

The Shepherd (Psalm 23:1-6)

How many times have we been to a funeral or memorial service and text that was chosen was from this famous passage in Psalms. Most of us can probably quote it from having memorized it from our childhood. I personally haven't taken the time to give it serious thought until this last week. I was asked by the Schlup family to use this book and chapter for their mother, Viola who passed away. It is a great Psalm, one I am sure you have turned to many times in periods of heart ache and trials in your own experiences in your life's journey. It ministers to our deepest needs.



We know from the fifteenth chapter of Second Samuel there is a recorded instance in David's life when his own son rebelled against him and caused him to lose throne and run for his life and his family into the Judean wilderness. He spent a long time, several months hiding from his enemies. I think this was during the time God refined David into the man he was to become. Someone has rightly said, "God chooses men or women on the basis of who they will become and not who they are."

This is a Psalm for people who, like David, are experiencing a major rough experience in their life. Perhaps you are experiencing a rebellious child, or your home is in turmoil, or a long time relationship in your life has come to an end. It might have been a long time illness that ends with death.

David begins with a statement of the theme of the passage:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; (Psalms 23:1)



Because the Lord is my shepherd, I do not lack anything. He satisfies my needs. That is the place to which God wants to bring each of us. He wants us to be independently dependent upon him, to need him alone. If the Lord is my shepherd, then I shall not want; but if I am in want, then He is not my shepherd. It's that simple. If there is emptiness and loneliness and despair and frustration in our lives, then it is obvious that the Lord is not our shepherd. Or, if anyone or anything else is shepherding us, we are not satisfied. If our vocation shepherds us, then there is restlessness and feverish activity and frustration. If education is our shepherd, then we are constantly being disillusioned. If another person is our shepherd, we are always disappointed and ultimately we are left empty.

It occurs to me that if Jehovah God is to be our shepherd, then we have to begin by recognizing that we are sheep. If you are like me, frankly, I don't like being identified as a sheep. They are dumb, stinky, unattractive, helpless, and dirty. If I would be honest with myself that is exactly how I am. ("We are all like sheep who have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way," Isaiah 53:6). If Jesus is going to be my shepherd, then I must admit I need one. The first thing in allowing Jesus to bring me into the place I recognize that in Him I have no want, He is all I need.

In this Psalm David begins to tell us in what ways the Good Shepherd meets our needs. The first is found in verse 2 and part of verse 3:



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**He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul. (Psalm 23:2-3a)**

The first thing he does is to meet the needs of the inner man, the basic needs that we have for nourishment within. The basic needs of a flock of sheep are grass and water. Here is a great picture of sheep bedded down in grassy meadows, having eaten their fill and now totally satisfied, and then being led by still waters. Sheep are afraid of running water; they will only drink from a quiet pool. This sounds familiar doesn't it? It reminds me of our new furry animal friend, Blossom. She will only drink from a full bowl with ice chips. Now this is a fully spoiled dog.

The picture of the sheep is they are led to a place of rest and feed so their needs are totally met. The same is true of us. It is God who restores the inner man through his word. As we feed upon the word of God we see the Lord Jesus there. We draw upon him and our inner man is satisfied.



The second thing the Good Shepherd does is to give direction in life:

“He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. (Psalms 23:3b)

“... He leads me in right paths.” The Hebrew word translated “paths” means a well-worn trail.” That indicates again how stupid sheep are, because even when the trail is well laid out, they still need a shepherd. They are still inclined to wander away, no matter how obvious the path may be. The shepherd knows the trail. He has been there before, and the sheep trust him .

There is a classic story about a man undergoing basic training in the army. He was pulling KP and was given the assignment of sorting potatoes. There was a huge mound of them and the mess sergeant told him to put all the bad ones in one bin, and all the good ones in the other bin. He came back about two hours later to find the man just looking at the one potato. There was nothing in the bins. The sergeant said, “What’s the matter, don’t you like your work?” The soldier said, “It’s not the work; it’s the decisions that are killing me.” We all have to make countless decisions, day after day, which touch the lives of our children and our wives, and husbands. We need wisdom. We need a shepherd. We need someone who knows the trails, someone we can trust. Jesus wants to cover that role in our lives.

May your lives fall under the control of the Good Shepherd?

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