

MY SHEPHERD Psalm 23

“There was a “man of the Pharisees,” who called Jesus *ōa teacher come from God.*” As such, *Jesus* was master of the metaphor. He taught in figurative language about the new birth, vineyards, wine skins, the sower and the seed in his *ōlessons* for life*ö* classroom. The most familiar and numerous are those of a pastoral setting.

The 23rd Psalm is such a metaphor, depicting the life of a shepherd and his sheep. The Lord was not literally a shepherd, nor his follower*ø* sheep. The Psalmist, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as did other Old Testament writers represented Christ and his people in a rural setting. **Isaiah 40: 10-11** is a good example. “*Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*” Psalm 100:3: “*Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.*” Christ himself warns us in Matthew 7:15 to “*beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” Many of Christ*ø* teachings were reflective of real life situations and he used metaphors and parables very effectively. David does the same in Psalm 23 depicting himself as a sheep and the Lord his shepherd, reflecting the characteristics of one experienced, as was he, in both positions.*

As one born and raised in a rural setting, I had the opportunity to observe firsthand, the life of a modern day shepherd. A next-door neighbor bought a small flock of sheep, and discovered right away his inability to care for them. Inexperienced in their ways and physically unable to care for them he had to depend on his neighbors to help manage them. Though their pasture was fenced, they could easily jump the fence and wander into other fields and destroy neighboring crops. To the sheep*ø* benefit, which were not receiving proper care, and our delight, he finally sold them.

In the Scriptures, this pastoral scene is demonstrated over and over. Though hirelings were a dime a dozen, a good shepherd was hard to find. One qualified and experienced in shepherding was a valuable asset to the owner of the sheep. The best shepherd was the owner the flock: one who had a personal interest in the sheep. David wrote of such a shepherd in the 23rd Psalm.

Speaking from experience as a shepherd of his father*ø* sheep, and a sheep himself of God*ø* pasture, he exalted the position of the shepherd of God*ø* fold above all shepherds. He knew from experience the needs of sheep and he knew personally that shepherd who, according to Philippians 4:19 “*should supply all their need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*” He would readily agree with the Prophet Isaiah in 53: 6: “*All we, like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every man unto his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*” And he knew from experience the sinner*ø* contentment to remain in his own way because that way “*seemeth right unto a man,*” But David also knew the Good Shepherd makes the sheep to see that, *ōthe ends thereof are the ways of death.*” (Proverbs 16:25)

So David, the shepherd acknowledged in this 23rd Psalm who is his shepherd and what every sheep in this shepherds care comes to realize:

1. My shepherd is the Lord. V-1
2. My shepherd is the light. V2-3
3. My shepherd is the life. V4-6

1. My shepherd is the Lord. V-1

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” What a bold statement to make; yet made and believed by most in religion today who are totally ignorant of, and follow not the one true Shepherd of the sheep.

Who is the shepherd of God’s sheep? The LORD. öJehovahö is his name. The sovereign creator, Lord over all, without equal, fitly described in Isaiah 45:21 as a *“just God and Savior.”* How and when did he become my shepherd? The Father gave me to him. *“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.”* He has always been my shepherd. There never was a time he was not my shepherd nor I his sheep. In the everlasting covenant of grace, as the object of his love, God chose me in Christ, gave me to Christ and conditioned all my salvation on Christ. As the *“Good Shepherd, which giveth his life for the sheep,”* (John 10:11) Christ satisfied the law’s demands against every sheep of God’s fold. As the *“Great Shepherd of the sheep, brought again from the dead, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,”* (Hebrews 13:20) *“he was raised again because of our justification.”* (Romans 4:25) As the *“Chief Shepherd,”* (1 Peter 5:4) *“he shall appear to crown his sheep with glory that fadeth not away.”*

Of the lump of clay called humanity, (another metaphor) he fashioned his sheep, vessels unto honor, not based on who we are, what we would become or what he might enable us to do, but simply out of his sovereign free will and choice. My shepherd is no respecter of persons. Sheep never choose their shepherd until he chooses them. Truth is, they never choose to be sheep; they either are or they aren’t, based on the sovereign pleasure of this Shepherd who is **the** Lord. A goat cannot become a sheep, neither a sheep a goat. The sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient God over all is the shepherd of his sheep. He is the Shepherd who separated the sheep and the goats in election past and will do so again in the judgment.

