

# Christ Our Good Shepherd

## Reflections on **Psalm 23** From A New Testament Perspective

### Part 3:

### The Lord's Pastoral Care of His People

**Scripture:** *Psalm 23.*

**Exegetical Big Idea:** Jesus Christ is our Good Shepherd who blesses us daily with His secure *protective* care.

### Introduction

Two Sundays ago we began a three-part series of sermons in which we are reflecting on **Psalm 23**, which is probably the best known and best loved of all the Psalms.

For the sake of those who have not been with us over the past two Sundays I have already noted that most Bible scholars agree that David wrote **Psalm 23** although they don't agree on when he wrote it. In his youth David had been a shepherd. When, as an adult, David became the King of Israel, he was known as the Shepherd King of Israel. David wrote **Psalm 23**, however, not from the perspective of being a shepherd, but rather, from the perspective of being a sheep of the Lord. Along with all the OT people of God, David saw himself as being a sheep of *Yahweh's* pasture, as **Psalm 100:3** confirms to us.

Unlike David who lived under the Old Covenant, however, today you and I live under the New Covenant and we think of *the Lord* as referring not so much to *Yahweh*, but rather to our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ identified Himself as our Good Shepherd in **John 10**. He is also referred to as *the great Shepherd* in both **Heb. 13:20** and **1 Peter 5:4**. For this reason, in this three-part series, we have been reflecting on **Psalm 23** from a NT and Christ-focused perspective; we have been meditating on the Psalm in the light of what God has done for us in Christ that calls us to follow Jesus Christ as our Good Shepherd.

Let me say again that as I have meditated on this Psalm over the years I have been amazed by how the Holy Spirit took David's knowledge and experience of both being a human shepherd and a spiritual sheep of God to make the six verses of **Psalm 23** a very inspired and inspiring metaphor of how the Lord daily blesses His people with His abiding *presence*, His secure *protective* care, and His all-sufficient *pastoral* care (**3P's**).

Two Sundays ago we began our reflections on **Psalm 23** by looking at the first of these **3P's**, which was: The Lord's abiding *presence* with His people. Last Sunday we looked at the second of these **3P's**, which was, The Lord's secure *protection* of His people against our three deadly enemies - the world, the flesh, and the devil. This Sunday we are looking at the third and final **P**; the Lord's *pastoral* care of His people.

The word *pastoral* relates both to looking after sheep or cattle and to the giving of spiritual care and guidance in the Christian church.

This morning we are using the word *pastoral* with both meanings to relate to the way that Christ our Good Shepherd provides to us, His spiritual sheep, with spiritual care and guidance in our Christian lives. (The word *Pastor*, by the way, comes from this word *pastoral*. Interestingly, the Swahili word for *Pastor* is *mchungazi*, which means *shepherd*).

Specifically, this morning, we are looking at how the Lord provides *pastoral* care to us through first, our faith in Him, second, through our spiritual disciplines, and third, through our obedience to His Word.

### **I. Our Faith in Him (Verses 1-3)**

- 1) So, let's first look at how the Lord provides spiritual care to us through our faith in Him.
- 2) The Psalm begins in **verse 1** with the words, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*. We know that when David writes *I shall not want* here, he is not saying that the child of God will never experience any sort of material lack or deprivation because we know that even in his own life, for many years, David himself experienced deep material hardship as a fugitive fleeing from Saul in the wildernesses of Israel.
- 3) We also know that even in the life of Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd Himself, there were days of material deprivation that made him say in **Matt. 8:20** that *foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head*. So, what does David mean when he writes that *I shall not want*?
- 4) Well, in the Hebrew language in which this Psalm was originally written, the phrase, *The LORD is my shepherd*, literally translates as: *Look at who my shepherd is — the Lord!* David is obviously looking at *the size of his Lord* rather than *the size of his needs* and declaring *in faith* that since this big Lord is his shepherd, what need could he ever have that this big Lord cannot meet?
- 5) For you and I as Christians today, it is this faith in the Lord that Christ Our Good Shepherd was asking us to cultivate in **Matt. 6:32-33** when He said that we should not worry about our material needs because our heavenly Father who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the field knows what we need and will certainly meet those needs.
- 6) In other words, Jesus Christ our Good Shepherd is to you and I, His sheep, all that we will ever need, because we will never have a need that our Shepherd cannot meet. So the little child who misquoted the first verse of this Psalm by saying, *The Lord is my shepherd, what more shall I want?* got it right, after all!
- 7) So, we can say that the gift of faith the Lord gives us to continue to trust in His willingness and ability to meet our needs is a tangible way in which we receive His pastoral care that grows us up spiritually.

