

## The Greatest Story (Part 21):

The Great Shepherd

*Psalm 23*

*Memory Verses: Psalm 23:1*

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

I don't know why, but my mother has collected Sheep for as long as I can remember. If you were to visit her home in Hickory, you would be greeted by stuffed sheep, sheep figurines, sheep pictures, and sheep themed dinnerware. She calls them her flock. One of her favorite sheep is a stuffed sheep the size of Vera, called Raspberry, which rides shotgun in her car wherever she goes.

So it is no surprise that the first passage of scripture that we memorized together as a family was our passage this morning; **Psalm 23** which begins; the Lord is my Shepherd. If you know it say it with me.

King David was a man all too familiar with Sheep and Shepherds. He began his ministry as a shepherd for his father's flocks. Of course his shepherding days came to a close when he was promoted to Giant slayer, but he never forgot the many lessons that he learned while tending the sheep.

As we look at the story of God this year and the plan of God to redeem fallen mankind it is important to recognize that God is our Shepherd. As sinful, rebellious people we are all like lost Sheep needing a Shepherd to lead and guide us to a place of refuge and safety. On our own our lives would end in destruction, but with the Great Shepherd we can be saved. This is the story that David presents us with in Psalm 23.

Today as we look at this passage we will be presented with many different aspects of what it means to have God as your Shepherd. The question isn't whether or not God can help you. The question is are you willing to be helped.

There are many things in this life we know are good for us; vegetables, water, sleep, exercise. But instead of readily partaking of these we neglect them... because we don't like them. They aren't fun. Well today we are going to see the good which waits for us if we choose to follow God as our Great Shepherd, but we will also see the other side which is not so fun. Many people choose to flee those times of trials which often means fleeing from God. So... today, will you choose to be led by the Great Shepherd even if it means that you will be led to places that you don't want to go? My fear this morning is that we will choose to accept all the good in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and neglect the challenges within. You cannot have the good without the trial. This morning I want you to see that... **God can only be the Shepherd of Green Pastures and Still**

## Waters if He is Also the Shepherd of The Valley of the Shadow of Death and the Enemies Table

### Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to give our attention to is that... **The Great Shepherd is The End of Want (vs1-3)**. Look again at **vs1-3**. We are reminded here that Shepherds provide for the sheep. The Sheep don't starve because they depend on the shepherd to provide them with food. One thing about sheep is that they prefer to travel in flocks which means that they will all stay together and not move unless someone leads them to move. Another thing is that they aren't predators who can easily find food on their own... they depend on someone to find it for them. So... it's quite possible that sheep would starve without a shepherd to find them food or water. A good shepherd will make sure his sheep are fed and watered.

It is the same with us. I'm not in want because I have someone who provides all I need. Because I have God. There of course are some who claim that they have because of their hard work or because of their talents and education but the bible teaches us that all we have comes from God. Yes hard work and education are good things but the arrogance of man is that they achieve success without the help of a sovereign God. **Charles Spurgeon says this- "We have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have skill and wit with which to win my bread, but because the Lord is my shepherd."** It is God who supplies our every need and causes us to not be in want.

You say pastor, that sounds good and all but what about those who are truly in want? Does this mean we will always have everything we want or need? That is a good question and the answer is simple. This verse doesn't mean that God will make sure that no one is ever in want. There are Billions of people in this world struggling to find food, shelter, work, clothes, nourishment, etc... So the first thing to note here is that this verse is definitely not talking about wants – it's talking about needs. The translation is hard for us to understand but suffice it to say the word want means need. You won't be in need. If this verse were speaking of wants rather than needs then I could expect God to give me all the money I want. I want a million dollars and unless you give it to me I am in want. I want a supped up 100k truck... where is at God... you said I wouldn't be in need. That's not at all what this verse is talking about.

It's also not talking about the fact that everyone who depends on the shepherd will always have all they need, at least in the physical sense. Everyone dies and if our needs are in relation to survival then God has a 100% failure rate at keeping us alive. People starve every day, people are killed every day, people die of disease every day, people are homeless every day. But here is the good news.... our physical survival is not our

greatest need... our greatest need is God. **“Not being in want” doesn't mean that we will always be provided with our daily needs, but that we will always be provided with God.** This changes our perspective – God is the end of want. I may starve physically but I will never starve spiritually – I have the Bread of Life. I may thirst physically but I will never thirst spiritually – I have the River of Life in God. So get this... the great shepherd isn't turning our hearts to him through supplying every want or need in this life... he is turning our hearts to him by supplying himself. The point is simple... **When my heart is fully dependent upon God I have no other want than him.**

The next thing that deserves our attention here is that **The Great Shepherd is The End of Fear (vs4-5).** Look again at verses 4-5. Not only do shepherds provide for the sheep but they also protect the sheep. For sheep the most vulnerable place is a valley. Shepherds would have to travel through the valleys to get to the next cool mountainside knowing that the sheep may be suspect to predators. The valley itself would cast dark shadows making it easier for predators to sneak up on the sheep. For this reason sheep would never walk through a dark valley alone. But... hey will go anywhere the shepherd leads them because they trust the shepherd to protect them.

Shepherds protect the sheep with a rod and a staff. A shepherd didn't have many work materials. Their simple tools included two sticks... a rod, which he would use as a walking stick and a weapon if needed, and a staff which would be used to guide the sheep and catch them if they were in a hard to reach place. It could be used to hook sheep and steer them in the right direction when they started to wander in the wrong direction and sheep tend to wander a lot.

