

INI-SDG

In the Name of Jesus – To God Alone the Glory

5.3.2009 - Jubilate, St. Stephen Lutheran (West Bay) Mountain View, CA

Introduction:

Psalm 23 is without a doubt the best known and most popular out of all 150 Psalms...and with good reason. It provides an amazing amount of comfort for any Christian. In many ways I compare it to the Lord's Prayer. But as often as both Psalm 23 and the Lord's Prayer are quoted, we might speculate if there's anything left to learn from them. Today we're have the opportunity to take a closer look at Psalm 23 and see how it is truly "The Shepherd's Song for His Sheep."

HYMN 628 v.1-4 (*Red Hymnal*) *Shepherd of Tender Youth*

THE ORDER OF DIVINE SERVICE – AS FOLLOWS

1

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

When you first look at verse 1 of Psalm 23, what immediately grabs your attention? Is it the word "LORD" in all caps, or the fact that our LORD God is personified as our "shepherd?" Both are important points, but in my humble opinion there is another important word in the first line... the word "is." How sad and unfortunate would it be if we were to read that "The LORD *was* my shepherd?" The one true Almighty LORD God *is* very real, *is* very present, and *is* very active in our lives each day.

We remember that David wrote this Psalm by the inspiration of the LORD. And we'd probably guess how much this Psalm meant to David, having been a shepherd ALL of His life! Can I say that? Was David really a shepherd ALL of his life? Certainly when he was young we know that he watched over and protected his father's sheep. But David did that also while he was King of Israel! Listen to ***Psalm 78:70 He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; 71 from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. 72 And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.*** David understood sheep. He knew of their weaknesses, and he knew their lack of independent qualities. He knew just how dependant sheep truly are on their shepherd. But, his confidence in being the king and shepherd of Israel was dependant on God being the Shepherd over all! We see this truth in the first verse of Psalm 23, and likewise in ***Isaiah 40:10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.***

Psalm 23 is a description of the One and only true God being our Shepherd. He truly *IS* the God of action. Without this first assertive statement the rest of the whole song really comes into question doesn't it? If the LORD *maybe* is my shepherd, then *hopefully* I won't ever be in want or need. No, we rather confidently rejoice with David that, **The LORD is my shepherd. I shall not want.** We will not lack anything that we need. This is an expression of faith! It is a simple trust in a loving Savior... that will move us to desire to listen and to learn even more, and to love even as we are loved by Him.

[Sing – HYMN 426 (*Red Hymnal*) ...For each verse]

1. **The Lord my Shepherd is, I shall be well supplied.
Since He is mine and I am His, What can I want beside?**

2

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

One of our scripture readings for this joyful Jubilate Sunday really ought to be read in connection with this verse. It is found on the back of your bulletin from *1 John 3:1,2*. ***1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*** Because of Christ, our Heavenly Father calls us children of God! Yet, in this treasured Psalm our Heavenly Father is calling us *sheep*. What do you think about that? Before you mentally respond to that question, many writers have given us a much closer description about what it means to be a sheep.

Sheep need the continuous care of a shepherd. If they do not have it, they wander aimlessly and are oblivious to all dangers. Sheep will continue to eat until all food is gone and then starve unless the shepherd will lead them to more pasture. They will not drink from anything but calm waters. And sheep will eat and drink anything lying around. So if they aren't led to healthy pasture, they will eat and drink to their own harm and even death. Sheep have been known to graze right off a cliff from their lack of attention. Likewise, they are easy targets for predators, because on their own they are totally defenseless. Sheep can also become so anxious and panicked that they will actually die. So in other words, if sheep does as a sheep does... they are pretty well doomed. That's why sheep need a shepherd.

One might wonder why God ever created sheep. They're such mindless animals. If we all agree on that, then we should certainly sit up when our LORD continues to call us *sheep* also. ***Isaiah 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*** We may joyfully confess and sing that the LORD *is* my shepherd, because as Psalm 23:2 says **He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.**

Sheep will not lie down to rest unless they are free from hunger. *Our* wandering souls turn to our own sinful ways everyday. What *we* need is our guilt satisfied again and again! We need rest and peace found only in the lush green fields and calm living waters of God's Word. His Word is food and drink for our soul. His Word gives us life and salvation because God has laid the price of our sinful wandering (**the iniquity of us all**) on our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. And Jesus, like a **lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep before shearers**, silently went to claim this salvation for us. The LORD *is* my shepherd! What else, could I want?

