

MY SHEPHERD

Psalm 23

Part 2

In our first look at the 23rd Psalm we were shown the importance of the Shepherd to his sheep. Being the dumb, careless, ðprone to wanderö of the animal world, we were reminded of the necessary work of the Shepherd to find and restore his sheep to the fold.

Since God's sheep have all "*sinned and come short of the glory of God,*" (Romans 3:23) and have rejected the Shepherd and his work for them and have sided with Satan and his forces in opposition to Christ and have gone down that path which "*seemeth right unto a man,*" and are perfectly satisfied to continue in that way, they must be sought out and restored to the fellowship.

In the first three verses of Psalm 23 the Psalmist uncovers God's plan to this end. He reveals the Person and work of Christ to accomplish it. We saw the Psalmist make this bold claim:

1. My shepherd is the Lord of the sheep. This Lord is Jehovah our Savior, a just God and Savior. He is the sovereign, omnipotent Creator who chose a people in love and predestinated them to be conformed to the image of God in and by the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This he accomplished when he sent Christ to be made of woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law. By the finished work of the Shepherd of the sheep, Christ satisfied law and justice for every sheep of God's fold and provided for them a righteousness, which the Father freely imputed to them. To the sheep of God's fold, their Shepherd is the Lord. It is he who maketh the sheep to differ from the goats. It is Jehovah who separated the sheep from the goats in eternity past by election who will separate them, and justly so in the judgment. Men refuse to bow to this God.

The second claim the Psalmist made was:

2. My shepherd is the Light of the sheep.

For those sheep of God's fold, their shepherd, who is the Lord, is also their Shepherd the light. What he has done for them vicariously must be communicated to them experientially by revelation in order to reconcile them to one already reconciled to them by the death of his Son.

This reconciliation is made when this Shepherd, as the Light fills their ðwant.ö ð*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*"

- I shall not want for **the rest of God.** **Psalm 23:2** Why? Because he "*maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*" To lie down is to cease from my labor. Those to whom the Shepherd is the Lord have ceased from their labor of trying to satisfy a holy God by their obedience to his law. They see in Christ and his work a satisfaction and acceptance by the Father and rest therein. They know and believe that his is the only rest for sinners.

"In pastures green he makes me lie and rest from labor hard for I have found the work complete, already done. I rest my soul in God the Son." WP

- I shall not want for **the righteousness of God.** **Psalm 23:2** Why? Because he *leadeth me beside the still waters.*" Waters stilled by the shepherd are necessary and beneficial to sheep. Raging torrents kill. (Campers in Arkansas) In still waters is life.

Water is used figuratively in Scripture as the Word. **Ephesians 5:25-26**, “*Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word.*” 1 Corinthians 6:11, “*And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”* **Hebrews 10:22**, “*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*” (regeneration and conversion, not physical bathing)

Water is also used figuratively in scripture as judgment. **Hosea 5:10** says, “*The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound (change the standard) therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water.*” **Matthew 7:27** says, “*And the rains descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew and beat upon that house: and it fell, and great was the fall thereof.”* The greatest demonstration of water judgment is the flood. Save eighth souls, and those species in the Ark, the whole earth was destroyed in judgment for sin by water.

So, we see water as friend or foe. It washes away the filth in cleansing or it will wash away the guilty in condemnation. He who is the Water of Life will destroy the wicked and deliver the righteous.

Likewise, the Word of God is friend or foe. It justifies or condemns. It consists of two parts, the Law and the Gospel. The Law, like a river untamed, cannot but curse every sinner who violates its precepts. **Galatians 3:10**; *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.* Judgment, like a raging river will destroy all who owe a debt to the Law of God.

The Gospel on the other hand is the good news that Christ has stilled the waters of judgment for his sheep. He has turned the raging waters of judgment into the water of Life. He has answered every demand of the law against every sinner he represented in his obedience, suffering and death on the cross. In **John 4: 14**, Jesus told the woman at the well; “*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*”

Jesus has satisfied the Law and justice of a holy God against every sinner he represented and established for them righteousness, which is all their salvation. His righteousness imputed not only removes the guilt and condemning power of sin, it washes clean the filth and pollution of their sin and presents them holy and without blame before God. They shall never want for **the righteousness of God**. They have it in abundant spring that never runs dry.

My shepherd, as the Light of the world has filled my want for rest, for righteousness and thirdly;

- I shall not want for **the reconciliation of God. V-3a.** “*He restoreth my soul.*” God is reconciled to the sinner by the death of Christ. The sinner is reconciled to God when he sees his complete acceptance before God based solely on what Christ has accomplished for him. He is continually reconciled to God by the chastening hand of a loving Father who watches over his flock like a “*hen who gathers her chickens under her wings.*” This restoration is so sure and certain that Christ will not lose one that the Father gave him. I shall not want for restoration.

