

FBC POWELL, 3-5-17 AM NOTES
"The Lord Is My Shepherd" Part One
Psalm 23:1-6
5 in Series, "Psalms: Medicine for the Soul"

Isaiah 53:6a "All of us like sheep have gone astray."

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

I. We Have a Shepherd Who Provides for His Sheep (vv. 1-2a)

John 10:14 "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me."

John 10:26-28 "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."

John 16:33b "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Philippians 4:11-13 "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

John 15:5b "... apart from Me you can do nothing."

II. We Have a Shepherd Who Directs His Sheep (vv. 2b, 3)

John 10:14a "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own..."

*I must tell Jesus all of my trials,
I cannot bear these burdens alone;
In my distress He kindly will help me,*

He ever loves and cares for His own.

—Elisha Hoffman

Isaiah 30:15b “In quietness and trust is your strength.”

Psalm 46:10a “Cease striving and know that I am God.”

III. We Have a Shepherd Who Protects His Sheep (v. 4)

James 4:13-14 “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ ~~Yet~~ you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”

Psalm 22:1a “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”

John 8:12 “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

Luke 1:78-79 (HCSB) “Because of our God’s merciful compassion, the Dawn from on high [Jesus] will visit us to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

First Baptist Church Powell 03 05 17 AM

Sermon 5: The Lord Is My Shepherd Part One

Psalm 23:1-6

Almost no one would argue with the statement, “Stress is a major problem in our day.” It is likely that there has never been a more stressful time in history than this present time. Here are some statistics from Web M.D. In our nation, seventy-five to ninety percent of all doctor’s office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints. This web site goes on to say, “Stress can play a part in problems such as headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions, asthma, arthritis, depression, and anxiety.” It is estimated that stress costs American industry more than \$300 billion annually.

The Mayo Clinic’s web site lists some common effects of stress that most people are not aware of. Some common effects of stress on our body are headache, chest pain, upset stomach, fatigue, and sleep problems. Here are some effects of stress on our mood –

anxiety, lack of motivation or focus, irritability, anger, and sadness. Some common effects of stress, on our behavior, are overeating, under eating, social withdrawal, and lack of exercise.

For most, the days are gone of just sitting by a babbling brook and quietly thinking, relaxed bike rides (not for the aerobic effect), casual walks in the woods, and contemplating the beauty of a sunset. This generation seems to egotistically think that we are more intelligent, more efficient, and more productive than all previous generations. If the truth were known, about all that we have added is speed, noise, and stress. We arrive faster to our destination, but we don't really know why we are there. Our culture today reminds me of the pilot who came in the intercom of a jumbo jet and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that our navigation and our communications systems are not working and we don't have a clue as to where we are. The good news is that we have a tail wind and we are making excellent time."

Contrary to what many believe and some "experts" teach, I am not convinced that hard work is the culprit in the "killer stress" our culture is dealing with. Our forefathers in many ways worked as hard if not harder than we do. Let me use one of my heroes as an example. John Wesley (1703-1791) arose at 4:00 AM every morning and often preached five times a day. In fifty years of ministry, it is estimated that he preached more than 40,000 times. It is estimated that he traveled over 250,000 miles mostly on horseback! Yet, Wesley never seemed hurried or worried. He was often persecuted and rejected but showed no signs of stress. Generally, our bodies were constructed by the creator to work hard. Our brains were designed to find solutions to problems. The problem is not work or seeking solutions to problems. The real problem is a lack of peace and confidence that come from a faulty relationship with the One who created us! This is the problem that is dealt with in this most popular of the Psalms. Many people have heard it read often in churches, funerals, and other venues. It is likely the most memorized passage in Scripture and yet it seems that even most church members have never really understood and applied what it says. That is what we are attempting to do in this message.

In Psalm 23, David, under divine inspiration, uses the illustration of a shepherd and his sheep. The shepherd is an illustration of our God, and the sheep picture us. Over 400 times in the Bible we are compared to sheep. You may hear that and say, "How sweet." Not really! Let me give you four truths about sheep. First, sheep are dumb. If you go to the circus, you may see trained lions, tigers, dogs, seals, and even a trained pig. I have never seen or heard of a trained sheep. When I say "dumb" in comparing sheep to us, I am not speaking of our IQ but our SQ (spiritual quotient). Second, sheep are often defenseless. A horse runs, a mule kicks, a bear bites, but sheep (the domesticated kind David is referring to in Psalm 23) are defenseless. Third, sheep are directionless. We read in Isaiah 53:6a: "All of us like sheep have gone astray." Sheep tend to wander and they have no natural sense of direction. They can't get back home. Fourth, sheep are dependent. Sheep cannot long survive without a shepherd. Often, they cannot even get up when they fall! Do you see why sheep serve as an illustration of us and the shepherd serves as a wonderful illustration of our Lord. Jesus was referring to Psalm 23 when He said in John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

In the remainder of this message, we are going to look verse by verse at this familiar Psalm. I am praying that our familiarity does not serve to hinder us from really hearing and applying what this glorious passage is telling us.

