

## Psalm 23:1 - The Lord is My Shepherd

Colossians 1:15-20, John 10:11-15

If you were to ask persons of faith, what is their favorite and most loved Psalm, probably 9 times out of 10, the answer would be the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. I can still picture the stained glass window in my church growing up of Jesus, the Shepherd in a meadow with a flock of sheep, holding a lamb in his arms. It was such a comforting image. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. It is the Psalm that is most familiar to us. It is the one Psalm that a lot of people can still recite by heart. It is the Psalm most often used in a funeral service as we cling to the words “yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” (Read part of Bishop’s statement on the shootings in Dallas and the recent shootings in Minnesota and Louisiana) And maybe this Psalm has become so familiar to some, that they no longer feel the impact of its message. And yet it has such a powerful and wonderful message for everyday life and for living our faith. And so I want us to take a closer look at this great Psalm during the weeks of this summer.

This Psalm to be fully understood, needs to be read as a whole to grasp its meaning. But I want to take it verse by verse for the next 6 weeks and allow the message of this Psalm speak to our hearts. We will see that through the imagery of Shepherd, sheep and pasture that the Bible conveys a beautiful picture of who God is, an understanding of God’s love and care. Reading through the Bible, you realize the Scriptures present a number of images to help us understand our relationship with God. The Bible talks about a farmer, a runner, a soldier. But perhaps the most frequent is that of the shepherd and his sheep. Well, when you think about it, it only makes sense when you consider the original audience of these words. For the most part, they were a rural people, there were nomadic people, there were those who witnessed the ritualistic sacrifices that obviously involved sheep.

And shepherding since the time of David really has changed that much. There are still shepherd’s rods and staff, and now perhaps a rifle. There may be a motorcycle or jeep in place of a donkey, shepherd’s attire for some have changed but for the most part shepherding is very similar to David’s time. And as Don Baker states in his book, The Way of the Shepherd, “Sheep have changed even less.” He makes this observation: “Sheep are still among the world’s most wonderful animals, providing wool for clothing, mutton, the most digestible of all meats, milk for childhood diseases, lanolin for

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hundreds of uses, and soft sheepskin blankets for the sick and the elderly.” They are pretty remarkable animals, but they are also often described as some of the dumbest, easily led, unpredictable animals. And maybe we don’t like to admit it, but there are reasons why the Bible notes the similarities between sheep and us humans. As the Scripture say...we like sheep have gone astray. And for that reason, we can relate to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

So in this series it is my prayer that through this very familiar Psalm, you will discover new and precious truths. Some of the basis for this series is based on a collection of insights by a Christian writer and one time shepherd, Philip Keller. One his books is entitled: [A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23](#). Keller grew up and lived in East Africa, where he was surrounded by simple, native sheep herders whose customs closely resembled those of their counterparts in the Middle East. Philip himself also made his livelihood as a sheep owner and sheep rancher for 8 years. And so he has some interesting perspectives that add great meaning to this familiar Psalm.

So let’s begin. Today we look at verse one. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. This Psalm like many of the Psalms was penned by David. David, he was once a shepherd boy, whose skill in taking care of sheep with his trusty sling shot helped him defeat a giant by the name of Goliath. David, son of a shepherd and later known as the shepherd king of Israel. He is the one who makes this great affirmation: The Lord is my Shepherd. We don’t know for sure when David wrote this Psalm, but you have to imagine it is David’s reflections on the very nature of God and how God had been with him throughout his life. Yes, there was the battle with the Phillistine, Goliath, but there was also the wrestling with a bear in the wilderness, there were also the encounters with King Saul, his running for his very life. Through it all, David knew where his help came from, the Lord who made heaven and earth. I would have to think that a shepherd has the opportunity to do some serious pondering and reflection about life. Being out in a pasture on a dark night, a person can feel very isolated and alone. But they also can watch the night sky and with its millions of stars and think about the wonder of it all. The vastness of God’s creation. When we went out West last fall, I believe it was near Zion National Park, we took a drive out to a very remote area and had the opportunity to stand outside our car on a very dark night and view the wide expanse of the night sky. And as you look at the millions of stars,

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it is a very humbling experience. You think about the expanse of the universe and how we are just a speck in all of creation. But it is also an experience that inspires you, to think that an infinite God is aware of my being. I sense the awesomeness of God, the majesty of God, and I realize that I am not alone.

The Lord is my Shepherd. Who is this Lord. Colossians tells us that the Lord is intimately involved with all of creation. Read Colossians 1:15-17. These words which speak of Jesus our Shepherd: *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."* It's amazing to think of our Lord, the God of universe as a Shepherd, because generally a shepherd was not considered one of the more nobler professions. Actually it was often seen as one of the lowest. But think about it, this is the wonder of the incarnation. Jesus, left the throne of heaven in all his majesty, to walk among us as a lowly shepherd to care for his sheep. In the gospel of John, Jesus identified himself as a Shepherd, more than that, He said: "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. When we say the Lord is my shepherd, we acknowledge the God who created and holds us, but also the Lord who loves us and was willing to be the sacrificial lamb so that we could know God. To say the Lord is MY shepherd is to make a personal statement of affirmation...that it is possible to know this Lord on a personal level. That we can have this relationship between Creator and us his creation. And that is an amazing thing!