- I shall not want for **the right paths of God. V-3b.** “*He leadeth me in paths of righteousness.*” My shepherd, the Light of the world takes me off the broad way that leads to

destruction and leads me in the straight and narrow way. **Micah 6:8** defines those paths for us. *“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”* Walk these paths.

a. God’s sheep **“walk the path of justice”** when they look alone to Christ’s righteousness imputed for their whole salvation.

b. God’s sheep **“walk the path of mercy”** when they see how a holy God can justify them and remain holy.

c. God’s sheep **“walk the path of humility”** when they see their deservedness of eternal death and God’s gift of grace, full and free.

No sinner begins his walk in righteous paths until he sees justice satisfied. The good Shepherd leads no one in righteous paths who is not righteous. Until he sees and believes how God is just to justify him, righteous paths are off limit to him. Until he sees how God would be just to condemn him, the sinner, based on his best obedience, he can’t walk in right paths. Until he sees how God is just to render him not guilty based on the work of a suitable substitute and surety, he walks the broad way, not righteous paths.

It is the mission of the **Shepherd who is the Lord** and the **Shepherd who is the Light** to reveal these things to the sheep.

The Shepherd of the flock does this *“for his names sake.”* What God does is for his glory. Therefore, *“what ever you do in word and deed, do all to the glory of God.”*(1 Corinthians 10:31) How? By walking in paths of righteousness.

This brings us to the third part of this Psalm; **my Shepherd is the Life of the sheep. 4-6**

John 1:4, *“In him was life; and the life was the light of men.”*

Colossians 3:4, *“when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”* Jesus said of himself in John 14:6, *“I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh to the Father but by me.”*

My Shepherd is the Life. *“In him we live and move and have our being.”*

Three truths come forth in **Psalm 23:4-6** concerning **My Shepherd is the Life of the sheep.** As the **Life of the sheep:**

He is ever present with me, *“for thou art with me.”*

He makes every provision for me. *“Thou preparest a table before me.”*

His eternal purpose is fulfilled in me. *“I shall dwell in the house of the Lord.”*

1. My Shepherd, the Life is ever present with me. V-4 *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.”* (My life, my Shepherd is with me)

Jesus made this promise to his disciples in Matthew 28:20, *“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”* “Lord, even the valley of the shadow of death?” Yes, especially this valley.

What is this valley of the shadow of death? Where is it? What distinguishes it from all other valleys? Who walks this valley? Where does it end?

The word valley by definition means a low point, a depression.

The word valley in the Hebrew is “*gah-ee*” and is from the root word “*GeV-ah*” which means to lift up with pride. It is, in a figurative and scriptural sense of the lower world, the earth. Its meaning seems to be a contradiction of terms; that which God made low, (valley) exalts itself high. Such is the nature of the proud.

The valley of the shadow of death is the sinner’s walk in this life. It is his experience from the cradle to the grave. The word walk in Hebrew is manner of life. The verb tense is imperfect: meaning unfinished. Sinners walk this valley indicating a predestined, defined and certain destiny. It is that vapor in **James 4:14**. *“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”*

Two typical sinners walk this valley, the proud and the humble. To the proud, this valley is the valley of death. To the humble, it is the valley of the shadow of death. Both sinners walk this journey in fear. The proud are described in **Hebrews 2:14-15**. *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Christ) also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”* The proud have a fear of God but not godly fear. It is a legal fear of punishment or a promise of reward earned by the sinner and keeps him trying to satisfy God’s law by his works.

The humble say as did David in **Psalm 23:4**, *“Yea, (yes, though I am walking through this valley, I will fear no evil. Why? He fears God. He has a reverential respect for the honor of God’s redemptive glory in Christ. He was of those who once served through fear of death also. To him now it is only the valley of the shadow of death. How so?”*

Every one knows that before a shadow can be cast there must be first a substance by which to cast the shadow. Some opaque object must intercept light for a shadow to be formed. Not only is a substance needed, there must be light. Without light shining on the substance, no shadow can be formed. Where both come together, the shadow is cast.

To the proud, the light (the gospel) has not exposed the Substance (Christ) to them. Though shining in the valley (by faithful witnesses) to reveal his Person and work in salvation, the proud fail to see the shadow, the substance or its source, or they fail to receive it. The evidence of this is their ignorance of or non-submission to God’s standard of judgment, his righteousness imputed and their going about to establish their own. (Romans 10:1-4) Seeking to be justified by the works of the law reveals their ignorance of God’s standard of judgment. Walking through the valley of the shadow of death they miss the substance by ignorance of, or rejection of the shadow cast or the Light which casts it.

A good illustration is of Saul of Tarsus in his Damascus Road experience. When Christ confronted him at noon in a bright light and called him by name, Saul answered; *“Lord what would you have me to do?”* Not only did he see the Source (God, the Light) he saw the Substance (Christ) and the Shadow. The lesson here is that men might and do hear much truth

but until they see the light and the shadow it casts they remain in darkness. Those accompanying Saul heard a voice but they didn't see the shadow, the substance or the source. They saw nothing.

You and I are walking that valley today. Do we see the shadow? Is the substance clear? Do we see the source, the Light? Let's consider the shadow.