I. We Have a Shepherd Who Provides for His Sheep (vv. 1-2a)

The focus of this Psalm is not the sheep; the focus is on the Lord who is our shepherd. What I am about to say is very important, but is missed by what I suspect is the vast majority of the people who read or hear this Psalm. Every glorious promise in this Psalm hinges on whether or not you can truly say, “The LORD is **my** shepherd...” The Lord is not the shepherd of all mankind. He is only the shepherd of those who are His sheep. Let’s go back to John 10 to see more of what it means to have the Lord as our shepherd. We read in John 10:14: “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me.” To say that “the Lord is MY shepherd,” there must be a time when He became your shepherd.

Your physical birth did not make Him your shepherd. There must be a time when your spiritual eyes were opened to see your true condition and the Holy Spirit convicted you of sin (John 16:8) and judgment to come. In response to that conviction you repented (turned from, forsook) sin and in an act of total submission trusted Christ alone based on what He did on the cross as is described in Psalms 22 (the previous message). While you may not remember all of the details of that time, the Bible is clear that you can know that time did or did not happen based on your response to the Lord as shepherd. Jesus said in John 10:26-28: “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

Those who know the Shepherd (the LORD) as a pattern of life follow Him. We don’t become His sheep as a reward for following Him, but those, who by grace alone, through faith alone, are saved (become His sheep) give evidence by a lifestyle of following Him.

When He is your Shepherd, then you can expect His provision. The word translated “want” in verse 1 means to lack, fail or be deficient. It carries the idea of being perfectly contented in the Shepherd’s care. This certainly doesn’t mean that when the Lord is your shepherd there will not be pressure and disappointments and unpleasant tasks. The Good Shepherd Himself – Jesus said in John 16:33b: “In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” The word translated “tribulation” means to be pressed or squeezed. The promise of Psalm 23:1 is that before I face a pressured situation, a stressful circumstance, my Shepherd knows about it and has given to me His name to use in prayer, His wisdom, and His power to deal with the challenge. I have no need to stress out, to worry, or to be fearful.

Do you know the mark of a sheep that is abiding and trusting in the shepherd? It is contentment. There is an alarming deficiency of contentment in our world, and sad to say, the majority of those who claim to follow Christ are discontent. The Apostle Paul had learned to follow the Shepherd and in spite of his tribulation, that was beyond our imagination, he could say in Philippians 4:11-13:

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be *content* in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also

know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

We see a wonderful picture of that provision in Psalm 23:2a: “He makes me lie down in green pastures...” Because sheep are so defenseless, it is difficult for them to fully rest in the absence of a shepherd. Shepherds tell us that even a rabbit jumping out from behind a bush can cause sheep to stampede. This is more dangerous than it is for cattle. Sheep have little *spindly* legs that are easily broken and they are so top heavy that they can easily take a tumble from which they cannot get back to their feet. Sheep just do not do well without a shepherd. In fact, the Good Shepherd said to His sheep in John 15:5b: “... apart from Me you can do nothing.” When we are not abiding in our Shepherd, we just don’t do well! However, when the sheep are aware of the shepherd’s presence, and hear His voice, they are willing to lie down in the green pastures that He has led them to.

II. We Have a Shepherd Who Directs His Sheep (vv. 2b, 3)

The body of a sheep is 70% water, so being close to a reliable water source is essential for them. They tend to dehydrate very quickly. What a beautiful picture of our need for Christ. Jesus said in John 7:37-38: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

The phrase “quiet waters” or “still waters” is literally “stilled waters” or “quieted waters.” Sheep are really sort of “picky.” Fast flowing water scares them. The noise that we might find calming, sheep find to be terrifying. What the shepherd did was to dam up a little cove and form a clear water cove from which the sheep would drink. Remember that Jesus said in John 10:14a: “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own...”

Here is what our Shepherd does. He knows our needs. As we abide in Him He stills the turbulent waters in which we find ourselves and we can “lie down” in complete trust that “He’s got this!” We must develop the discipline of coming quietly before the Lord in time of turmoil and tribulation. I am blessed by the words of an old hymn that says:

*I must tell Jesus all of my trials,
I cannot bear these burdens alone;
In my distress He kindly will help me,
He ever loves and cares for His own.
— Elisha Hoffman*

We read in verse 3 that when we drink from those “stilled waters” and put things in perspective, that He restores our soul and guides us in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Sometimes we just need to stop and evaluate why we are doing what we are doing. I suspect that I am speaking to some today that are missing so much of what God has for you. You are not allowing Him to restore your soul and you are not even recognizing the paths of righteousness that He desires to lead you down.

I got an object lesson several years ago from a “special needs” man named Rex. I was speaking for several evenings at a church just out of Summerset, Kentucky. Across the road from the church was a nursing home where this special needs man named Rex stayed. There was also a railroad track close by. Whenever Rex heard the train whistle, he ran to the tracks and pulled out a “counter” from his pocket. He meticulously counted every car on the train. After the train was gone, he would proudly announce how many cars were on the train. You may be thinking, “Why would Rex do that? It makes no sense. He is obsessed with something that doesn’t really matter.” Think about that. In light of the truth of Psalm 23 and really the whole of Scripture, how much sense does it make that we stress out over the things we stress out over?