David knew from first hand experienced that the lot in life of any sheep depends a lot on the type of person who owned it. How that shepherd treated his sheep would make all the difference. That's why each of us have to come to that place in our lives where we can put our trust in the Lord and say God is my shepherd. We need to admit God's ownership, God's claim on our lives. Picture it like this. We know we are sinners, and it is our sin that has broken our relationship with our owner. But Jesus the great Shepherd came to restore us, to bring us back into the fold. The prophet Isaiah says it powerfully: "For we are all like sheep who have gone astray. We have turned each one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

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As a shepherd, Philip Keller would put his mark of ownership on each of his sheep. Each shepherd would have his own distinctive earmark which the shepherd cuts into one of the ears of his sheep. It is not the most pleasant procedure. Each ewe is taken laying her ear on a wooden block and it is notched deeply with the razor-edge of a knife. There is pain for the sheep and the shepherd as he gave the mark of ownership. For the follower of Jesus, there was the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross for our sins. God wants to place the mark of ownership on us. Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. And our repentance and turning to God can be painful at first, but there is the joy and blessing of being in God's care. What a special thing to say: The Lord is my shepherd. Jesus loves me as a shepherd. I hear Jesus saying: "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." In one sense every time we have baptism, we think about how God claims us as his child. The mark of baptism is water and we are reminded that by God's grace we can be in this relationship with the God who made us and loves us.

It is then that we can experience the peace of being in close connection with our Shepherd and I can say: I shall not want. (or be in need) Some other translations say it this way: The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need. Another says, God my shepherd! I don't need a thing. When a shepherd cares for his sheep, he knows what they need...food, water, protection, rest...basic necessities of life for sheep, and really for you and me. We often think we need more, social media tries to convince us that we are not happy without much more, and that fulfillment and success comes by accumulating more and more. Our culture seems to thrive on who can wear the latest fashion, have the nicest home, have the biggest portfolio. But we soon discover, those things really don't satisfy our souls. They don't make us happy.

I've heard a lot of people say: "If I could win the lottery, then I would be set." Well, I know one thing no one from this congregation won this past weekend's mega-millions. Everytime there is a big jackpot, millions of people chase that elusive dream. There have been studies and books read about those persons who have won the big jackpot, and many who have ended up in deep depression and despair. Their lives ruined by what they thought was their good fortune. Fortune magazine ran an article on this very topic and stated it like this: 44% of those who have ever won large lottery prizes were broke within five years, according to a 2015 Camelot Group study. The Certified

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Financial Planner Board of Standards says nearly a third declared bankruptcy—meaning they were worse off than before they became rich. Other studies show that lottery winners frequently become estranged from family and friends, and incur a greater incidence of depression, drug and alcohol abuse, divorce, and suicide than the average American. But it's the temptation we all face. Thinking the world's view of happiness will make us happy. And we like sheep can go astray. You see, sheep can get restless, it gets discontented and a sheep will wander off from the rest of the flock. This sheep thinks there are greener pastures, but it will find that soon it is lost and in danger.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. To be contented with God's care and provisions for life. That we can be people who face troubles, hardship, struggles in life and yet still find that deep, quiet, settled peace. Why? Because I am trusting in the care of My Shepherd. The diligent shepherd rises early and looks over his flock. He searches with careful eyes to make sure they are fit and content. He notices if any sheep are in danger. The sheep find contentment in the shepherd's care.

It is the testimony of the apostle Paul. "I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty." In that same chapter, Paul goes on to say: "And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

That's putting our trust in the Great Shepherd. Who knows us, who loves us, and can truly fulfill the longing of our souls. That we could say with the Psalmist David: The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want.

A Sunday School teacher decided to have her young class memorize one of the most quoted passages in the Bible: Psalm 23. She gave the kids a month to learn the verse.

Little Bobby was excited about the task, but he just couldn't remember the Psalm. After much practice, he could barely get past the first line. On the day that the kids were scheduled to recite Psalm 23 in front of the congregation, Bobby was so nervous. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone and said proudly, "The Lord is my shepherd and that's all I need to know." Yes, that's the important truth for you and me. This Shepherd who cares for you personally. This God knows our need and to discover that we find our real peace and

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contentment as we trust in his love and care. This morning I ask you to take a look at what is most important to you, what will truly bring you peace and satisfaction? (especially in this world that is so troubled and confused) And to believe that the God who made you, the one who is our loving Shepherd will meet the deepest needs of our hearts. Savior, like a Shepherd lead us...we want to trust in your care in all of life.