

The Lord is MY Shepherd – Psalm 23

Pastor Colin Rieke – May 7, 2017

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

When you think of a sheep, what comes to your mind? Do you picture a cute, cuddly animal, with clean wool, that walks on four legs and says “Baa!” This is the idealistic picture that I think many have. But let me see by a show of hands, how many of you have ever seen a real, live sheep? Maybe it was on a farm, maybe it was at the Pima County Fair. Not quite the exact same picture of a sheep that we get in kids’ picture books. But even the image of a sheep that we get on the farm or at the fair isn’t quite the same thing as what those who heard Jesus speak about a shepherd and his sheep.

In Israel, during the time of Jesus, shepherds and sheep were about as common of an occupation as you had in that day. There were any number of people who grew up taking care of sheep, sheering sheep and yes even killing sheep for meat. A reason for this was due to the landscape that was suited for grazing animals, but another reason for the abundance of sheep in Israel was the high demand of sheep and lambs for sacrifice in their worship of the Lord. This gave the Israelites a very up close and personal encounter with sheep, almost on a daily basis.

But it was like this long before Jesus walked the dusty roads of Israel. It was like this ever since the Israelites entered the Promised Land. One of the most famous shepherds in the Old Testament, also happened to be one of the first kings of Israel, a man by the name of David. David was the youngest of eight brothers, and one of the jobs he had as a young boy was taking care of his father's sheep. David knew what it was like to be a shepherd. And when he became king over Israel, he saw several similarities between the job of king and the job of shepherd. Perhaps this is what led him to write Psalm 23, one of the most famous sections in all of the Bible.

But in this famous Psalm, David does not compare himself to the shepherd, shepherding over God's people, he rather saw himself as the sheep, and he took great comfort in this. He took great comfort in who his shepherd was, the Lord. But not just that the Lord was a good shepherd, but that the Lord was David's good shepherd. It is to this comforting psalm from God's Word that we turn our attention to this morning, as we are reminded that the Lord is not just a shepherd, but that THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD.

1. To be with me in trouble and uncertainty
2. To bless me with his faithful love

(1)

One thing that David knew better than any of us was how ignorant sheep were. There's a reason why shepherds are needed for the sheep, because without a shepherd, they would be prone to wander, they would be prone to eat what they shouldn't eat, they would be prone to do just about anything that wasn't good for them, because sheep don't do a lot of thinking. And so during David's time as a shepherd, he knew how to care for his sheep. He knew where the good grazing grounds were, he knew where to find shade and water in the heat of the summer, he knew how to protect the sheep from roaming predators like bears and lions, he knew to go and look for a sheep when it got lost.

As David considered all of these things, he saw the Lord being that good shepherd for him. David had gone through his fair share of trouble and difficulties in his life. Ascending to be the king of Israel was not an easy road. The king before him, Saul, had sought to take David's life on any number of occasions, he chased him from his home, he had him on the run for years. But through all of that, God watched over David. Even after David ascended the throne over all of Israel, there were still difficult times. His family life was a mess (another one of many examples why God wants just one wife for one husband), his own son drove him from the throne as well. And still through all of that, God watched over David, as a shepherd watches over his sheep.

This is why David was able to say, "**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.**" It was the Lord who led him to green pastures and quiet waters, guiding him in the right paths, walking with him through the valley of the shadow of death. How could David do anything other than give praise to the God who had given him so much, not only in the way of material wealth and power, but in terms of his faith, in terms of his salvation.

Now I can imagine three instances in David's life that caused him genuine trouble and uncertainty, not just about what would come next, but perhaps even if he had strayed too far from God. The first two

I've mentioned, when David was on the run from King Saul, and when David was on the run from his son Absalom. The third time may have been after he committed adultery with Bathsheba. David had stolen another man's wife and impregnated her while that man was off at war (where David should have been by the way), he had covered it up by having that man killed, and taking Bathsheba as his wife. While all may have seemed fine on the outside, David was being eaten up on the inside. He imagined that he could get away with it, but his conscience soon realized that he could not hide his action from God. He knew he was in trouble with God and was uncertain as to what that would mean.