We are also like these sheep who tend to wander. **Isaiah 53:6** says all of us like sheep have gone astray. The Great shepherd keeps us from going astray. The Great shepherd protects from the valley of the shadow of death.

Mankind's greatest fear is death. We fear the pain of death, and we fear the uncertainty of death. I don't think we will ever truly get rid of the fear of the pain of death. I often think of the worst ways to die and I will be honest... I fear burning, drowning, cancer, a heart attack... and I don't think that will change. I also have a great fear of being eaten by roaches... but that's my issues and you shouldn't concern yourself with that. But the fear of the uncertainty of death has been defeated by Christ on the cross. You see... Christ has taken away the fear of death by defeating the one who has the power of the fear of death. **Hebrews 2:14-15** says that Christ destroys the devil and the fear of death. It's interesting that the shepherd protects us from the fear of death with two pieces of wood. Christ has delivered us from this fear of death with two

pieces of wood; the cross. The rod and staff of Christ comfort us because through the weapons of Christ we have been saved from all fear, even the fear of death. We no longer fear death because we know that death is not the end but the beginning of an eternal kingdom of peace and prosperity beyond our wildest dreams. So... **If we've been saved from the fear of death what then shall we fear?**

This point is huge... If we no longer fear death then we no longer fear anything right because death is the greatest fear? If we no longer fear death we certainly don't fear our enemies. That is why the shepherd will prepare a place for us to eat in the midst of our enemies. The shepherd will bring the sheep to a mesa, a plain on the rocks where there is good vegetation and he will make sure that poisonous weeds and plants are rooted up so the sheep won't eat them. Often the shepherd prepares the mesa while the predators, bears, coyotes, cougars look on. The confidence of the shepherd in his ability to fend off predators actually keeps the predators at bay. This mesa is prepared in the midst of the enemies. If the sheep want to enjoy their meal then they need to trust the protection of their shepherd.

This is key for us who trust in God. We do not mind our enemies because we know that our shepherd will take care of them in his way and in his timing. This shows us something of great value... **“Our measure of fear is in direct correlation with our measure of faith. The more we trust our shepherd the less we will fear our enemies.”**

The last thing we need to turn our attention to is... **The Great Shepherd is the End of Spiritual Poverty (vs.5-6)** Look again at verses 5-6. It's important to not that sheep suffer from the affliction of flies more than any other predator. The flies would land on the sheep's nose and plant their eggs in the sheep's skin. Once the eggs hatched they would burry deep into the sheep's nose and eyes often causing severe pain and or blindness. In order to prevent this the shepherd would have to apply oil to the Sheep's heads so that they would not be infected by flies.

Anointing a persons head with oil was also a sign of blessing and God's favor. Anointing oil was also used for healing diseases. Oil also signified wealth. The oil spoken of here represents all of these. The sheep was blessed with the oil because it got rid of the flies. We are blessed by the oil of God's anointing through the Holy Spirit. The cup of anointing signifies the holy spirit for Christians. Metaphorically, to have the anointing of God is to have the Holy Spirit and to have ones cup run over is to have abundant blessings and presence with the Holy Spirit. So where one was once spiritually sick now they are spiritually healthy, where once they were spiritually poor they now are spiritually wealthy. The Holy Spirit is the root of spiritual blessing in the lives of believers. So now one could say – with the blessing of the holy spirit in their life and a cup that overflows with the favor of God that – surely goodness and mercy will follow them all the days of

their lives. Not because of physical blessing but because of spiritual renewal and maturity. **We are not guaranteed physical blessings all of our lifetime, but we are guaranteed spiritual blessings in our great shepherd and the oil of his holy spirit.** Of course the greatest blessing is not in this life but in this life to come where we will dwell in the house of the lord forever. We are blessed to dwell within God's house (the church) here on Earth and then we will be blessed to dwell within God's house (heaven) in eternity.

### **Application (Resolution, You)**

Everyone wants to be blessed. Everyone wants green pastures, still waters, heads anointed with oil, and a house to dwell in... But this life also includes valleys and enemies. We must trust God to be our shepherd in our times of blessings as well as our times of trials. If we can't trust our Great Shepherd through our trials then he is not God. As Don said a few weeks ago... our faith is revealed in times of trial. That is why... **God can only be the Shepherd of Green Pastures and Still Waters if He is Also the Shepherd of The Valley of the Shadow of Death and the Enemies Table.** So do you trust the Great Shepherd?

Do you trust God or possessions? If God is the shepherd which stops our wanting... then why are you still wanting things other than God? What do you need to do in order to find your satisfaction in God alone?

Do you trust God or fear death? Jesus Christ has destroyed the devil and the fear of death by guaranteeing those who trust in him eternal life.... so are you still fearing death? Why? What do you need to do in order to trust God more with your life and with your death?

Do you trust God for spiritual maturity? Only in Christ can you find the spiritual blessings of the Holy Spirit. Do you feel as if you are blessed spiritually? If not, what can you do to see your spiritual blessings as the only blessings you need? Perhaps focus on the spiritual blessing of heaven. Is heaven enough of a motivator in this life to help you persevere through trials?

### **Conclusion**

Christ is our Shepherd. He lived a perfect life and died a perfect death on the cross so that you can have an abundant life now and a eternal life in heaven. Are you ready to place your trust in him today?

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