

PSALM 23 “THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD”

- How many of you have ever been to a sheep farm?
 - Did you know that each sheep is given a mark by their owner showing who they belong to?
 - In the Bible, who else are called sheep? (Believers)
 - And Who is their shepherd? (The Lord)
 - What is our mark that represents we belong to the Him? (The mark of the cross, it identifies us as His own. It can never be erased.)
- We are going to look at one of the most favorite Psalms in the Bible that refers to the Lord as our Shepherd and we as His sheep. It is Psalm 23. How many of you know it?
- Let us say it together if you know it: “The Lord is my Shepherd...”
 - Do you know who wrote it? (David)
 - And what was David’s occupation before he was king? (Shepherd)
 - So David had a good understanding of a shepherd and his sheep when he wrote this Psalm unto the Lord.
- Let’s begin our study of this Psalm with verse #1 on our Verse Sheet: (Psalm 23:1 “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”)
- What do you think this means?
 - If the Lord is your Shepherd, are there still things in this world that you may want? Can you name some things? (...)
 - Are you still content to be in the Shepherd’s care even though you may want those things?
 - Sometimes we may struggle with contentment but we still know that God is taking care of us. It is something we have to work on.
- Being utterly content in the Shepherd’s care and not wanting anything else is really hard, especially living in the world we live in today. But, by knowing Him, we should be experiencing complete and utter contentment. He said in John 10:10 “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”
- True life is inner joy and peace in the midst of suffering and hardships that can only come from having a relationship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd.
- Let’s continue and read Verse #2 on our Verse Sheet together: (Psalm 23:2 “He *maketh* me to lie down in green pastures; He *leadeth* me beside the still waters.”)
- Did you know that sheep refuse to lie down unless they are free from all fear, pests, hunger and friction with other sheep? (...)
 - Does that sound like us sometimes? Do we refuse to lie down and rest until a problem is solved and fixed the way we want it to be?(...)
 - Do we pray about it and then take it back up and worry about it for hours, days or even years? (...)

-If we put ourselves into the Good Shepherd's care, we need to lay it all down and *rest* in His protection over our situations and trust Him that He will care for us in it and lead us calmly through it.

-This verse shares with us that "He makes us lie down in green pastures and leads us beside still waters."

-Do you think green pastures were easy to find in the land of Israel?(...)

-It was very hard. You have to clear the land from things that keep grass from growing, such as rocks and weeds, and then plant grass and maintain it as well.

-This is similar to what Jesus does in our own lives. He wants to clear our lives from spiritual rocks and weeds that are not good, that keeps us from growing in Him. Things like unbelief, bitterness, doubt and many other negatives, so His Words can be sown into our hearts.

-His Word are the green pastures and still waters that our souls need.

-Let's read Verse #3 together on our Verse Sheet together: (Psalm 23:3 "He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.")

-As David was writing this, he was probably thinking of times his soul was cast down and needed restoration. Can you think of times throughout his life when his soul was probably cast down? (When Saul was pursuing him; Absalom, his own son, wanted to take his kingdom from him and wanted to kill him; his son from Bathsheba died because of his sin with her, etc.)

-Did you know that there is a term used for sheep called a "cast" sheep?

-It is used when a sheep turns over and can't get up on its own.

-Are there days when you feel cast down and you just can't seem to get up? Maybe too much is burdening you and you just don't feel like it?(...)

-A good shepherd keeps his eyes on those sheep that have turned over and can't get up. If it is on it's back, it is vulnerable to predators. He restores the sheep to its' upright position and leads it back to the flock so it may live. God does that for us as well. He restores us to an upright position through His Word and His love and leads us back to His flock so we may live the life of hope and peace He has for us.

-The second part of this verse says "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

-When sheep go down the same path so many times, the paths will turn into ruts which are not good for the grassland. The grass won't grow and their own waste covers it as well. They pollute their own grassland and that makes them sick.

-A good shepherd will keep his flock moving so they won't wear down the pasture and cause ruts. He will lead them from pasture to pasture to get new green grass wherever they go.

-This is why David said "He leadeth me." Jesus knows when we are getting into a rut. Sometimes our minds get into a rut when we focus on the negative

circumstances in our lives and not the good, or we're in a rut because we may feel lonely or unimportant.

-God knows this and leads us into new pastureland because it is the best for us. He does that by using His Word and His promises from His Word to remind us that He loves us and gave His Son for us; that we are important and created for His purpose to love Him and glorify Him; He tells us that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. That He came so that we may have life and have it abundantly.

-When sheep are lead to fresh pasture, they are so excited. Oh, that we would be wildly excited when He leads us into new pastures.

-Let's read verse #4 on our Verse Sheet together: (Psalm 23:4 "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou are with me!")