Is this your Shepherd? Have you heard his voice? Do you follow this shepherd? To a man, by nature, even the sheep rail out, *“We will not have this man rule over us.”* But his *“sheep hear his voice and they follow him.”*

It’s one thing to make this boast; ömy shepherd is the Lord,ö but what is my proof? How can I tell?

This shepherd fills the “want” of his sheep. Is your öWANTö filled? If it is you have every right to say, **“My shepherd is the Lord.”** If my shepherd is the Lord I just described for you, then:

2. My shepherd is the light. V2-3

What will satisfy the want of every sheep of God's fold? A revelation of, and acceptance of what their shepherd has accomplished on their behalf. That's why my shepherd, the Lord is also my shepherd the Light. In John 1:9 this shepherd is called "*the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*"

John 8:12: "*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I, (the shepherd of the sheep,) am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*"

Light reveals. It uncovers that which is hidden by darkness.

Light shows us what is the most pressing need of lost sheep: to be found and restored. It is to be enlightened to see and believe what the shepherd has done for his sheep? That's what the shepherd does for his flock. If my shepherd is the Lord, "*I shall not want.*" (Lack for nothing) Why, because he will leave the ninety and nine until he finds me and fills that want. What shall I not want? We want many things, but there are some things God's sheep want not. What does every sheep of God's fold possess in full measure? The shepherd of God's flock has provided without measure:

a. The rest of God. V-2a. *“I shall not want”* for rest. Why: because "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*" The first realization of every sheep **in** God's fold is that God has provided him a resting place.

This rest is objectionable to the natural mind. "***He maketh me.***" Thank God he does so. Left to ourselves we never would lie down, but (Psalm 110:3) "*Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.*" By nature even God's sheep reject grace and opt for works. "*You will not come to me that ye might have life.*" (John 5:40) **He maketh us to differ.**

This rest is unconditional. "***He maketh me to lie down.***" Lying down is a ceasing from labor; it is a position of rest. Men will cease from this labor only when they see the work finished by another. I remember vividly when God "*made me to lie down.*" Wandering in the wilderness of legalism and self-righteous religious pride, (where no spiritual life can be found) seeking to be accepted by God based on my works, I heard him say, "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will **give** you **rest.***"

This rest is eternal. "***He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.***" Green pastures are places where everything necessary for life is in abundance. God will have his sheep lie down only where there is provision, protection and peace. In green pastures there is provision. Green indicates an abundance of water and food, the necessities of life for sheep. Pastures were fenced places, not open ranges, shutting out predators and securing the sheep. Green pastures are God's rest.

What about this rest without measure in which God's sheep enter?

In **Genesis 2:2-3**, God talks about a rest. "*And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested*

from all his work which God created and made.” The Hebrew word, *ōrestedö* is *ōSabbathö* meaning, *ō* put an end to. *ö* God finished the work in which he was engaged. “*On the seventh day God **ended** his work.*” Creation was complete; God was not tired, He was satisfied with what he had done.

In Hebrews 3 and 4, God speaks of another rest. Here he reminds us of the awful results of refusal to enter into his rest. He uses the nation of Israel as an example. Israel left Egypt in the exodus, according to some biblical scholars, with six hundred fifty thousand fighting men twenty-five and older. Including the women and children there were estimates of over two million strong. Of this number, most died in unbelief.