## II. Our Spiritual Disciplines (Verse 3)

- 1) In **verse 3** that says, *He restores my soul*, we see a second way in which we receive our Lord's pastoral care. The Hebrew word for *restore* in this verse is *shuv*. This Hebrew word means *to turn back, to turn around, or to return*. For this reason Bible scholars believe that when he wrote these words, *He restores my soul*, David was referring to the experience of a shepherd turning around a *cast sheep*. A *cast sheep* is a sheep that has turned over on its back and cannot get up again by itself. This is a very serious situation for the sheep because if the shepherd does not arrive on the scene within a reasonably short time to turn it back around on its feet, the sheep can become easy prey for predators such as wild dogs, vultures, and hyenas.
- 2) Sheep usually end up in this predicament when their wool becomes heavily matted with mud and manure and other debris that weigh them down so that when they lie down in a depression in the ground and they stretch out the center of gravity in their body can shift so that if they turn on their back far enough their feet no longer touch the ground. When a shepherd rescues *cast sheep*, he turns it back on its feet, and then, to prevent it from being a cast sheep again, he shears off the overgrown wool that is matted with all that mud and debris.
- 3) The equivalent of this in our Christian lives is when we go through periods of feeling cast down, and discouraged in our spirits and we find that we need spiritual restoration. This can happen when we slacken in our spiritual disciplines such as prayer and spending regular time in God's word. When we slide back like that spiritually we can find ourselves unprepared for serious temptations and the attacks of the enemy, so that when these come in various forms, we find ourselves cast down, dejected, and discouraged.
- 4) Often, when Christ our Good Shepherd comes to rescue us from our conditions of feeling cast down, if He finds that it is our slackening in spiritual disciplines and giving in to our self-life that is partly to blame, He can choose to shear off the mud and debris of our spiritual laziness and our self-life in ways that can be painful and unpleasant, just as sheep do not enjoy having the shepherd shearing off their overgrown wool matted with mud and debris. This may include the Lord allowing us to go through seasons and experiences of pressure and turbulence in our work, our relationships, in our finances and so on, that turn us back to the spiritual disciplines of prayer and spending regular time in His Word. In **Heb. 12:11** the writer reminds us that God's discipline can be painful and unpleasant but in the end it produces a harvest of righteousness in our lives.
- 5) A good example of this is to be found in the life of David himself when material affluence lulled him into spiritual complacency that led to his sordid affair with Bathsheba and the tragic murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah.

- 6) The Lord's correction of David was deep and bitter; he experienced bitter conflict and tragedy in his family as well as the military rebellion of his son Absalom that we read about in **2 Sam. 11-19**. The end result of all this, though, was a David whose transformative repentance was so deep and real that we can still read about it today in **Psalm 51**.
- 7) So, a second way in which we receive Christ our Good Shepherd's pastoral care is His correction that restores our souls by returning us to the spiritual disciplines of prayer and spending regular time in His Word. *Shuv* (restore): present, continuous tense – denotes an active on-going process.

### III. Our Obedience (Verse 3)

- 1) In **verse 3**, we see that a third way in which we receive our Lord's pastoral care is His frequent reminders to us to cultivate habits of obedience to His Word. We find this in **verse 3** where David declares that *he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake*.
- 2) It is the shepherd who knows the paths along which he should lead the flock to good pasture. Left to themselves the sheep, which are often stubborn and self-willed, will persist in blindly following the same old paths and grazing on the same land until they deplete and ruin their grazing land and begin to starve.
- 3) In **John 10:27** Christ says His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him. As Christians we hear His voice through the Scriptures and through the leading of His in-dwelling Holy Spirit. If in hearing his voice we choose to follow Him, that is, to obey Him instead of our own self-will, He, our Good Shepherd, will lead us in paths of righteousness.
- 4) In the NT the word *righteousness* is a translation of the Greek word δικαιοσ (dikaios), which means, to be in right standing with God, to be on the same page with Him. In every single situation we face in our lives we can either choose to obey Him or we can choose to do our own thing like stubborn sheep.
- 5) If we choose to follow Him He will guide us to make decisions and choices that conform to His will for us *for his name's sake*, which means, in keeping with His character of righteousness and holiness.
- 6) This is the heart of Christian discipleship and this is why in the Gospels, in **Luke 9:23**, for example, Christ made it clear that the Christian life is a life of resolute and determined self-denial and obedience.
- 7) So, the Lord's reminders to us to seek to obey His Word, is the third way in which we daily experience His pastoral care in our Christian lives.

## Conclusion

So, to summarize, we daily experience our Lord's all-sufficient *pastoral* care, first, through the faith the Lord gives us to trust in His ability to provide our needs, second, through the spiritual disciplines He reminds us to cultivate in our walk with Him, and third, through His frequent calls for us to obey His Word.

As we end this series of three teachings on **Psalm 23** this morning, let me say this. **Psalm 23** is not for everyone. It will be unfair for me to say that it is a nice, feel-good Psalm that anyone can pick up and apply to themselves. It only applies to the sheep of God's flock who have, in faith, accepted and personalized in their lives the reality of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I say this because in the very first verse of the Psalm, David declares that: *The Lord is my shepherd*. This means that the **3P's** we have reflected on these past three Sundays only apply to us if the Lord is indeed our Shepherd.

So, how do we get the Lord to become our Shepherd? Well, as I have noted over the past two Sundays, Christ our Good Shepherd Himself explained how we can become His sheep when He said these words in **John 10:9-11**: *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I have come that they may have eternal life. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. When Jesus says here that whoever enters through me will be saved we know from His teaching throughout the NT that what He means is that we enter into His sheepfold, His family, His Kingdom, when we genuinely repent of our sinful way of life, when we place our faith in His dying on the cross for our sins, and when we fully commit our lives to Him as our resurrected Lord. If you have never done this, why not do so this morning?*

I'll end by quoting from **Isaiah 40:11** because it beautifully sums up how Christ our Good Shepherd's abiding *presence* in our lives blesses us daily with His secure *protective* care, and His all-sufficient *pastoral* care: *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young*. Isn't that beautiful?

Refer to **Phillip Keller** book: *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*.

Let us pray.

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