-Sheep are lead down the mountains as the winter approaches to go home. They are in danger of snow, running waters and predators. As the shepherd leads them to safety, the best way is through the dark valleys. We often have to go through dark valleys in order to find the refreshments God has for us.

-What are some dark valleys that we may go through? (Loss of loved ones, loss of friendships, loss of health, loss of finances, etc.)

-Did you trust in the Lord and was their refreshment for you in those times?(...)

-The Lord allows us to walk through those valleys sometimes so that we can console others who are experiencing the same thing. God leads us through dark valleys and goes through them with us so that others can benefit from the experience we gain through walking through them with Him. Use that experience to counsel someone. Try not to let it go to waste.

-Let's read verse #5 together from our Verse Sheet: (Psalm 23:4b "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.")

-Did you know that the shepherds would go out into the woods and look for the special branch that they could make into a perfect rod? They spent time whittling it away to a hook that would be strong and help them guide their flock, correct them to the right path and discipline them from going off the path.

-God's Word is the same thing for His sheep, those that belong to Him, His children. It is a tool to guide us, correct us, comfort us, discipline us and we know it is an extension of His mind and will.

-The shepherd's rod is not only for correction and discipline. It is also used to separate the sheep's wool, which is 4"-6" deep, to determine if there is anything going on on the skin that may be irritating or harming his sheep. In a way, God does this to us too. He separates all of the outer things we do for Him and searches deep into our hearts to see what is really going on that may be separating us from Him.

-Let's read our next verse together to see how this relates to us in God's Word. #6 on our Verse Sheet: (Psalm 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting/understanding.")

-Can we "pull the wool over" God's eyes?

-We can try or think we are, but God searches our hearts to see if there is anything that is keeping us from being close to Him.

-The shepherd's rod is also used a defense weapon against predators.

-What is our defense weapon against predators that try to steal our joy? (His Word, Bible)

-When Satan is coming after us, or we're not doing something right, God's Word, the Bible, gives us the advice or encouragement that we need.

-The shepherd's staff also uprights the sheep that have fallen and when the sheep see the staff, it comforts them because they know that the shepherd is there to help them up, to be with them and protect them. Just like it says in our verse, "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

-Would someone share how God's Word and knowing He is near can comfort us? (...)

-Let's continue on with our next verse, #7: (Psalm 139:5 "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:")

-What do you think it means when David wrote "You prepare a table for me in front of my enemies?" (When David was a shepherd boy, he would have to go and prepare a table of grassland for his sheep to eat on that would last the whole summer. He would clear it of poisonous plants and pesky rodents so his sheep could graze safely. Many times he did this as the sheep's predators were watching and waiting. David would keep an eye out for them as well, to destroy them if they messed with his sheep. God is our Good Shepherd that goes ahead of us. He knows what situation we will be in and He knows what dangers we will encounter. We just need to pray and ask that we will not succumb to the poisonous plants and predators that want to rob us of our relationship with God.)

-Let's read verse #8 together from our verse sheet: (Psalm 139:5b "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.")

-Did you know that sheep can be tortured by flies that make their home in the sheep's wool? But, the worst one is the nasal fly that tries to lay eggs in the nasal passage of the sheep's nose. When they hatch, they work their way up to the sheep's head and start gnawing on its' head, which drive them crazy. They may even drive themselves to death trying to get them off of their head. Guess what the anecdote was? (A special oil smeared over the sheep's nose and head would protect them from these nose flies.)

-We are so similar to these sheep because we can get distracted by things in this life that annoy us and we just can't let it go. But, Whom did God send to anoint us? (His Holy Spirit)

-Jesus tells us to ask for the Holy Spirit to anoint us everyday so we can have the attitude of Christ, an attitude of joy, contentment, love, patience, goodness and peace. All of those are fruits of the Spirit.

-Have you heard of the phrase "Is your cup half full or half empty?"

-That is a reflection of your attitude on life.

-As a Christian, what should our cup(lives) be filled with? (Jesus)

-And what does He give us that overflows? (His love)

-Let's read our last verse together, #9 on our Verse Sheet: (Psalm 139:6 "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.")

-Does anyone know what mercy means? (Not giving us what we deserve, but giving us what we don't deserve.)

-And how did Jesus give us mercy? (When we deserved death for our sin, He went to the cross and took on our sin and died for them and rose again so we can have eternal life with Him and the Father forever in Heaven. We get to spend eternity in His house forever because He did this for us.)

-Does that give new meaning to this last verse?

-Love and Mercy pursues us until He captures us!

-We have a Good Shepherd that is sympathetic to our needs. He is goodness, He is mercy and He follows us throughout our whole lives. Calling us to come to Him when we are burdened and weary, and He will give us rest. Matthew 11:28 says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." He owns us, He cares about us and He gives the true rest that our souls need.

-God's goodness and mercy is pursuing us everyday and I want Him to capture me. Do you?

-Let's let Him. Let's read the whole Psalm together in joy!

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