We have a Shepherd who will guide us in paths of righteousness where that which we are doing has eternal significance if we will just put down our “counter” and listen. Isaiah 30:15b: “In quietness and trust is your strength.” Psalm 46:10a: “Cease striving and know that I am God.”

III. We Have a Shepherd Who Protects His Sheep (v. 4)

We will not get through this life without going through some dark valleys. Even when you know and follow the Shepherd, you will go through trials. Short of the Lord’s return in our lifetime, we will all face that last valley – physical death. Let’s look at that *valley of the shadow of death*. There is a literal valley named this in Palestine and it is likely the one that David is referring to. It is located in the Judean wilderness beyond the hills of Bethlehem and toward the Dead Sea. It is really a miniature Grand Canyon that is some 1,500 feet deep in some places. In Bible times, the bear, the lion, and other predators, as well as thieves, waited in the shadows and caves of this dark valley to do harm to the sheep. Since this valley is only twelve feet wide in some places, it had perpetual shadows even at high noon.

After the spring rains came, the hills would have lush green grass and beautiful flowers. The shepherds would at that time lead their flocks out of the lowlands and into the mountains and the spring pastures. To get there, they had to go through the valley of the shadow of death. David is saying that just as he took his sheep through this valley, even so the Good Shepherd, the Lord, leads His own through life’s dark valleys.

The valley of the shadow of death refers to much more than just physical death. It is any kind of danger or trial. However, because so many fear physical death, that is what I will focus on most. Death from our perspective is so unpredictable. We are always walking in the shadow of death. Death could come for some of us before this day is over. James 4:13-14: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”

Allow me to give you a true statement (really a “truism”). You have never been as close to death as you are right now. I speak to you today as a dying man to dying people. This could be the last message I will ever preach or it may be the last you will ever hear. Short of the Lord’s return, we all have an appointment with death.

The phrase, “the valley of the shadow of death” tells us at least two things. First, the fact of a shadow necessitates a substance. You can’t have a shadow of a tree without the substance of a tree. The shadow of death necessitates the substance of death. In Psalm 22 we see that for those in Christ, He has already taken the substance of death, the agony of death, the separation of death when He died in our place, when he suffered the greatest agony of death which is the separation from God. That is what He was suffering when He cried out in Psalm 22:1a: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”

Jesus suffered the full blow of death (the substance), that His sheep (those who follow Him) might experience only the shadow. One of my favorite Bible commentators is Dr. Donald Barnhouse who has been with the Lord for some time. When Dr. Barnhouse’s first wife died at a young age, he and his children were broken hearted. On the way home from the funeral service, Dr. Barnhouse was praying for a way to speak comfort to his children. Just then, a huge moving van passed them. As the shadow of that huge truck swept over their car and moved on ahead of them, Dr. Barnhouse had an answer to his prayer. He said, “Children, would you rather be run over by a truck [like that one] or by its shadow?” The children answered, “Well of course we would rather be run over by its shadow, because a shadow can’t hurt you at all.” Dr. Barnhouse then said, “Did you know that 2,000 years ago the truck of death ran over our Lord Jesus... in order that only its shadow ran over your mother. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a snake cannot strike us, and the shadow of death ought to hold no fear of one who follows Jesus.

The phrase, “the valley of the shadow of death” tells us that there is a substance that makes the shadow. The second thing this phrase tells us is that a shadow presupposes light. Jesus not only took the substance of death; He also is the light shining on the substance that makes the shadow. He said in John 8:12: “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.” We read in Luke 1:78-79 (HCSB): “Because of our God’s merciful compassion, the Dawn from on high [Jesus] will visit us to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” When followers of the Good Shepherd go through death, they go into the light. The unbeliever goes into the darkness.

If you are a follower of Christ, listen carefully. Shadows are for walking through. No one has ever been injured or killed by a shadow. The attitude of those in Christ toward death is that because Jesus has paid our sin debt on Calvary. He took the substance, the agony, the pain, the separation from the Father that we might only have to experience the shadow, and even the shadow of death is a reminder of Christ who is the light. That is why we fear no evil!

In the last part of verse 4, David is no longer speaking about the Shepherd; he is speaking to Him. When we pass through the valley of the shadow of death before death comes, we have the promise of His presence – the intimacy of the Shepherd Himself. There is nothing to fear in life or in death! He picks the symbolism of the rod and the staff to illustrate that protection. The rod was a powerful weapon. David had killed a lion and a bear with a rod like the one mentioned. With the staff, the shepherd guided and pulled back the sheep from danger. The message of verse 4 is that we have nothing to fear as we face the future.

Conclusion

In some ways those last two verses that we will examine next week are the most thrilling of all, but in these four verses, I have been blessed. Here is the ultimate question. Is Jesus Christ your shepherd? If He is not, then none of these glorious blessings are for you. Death is to be feared for it means eternal separation from God. Come today to the Shepherd.