Hebrews 3: 7-11, “*Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, they do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest.*”)

Why? Read **Hebrews 3:19**. “*So we see they could not enter in because of unbelief.*”

What did they reject? **Hebrews 4:9-11**. “*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, (Christ) he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. **Let us labor** therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.*”

Christ rested from his labors to redeem his people when he cried from the cross, “*it is finished.*” His resurrection from the grave is God’s declaration that satisfaction was made to his law and justice by the death of Christ and no other work was needed or accepted in the justification of his people. If I am trusting in the shepherd who is the Lord and the shepherd who is the light, I have all of the only rest I need. God’s sheep lie down, not pass through green pastures. This rest is permanent. Lying down speaks of abiding. Once you enter his rest in green pastures the barren wastelands and the desert of legalism and works hold no interest for you.

The only rest into which the Good Shepherd leads his sheep is Christ’s finished work of redemption. We *ōlabor to enter*” that rest when we see **no other hope, no other need and have no other desire** to rest in or by any other than Christ. He has filled our *ōwant.ö* Our “*cup runneth over*” for rest.

The shepherd of God’s flock has provided us without measure: **The rest.**

b. The righteousness of God. V2b. “*I shall not want*” for righteousness. Not only does God provide redemption (a rest) for the sheep, he provides a robe for our sanctification. How? *ōHe leadeth me beside the still waters.*” What are still waters? They are waters the Shepherd has stilled.

Water is one of those phenomenons of life, like fire and wind, with multi potential. Unleashed it is a destructive torrent. Controlled, it is life’s greatest blessing. Uncontrolled, it destroys everything in its path. Harnessed, it becomes one of life’s greatest benefits. Swift water is a force of destruction. Still water is the source and substance of 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.*”

Water is also used figuratively in scripture as judgment. **Hosea 5:10** says, “*The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound (ignore 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 world was destroyed in judgment for sin by water.

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

The Word of God is the water of life. Jesus told the woman at the well that he could give her the water of life. There is no salvation without water or God’s word. God’s word consists of the Law and the Gospel. It’s that two-edged sword in Hebrews 4:12. **The Law** is an extension of a Holy God. It knows only obedience or death. “*Do and live, disobey and die.*” It can demand no less than life to the obedient. It can demand no less than death to the disobedient. **The gospel**, on the other hand, declares that righteousness by Christ and imputed by the Father demands life to the recipient thereof.

The gospel is a just God and Savior’s declaration that he has justified the ungodly and remains just and holy based on the Person and work of His Son who established a righteousness that satisfies law and justice for all he leads beside the still waters. It is the gospel that reveals God’s remedy to the broken Law.

The law alone is a raging torrent, which will sweep away that sinner’s refuge of lies who finds himself under its judgment. The gospel answers the demands of the law and reduces the torrent into still waters. (It always points to Christ. The law is designed to show sinners the utter impossibility of salvation by works of the law. The gospel answers ever charge of the strict law and inflexible justice of a holy God by declaring Christ’s righteousness imputed to be the satisfaction needed to fulfill and honor the law.

The end product of righteousness is the possession of it by imputation of every sheep Christ leads beside the still waters. They have all of the righteousness God requires for salvation. That’s how David could say in **Psalms 119:97**, “*O how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day.*” He saw the judgment pronounced upon sinners by the law. Then he saw that judgment satisfied in the gospel. He saw that, “*Where sin did abound, (like an overflowing scourge) grace did much more abound.*” He said in **Psalms 85:10**; “*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.* The strictness of the law is answered by the mercy of the cross, therefore I shall not want for righteousness.

Christ has stilled the raging water of judgment for his sheep. He has answered every charge against every sheep of his fold and if he is leading you; it is always by the still waters of the gospel. Does your shepherd lead you beside the still waters? Is your shepherd that one who stilled the water? (Mark 4:39) The shepherd of God’s flock has provided us without measure the **rest** of God, the **righteousness** of God and:

c. **The reconciliation of God V3a.** *“I shall not want”* for reconciliation. *“He restoreth my soul.”*

The word *“restoreth”* means to revive or quicken.

The soul is the innermost part of man. It is the seat of his emotions.