Colossians 2:16-17. *“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a Holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of thing to come; but the body is of Christ.”*

Here we have in clear view before us the Psalmist's meaning of the valley of the shadow of death. The Apostle Paul calls the Law a shadow of things to come. Judging by meat or drink, holy days or new moons or Sabbaths is "law keeping," it is seeking God's acceptance by our obedience to the law.

He says all these things are a shadow: a shadow of what; the substance, the body which is Christ. Christ, the substance was before the shadow, the law. Not only was Christ before the law, (He is the eternal God) He formed the shadow. He gave the Law. The Law is an extension of God. What was the function of the Law; a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ. The Law shadowed the substance, Christ. In the everlasting covenant of grace, Christ stood as the Substitute, Surety and Representative of a people before the law was given. The tabernacle was patterned after Christ, **Before** Christ. That's why God instructed Moses to precisely follow the pattern set for the tabernacle worship. It shadowed (patterned) Christ.

The "shadow of death" (the law) cast by the Light of the gospel shining on the Substance, Christ, was in "accordance to the pattern shown to Moses in the Mount." (Exodus 25:40) This was because the Substance, Christ preceded the law (all the shadows (types) that followed in the tabernacle services. The Substance, Christ fulfilled the law. He is *“the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.”* To the believer, the law of God is satisfied by the death of Christ. To the believer the law is now a shadow, it is without strength to condemn those for whom Christ is the substance of the shadow. **Colossians 2:17**, *“But the body is of Christ.”* **Read Colossians 1: 17-18.** *“And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”*

The Psalmist could say with confidence; *“though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”* Why, *“because thou art with me.”* A shadow cannot hurt me. The law which once charged me with sin cannot lay anything to the charge of God's elect because it is Christ that has died. A shadow is like the rainbow. Every time we see one it should remind us of our sinfulness and deservedness of eternal punishment but for the Lord our Life who satisfied and honored that law by his death on the cross.

Do you see the shadow? Has the Light of Life shined on the Substance, Christ and cast the death shadow on the law for you? Or, do you still insist on your law keeping as a condition for acceptance before God? Sadly, most religionists have made the law their substance and Christ their shadow. If you do, the law is more than a shadow, it is a sword. And he that takes up the sword shall die by the sword.

My Shepherd is the life of the sheep. *“Thou art with me.”* Like a shadow, **He is ever present with me** and will be as long as the Light shines on Christ. Secondly:

2. **My Shepherd is the life of the sheep. He makes every provision for me. V- 4b. He provides my comfort.** *“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”*

God told the prophet Isaiah in chapter **40:1-2** to *“comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”* What will comfort the sheep in the valley of the shadow of death, *“thy rod,”* the word of God. The sinners comfort and assurance comes not from visions, dreams and experiences, but from a firm conviction based on the truth of God in Christ concerning how He saves sinners based on the imputed righteousness of God alone. There’s only one place in this world to find this truth, God’s Word in the hands of a faithful minister of the gospel. The Hebrew word *ōstaffō* is the word *“mish-ay-naw”* We get our word missionary from it. A missionary is a faithful staff member of the church of God. When Satan assails, we *“fear no evil”* because we have the Word to comfort and guide us. God provides our comforts.

He provides me a table. *“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”*

God prepared a table for sinners in the presence of our enemies. He did not hide his preparation. (Like Noah and the building of the Ark.) It is open for all to see. That table is Christ. His life and ministry was an open book. It was witnessed by many. His message, his mission, his ministry and his misery, (his suffering) are well documented and witnessed by millions.

A table is for eating and fellowship. Jesus told his followers in **John 6:56**, *ōHe that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.”* It is at the table of the Lord alone his sheep (the company of the redeemed) eat his flesh and drink his blood.

Read Hebrews 13:10. *“We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.”* Our Altar is Christ. He is our Table. Those who *“serve the tabernacle”* (those who seek acceptance before God based on anything but the imputed righteousness of Christ) CANNOT eat at this table. Only those who plead Christ’s righteousness imputed alone have the (authority) to eat at this altar. Christ said to the Father in **Psalm 119:63**, *ōI am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.”* I am in good company at this table.

He provides me with wisdom. *“He anoints my head with oil.”* He makes me ready for instruction and learning. Of the Word Christ said in 1 Corinthians 2:14, *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* (The Spirit must teach us) Oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. But, of his sheep he said *“They shall be all taught of God,”* by the Spirit of God.

He provides me with an overflowing cup. *“My cup runneth over.”* **Read Psalms 16:5** *“The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.”* The 12 tribes of Israel inherited a portion of the Promised Land as appointed by God. His sheep *“look for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”* We look unto Jesus as the portion of our inheritance. Our cup overflows because he drank his cup dry. **Read Psalm 116:13.** *“I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.”*

My Shepherd is the life of the sheep. He is ever present with me, he makes every provision for me and:

3. His eternal purpose is fulfilled in me. Psalm 23:6 *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”* If my Shepherd is ever present with me and makes every provision for me and his goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life then He is glorified, Christ is exalted and I shall dwell with him eternally. And if I, then all for whom Christ died shall live also. Is your shepherd the Lord? Is your shepherd the light? Is your shepherd the Life? My Shepherd is the Lord.

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