2. **He leads me to the place, Where heavenly pasture grows,
Where living waters gently pass, And full salvation flows.**

CONFESSIO AND ABSOLUTIO OF SINS

C: Oh Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee and justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray Thee of Thy boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.

P: Our Good Shepherd has paid the price for our sins. And so I now ask you before God, if this is your confession, declare so by saying yes. --- Upon this your confession, I, a servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **ALL: Amen.**

HYMN 783 (*Worship Supplement*) *Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep*

3

He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

If a sheep wanders away from the flock, it is a major concern. Jesus describes it in **Matthew 18:12** "*What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.* The LORD *is* my shepherd. He *is* making it His business to restore my soul again and again. When I wander from the paths of righteousness in my sin, it is my Shepherd's calm Word of love that turns me back.

The apostle Peter wrote about this very thing when speaking about Jesus Christ, **24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:24,25)** The Good Shepherd gives us rest when He delivers us from sin and from any of our own efforts to save ourselves by works. He tells you, **Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)** It is rest in Jesus' Word that revives and restores souls. Wherever and whenever Christ's forgiveness is taught, it brings peace and joy to sinful hearts.

3. **If e'er I go astray, He doth my soul reclaim
And guides me in His own right way, For His most holy name.**

CONFESSION OF FAITH, Page 5 (*Tan Worship Supplement*) - **Nicene Creed**
The Nicene Creed was written to defend the Bible's teaching that the MAN Jesus Christ is TRUE God.

4

**Yea, 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.**

We just spent some time speaking about the rest that our Shepherd leads us to in His Word. But there's another thing about sheep that we need to know. If sheep are to rest, they must be free from fear also. And there are many potential things in this valley to fear aren't there? What problems could we speak about this morning? Could we panic about a flu virus, economic uncertainty, a missed event in our minute by minute planners? As I speak and visit with members and non members alike, who have been or are facing serious surgeries, who are confronted with life threatening illnesses, whose marriages and families are facing great challenges, who have been struggling with depression and chemical dependency, those who face very difficult financial circumstances, we all at times wonder... are we like sheep that cannot find rest because of the fears we face from day to day? If we understand our Shepherd even a little better we will be less likely to run into the problem of doubt and fear. We walk in life through the many valleys of **the shadow of death**. You need not fear, Jesus Christ your Savior is with you – always to comfort you with His loving and caring Word.

A good shepherd does much more of course than just feed his sheep like we mentioned earlier. He also protects them from wolves and other dangerous animals. Verse 4 confidently boasts against both physical and spiritual dangers, **Yea, 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.** Human nature and trusting in ourselves will tend to put us into a panic. Why? It is because we so often fail. The devil stalks us like a prowling lion waiting to catch the helpless sheep that has drifted from the shepherd. This verse may refer to ALL the dangers a Christian faces in life, as well as death. We might think of every kind of protection our Lord gives us, but it is especially in view of His deliverance from the devil, sin, and eternal death. By His Word, our LORD guides us as a shepherd guides his sheep with rod and staff. A rod – meant to discipline us (as in God's law). And a staff – meant to pull us close out of harm's way (as with the Gospel of Christ). What a meaningful verse to hear also when someone is near death. The LORD *is* my shepherd. He draws me close to Him through His Word. What else matters?

4. While He affords His aid, I cannot yield to fear;
Though I should walk through death's dark shade, My Shepherd's with me there.

OFFERING OF THANKFUL HEARTS TO THE LORD
SPECIAL PRAYERS - GENERAL PRAYER - LORD'S PRAYER

5

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

You may have heard of the devotional book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. In it the author Philip Keller describes how preparing the table for the sheep refers to the work shepherds do each spring. They will prepare the high elevation table lands where they will lead their sheep for summer pasture. They go up and by hand remove all the toxic weeds that would poison their sheep. It is difficult and time consuming work, but necessary as it maintains the health and welfare of the flock. Keller also explains that the anointing of the head with oil refers to the shepherd putting thick oil around and over the sheep's eyes and nose to keep away troubling flies and insects in the heat of the summer. Why? In order to help the sheep overcome the challenges that they face, and because the shepherd loves them.