This uncertainty came to a head once Nathan, a prophet of God confronted him with his sin, and said that David was the one who deserved to die. David knew he was guilty, he knew he deserved death. But when David's hope had been lost, almost immediately, God, the good shepherd, came to David's rescue proclaiming that his sin of adultery and murder were forgiven, washed away, washed away in the blood of the perfect sacrificial lamb, the Messiah to come – Jesus. This is why David could declare, **THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD**, and that **“even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.”**

The God of David is your God as well. And he is not just an impersonal and uncaring God. He is your God, he is my God. We can say with as much confidence as David, **THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD**. And how comforting is this during our times of deepest, darkest doubt? We fit the picture of sheep perfectly, don't we? We fit the picture of dumb unthinking animals who don't know what's best for us. We fit the picture of animals who wander away from the God who watches over them. Unfortunately, it's often when we've gotten caught in the brambles of an addiction, the briars of temptation, when we've fallen and injured ourselves in some sin, when we've ingested the sweet looking food, which in fact turned to be poison for our bodies. It's only at those times when we seem to turn to our good shepherd for help.

But it's even at those times that **THE LORD WHO IS MY SHEPHERD** comes to find me, because I couldn't find him. He comes to rescue me from my own mistakes, my own wanderings, my own sins, my own doubts. And he takes me on his shoulders and brings me back home. This is what he promises in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, **“I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.”** But this alone does not make the good shepherd good. What makes the Lord my good shepherd, is that he gave up his life for the sheep. He gave up his life on the cross of Calvary, to pay for all of the mistakes of all of the sheep – all of the wanderings, so that we never have to be uncertain about how much God loves us.

A God who went to hell and back for you, this is your shepherd. A God who will be with you wherever you walk in this life, whether that be here in Tucson, or anywhere else in the United States. A God who will be with you during the times of uncertainty associated with a vacancy. A God who will be with you through your darkest days and will see you through them. No other God can promise that, no other person can promise that, no other prescription or product can promise that.

(2)

This promise is real, not just something that I say to comfort you, something God's Word says. And this God not only has delivered you from the shadow of death, he not only will be with you in trouble and uncertainty, he wants to bless you with his faithful love.

See how David describes it, **“You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.”** When we take a look at our lives, look at how overflowing our life is with blessings. When I take a look at my life, I see how God has blessed me with a good job, he has blessed me with a wonderful wife, he has blessed me with three, going on four beautiful children, he has blessed me with you, whom I not only get to call my congregation, but whom I get to call my friends. All these are wonderful blessings from a good and gracious God. All of these blessings are a result of God is faithful and merciful love to me. It is a merciful love that allows me to breath, it is a merciful love that brought me into his family, into the house of the Lord.

In fact, it’s a merciful love we confess every time we pray the common table prayer, “Oh, give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.” That’s the same **“goodness and love that will follow”** you all the days of your life. It is this mercy and love that brings us into the presence of God, not only in a spiritual way, but in a very physical way as we come to church to be able to worship this wonderful good shepherd we have. For it is in this physical way of coming to church that we express what is in our hearts about our God.

There’s a reason why Psalm 23 is so famous, there’s a reason why so many people take to memorizing this psalm. It’s for the comfort that it contains, the personal comfort. When we say Psalm 23, don’t overlook the little things. THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, he looks after me and guides me in trouble and uncertainty, he blesses me with his faithful love. And I don’t have to worry about anything in this life, because he is with me. Any shepherd today can only be a poor picture of what our Good Shepherd is like. Any pastor today can only be a poor picture of what our Good Shepherd is like. Our Good Shepherd cares deeply for us, and will do anything to get us to our heavenly home, in fact, he already has. Amen.