Verse 2.

1. “Green pastures.”
 - a) The tender grass and quiet waters are a cool and refreshing repose on a hot and weary day.
 - b) As the tender grass is a natural nutrient for sheep, so the word of God is a natural nutrient for the sin-sick soul (Psalm 119:16, 18).
2. “Still waters.”
 - a) Because they are nervous animals, sheep will not drink from noisy streams. “Still waters” denote calm, peace, and serenity.
 - b) God leads His people, not to standing waters which are corrupt and filthy, not to the troubled sea or rolling flood waters, but to silent and still waters.

C. Verse 3.

1. The writer for the moment drops the metaphor to declare his spiritual renewal. To restore the soul means to bring it back from the brink of destruction.
2. But He does not restore our souls that we may continue in sin. He restores us so we can walk with Him in the paths of righteousness (Jeremiah 10:23).

D. Verse 4.

1. “The valley of the shadow of death.”

- a) The valley of the shadow of death calls to mind a ravine overhung with cliffs and foliage, casting dark shadows over the dangers that lurk along the path.
- b) Such a place will arouse dread in the sheep, but the shepherd knows every pitfall and the way of every animal that could endanger him.
- 2. "Rod and staff."
 - a) One end of the rod a shepherd carried was a blunt instrument which could be used like a weapon to fight off enemies.
 - b) The other end was crooked so that the shepherd could lift sheep safely from crevices, ledges, and thickets.
- E. Verse 5.
 - 1. Before entering the banquet hall, an ancient host would anoint the honored guests with oil made by adding perfumes to olive oil.
 - 2. The overflowing "cup" symbolizes the care and provisions of God, previously represented by "green pastures" and "quiet waters."
- F. Verse 6.
 - 1. Goodness supplies our needs and mercy blots out our sins. Instead of being pursued by enemies who seek his destruction, God's "goodness and love" follow the psalmist.
 - 2. To dwell in God's house means to live with Him among His people. David was in God's house and he expected to be there through eternity (Psalm 27:4).

II. ***The Good Shepherd And His Sheep***

- A. The good shepherd (John 10:11-18, 25-29).
 - 1. In the Old Testament, the figure of a shepherd referred to God in Psalm 23 and to the Messiah in Isaiah 40:10-11.
 - 2. As the good shepherd, Jesus, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, lays down His life, protects the sheep from predators, cares for the sheep, and maintains the flock.
- B. The sheep (John 10:27-28).
 - 1. Sensitive: They hear Christ's voice.
 - a) They are "swift to hear" (James 1:19).
 - b) They desire, like Cornelius, to "hear all things" (Acts 10:33).
 - 2. Fellowship: Christ knows them.
 - a) They have fellowship with both the Father and the Son (1 John 1:1-4).
 - b) Christ is a mediator on their behalf (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).
 - 3. Obedience: They follow Christ.
 - a) Obedience is a sign of their love (2 John 6).
 - b) Jesus is their Savior (Hebrews 5:8-9).

4. Hope: They have eternal life.
 - a) The free gift of God has been given to them (Romans 6:23).
 - b) The promised inheritance will never pass away (1 Peter 1:4).
5. Assurance: They never perish.
 - a) The Lord is not slack concerning His promises (2 Peter 3:9).
 - b) Judgment day is not a terror for the Christian (Acts 17:29-31).
6. Security: They are not snatched from the Lord's hand.
 - a) Christ wants to protect His sheep (Matthew 23:37).
 - b) There is a crown laid up for His sheep (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

III. ***An Application Of Psalm 23 To Jesus' Care For His Sheep***

A. The material aspects of Psalm 23.

1. God's provision for the righteous from the beginning of time.
 - a) He provided the plans and specified the materials for the ark which saved the lives of Noah and his family (Genesis 6-8).
 - b) He increased the herds and land of Abraham after Lot had chosen the better pasture (Genesis 13).
 - c) He fed the Israelites manna in the wilderness for 40 years when they had no food (Exodus 16).
 - d) He sent ravens with flesh and bread to feed Elijah when, after being exiled from Gilead, he had to hide by the brook of Cherith (1 Kings 17).
2. The method of God's provision (Psalm 104:25-28).
 - a) God provides for His creation but it is up to us to gather what is provided.
 - b) His provisions include opportunities to work, physical families, the church, etc.
 - c) Christians work and gather God's blessings (Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Timothy 5:8).
3. The Lord's sheep will never lack the necessities of physical life (Psalm 37:25).

B. The spiritual aspects of Psalm 23.

1. Only the Lord needs to be your shepherd.
 - a) Israel fell prey to false shepherds who were more interested in feeding themselves than the flocks (Ezekiel 34:2-3).
 - b) God feeds His sheep in a "good" and "fat" pasture and they will "feed upon the mountains of Israel" (Ezekiel 34:14).
2. Jesus, as the good shepherd and in accordance with Psalm 23, accomplishes many wonderful tasks.
 - a) He supplies their spiritual needs (Ephesians 1:3; 2 Peter 1:3-4).
 - b) He feeds them with proper spiritual nourishment (Matthew 5:6; Acts 20:32; Hebrews 1:1-2).
 - c) He provides them the water of life (John 4:10, 14; 7:37-38).

- d) He restores their soul.
 - (1) By cleansing their sins (1 John 1:9).
 - (2) By making them alive when they had been dead (Ephesians 2:1).
 - (3) By renewing them day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).
- e) He causes them to fear no evil (1 Thessalonians 4:13; 1 Peter 5:7).
- f) He grants them peace in the presence of enemies (Romans 8:31-39).
- g) He accompanies them every step of the way in terrestrial life (Hebrews 13:5-6).
- h) He grants them eternal life (John 10:10; 1 John 5:13).

Conclusion. Those who reject Jesus as their shepherd while on earth have only condemnation awaiting them at the final day (Matthew 25:31-46; John 10:24-26). The sheep (the righteous) will be divided from the goats (the unrighteous). The sheep will go into the eternal abode the good shepherd has prepared for them. The goats will go into everlasting punishment. Make sure you are being led by the good shepherd. You will never want in this life and He will lead you to eternal bliss in the life to come.