Sheep also cannot rest unless they are free from these kinds of problems. Consider carefully the toxic teachings found in today's high schools and colleges that promote the idea that there is no absolute truth and that God does not exist. Consider carefully the poisonous doctrines widely accepted in today's churches that undermine the authority and absolute truth of God's Word. Tension with other sheep will keep them on their feet. There is nothing new about these problems. False teachers and false doctrine have been around as long as sin. **Ezekiel 33:1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? 3 You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.** Sheep cannot rest until they are free from tormenting pests and parasites that would distract and prevent them properly grazing. So what kind of a shepherd would you want to have? As sheep, what kind of pastures would we want to graze in? As hungry and thirsty sheep, how often?

The members of this church testify that by God's grace we will strive to follow our Good Shepherd as *one* undivided flock. He wants us to succeed in not condemning ourselves in our behaviors and practices like our false teaching foes. Just like sheep that need to heed the voice of their shepherd, our Savior commands us to follow His Word seriously as it ultimately is a matter of spiritual life and death. As the communion announcement reflects in the bulletin, when we take from the Lord's prepared Table together, the members of this church proclaim that we are **"of one mind"** together in Christ. Scripture says: ***Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment, and For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread (1 Cor. 1:10; 10:17).*** The Lord's Supper is yet another special and gracious way in which our Savior comes to us. He comes as our Good Shepherd, who has carefully prepared a Table for us to strengthen our faith in Him and the bond with our fellow like-minded confessors... through His Word of forgiveness.

5. Amid surrounding foes, Thou dost my table spread;
My cup with blessing overflows, And joy exalts my head.

- THE SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT -

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.**

The LORD *is* my shepherd. Why is this statement of confident faith so important? In the end, it does not matter the fame one enjoys, the money one possesses, or the power someone controls, for each one of us will face an end in the valley of death. When Judgment Day comes, it won't matter "who you know," except the Savior Jesus Christ. As believers who trust our Good Shepherd, we continue to ask for His guidance. Just as the Psalmist says... **Psalm 119:173 May your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. 174 I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight. 175 Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me. 176 I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.**

When we by the grace of God live lives that follow our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ, I can be confident two things will happen. 1) I will be attacked by that prowling lion the devil, by wild unbelieving animals of this world, and even by other self-serving sheep. And 2) **Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.** Here in this verse we see how our Good Shepherd *is* in fact also now our Good King. After the uncomplaining sacrificial Lamb went forth and suffered death on the cross for our sins, that spotless Lamb Jesus Christ rose from the dead that Easter morning. And 40 days later He would ascend to sit on God's throne on high as our King. THIS is why goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Because of what my Shepherd King has done for me which no one can take away. The apostle John saw in a vision from the Lord the final outcome when he wrote in **Revelation 7:13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" 14 I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. 16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."**

You are sitting in God's house this morning. Here is where His Word is read and spoken. Here is where tears are shed out of sorrow and guilt from sinfully wandering away from our loving Shepherd. But here also, is where God wipes away bitter tears from your eyes and fills them with sweet tears of joy! Here is where we continue to catch a glimpse of the unspeakable wonders we will have when we dwell God's Lamb, Jesus our Savior, in total comfort, safety, and eternal life.

Where will you spend eternity? Where will your little lambs spend eternity? Have the Lord continue to turn those questions into statements while you live in this life, by **dwelling in the house of the LORD...** now. Listen and sing in God's house "The Shepherd's Song for His Sheep" as we do today in rejoicing in Psalm 23. You and I may do so every day because each of us may say, **The LORD *is* my shepherd.** Therefore, as the writer to the *Hebrews* says **13:20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

6. The bounties of Thy love, Shall crown my following days,
Nor from Thy house will I remove, Nor cease to speak Thy praise.

Some of the passages on “Sheep and Shepherds” in God’s Word

Psalms 78:70 He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; 71 from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. 72 And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.

Isaiah 40:0 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

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