God is not content just to remove the guilt and defilement of his sheep, he is intent on restoring their soul to the fellowship they lost in the fall. Psalm 119:176 says, *“I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.”* God’s sheep are prone to wander. If the shepherd does not seek us out and restore us, it’s because we’re not sheep.

In the preaching of the word sinners are shown the extent of the law and their inability to meet it’s demands. The gospel reveals one who did meet every demand of the law and worked out the only righteousness with which God is pleased. These revelations, in the power of the Holy Spirit revive or *“quicken”* the lost sheep and bring him to faith and repentance in the new birth. His soul is made to *“fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”* (Matthew 10:28) This is a one-time miracle of regeneration by grace and not of works. Since it is totally the work of the Good Shepherd, there is no possibility of losing it. It is a reconciliation, which needs no repeating. Based on this righteousness by the death of the shepherd imputed, all the sheep of God’s fold are placed in an unchangeable standing of justification before God, evidenced by their eventual repentance from dead works and former idolatry.

But the restoring of the soul is also an ongoing process. It is a daily experience of the sheep. The verb tense of *“restoreth”* is imperfect, meaning an action or condition not completed, ongoing. Daily our shepherd the Lord has to recover his sheep from wandering into sins pathway. *“I shall not want for restoration.”* My God stands reconciling when sin draws us away from his fellowship. And this he must do for *“of all that the Father giveth me, I should lose nothing.”* (John 6:39)

And God’s only means of restoration is his word. It is the Word, revealing the love, mercy and grace of the shepherd that turn the sheep back. Anything less or more only adds to the sheep’s wanderings. If love doesn’t motivate us to be reconciled, legalism will.

But God’s sheep shall not want for reconciliation. It is sure and certain to be administered to every one the Father has given him. It’s not always pleasant when this chastening comes but it is for our benefit. He would not be a good shepherd if he lost one. The Father’s glory and Christ’s preeminence is at stake in this matter. If the *“Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”* **reconciliation** ”

My shepherd the Light reveals the **rest of God, the righteousness of God, the reconciliation of God and:**

d. **The Righteous paths of God. V3b.** *“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.”*

He leads me in right paths. I shall not want for good directions in the way of life. He will lead me in righteous paths, not the broad way that leads to destruction. He will lead me to enter in at the straight gate, (Christ said, *“I am the door,”*) and walk the narrow way, (Christ, I am the way) the way of righteousness. If we walk in any other paths than those of righteousness, we are not following the shepherd.

Paths of righteousness have their origin in and destiny at righteousness. They begin and end in righteousness. No sinner walks these paths except he be born again. No sinner restored, fails to be led by the shepherd in righteous paths. What are these paths? I believe there are three paths.

Justice. Jesus first leads in the path of justice. This one who knew no sin, who was made sin in order that the justice of God could be satisfied, by his substitutionary death on the cross, established the righteousness God requires and sinners need to walk in paths of righteousness. By imputation he was made sin, that by imputation we might be made the righteousness of God in him. God was just in the transaction. Jesus blazed the path of justice.

“He died, the just for the unjust” when sin was charged to him.

We who are justified by his blood walk justly: we seek salvation only by the imputed righteousness of God.

Mercy. Jesus walked the path of mercy. His whole ministry was a mission of mercy. Knowing the holiness of his Father and the ungodliness of his sheep, his love for us and his Father's glory motivated him, who is our Mercy Seat, who himself is our faithful and merciful High Priest, to offer himself without spot (without sin) to God. *“The Lord was merciful to me the sinner.”*

Faith. Jesus walked the path of faith. He had every confidence that his Father would honor his promise to Christ to save every sinner he redeemed and restore him to his rightful place in glory. Even his cry from the cross; *“My God, my God why has thou forsaken me,”* was not a cry of doubt but a resolution to the work he alone would perform to satisfy a holy God, fully confident his death would satisfy his Father. Christ walked in faith. So do we.

Read Micah 6:8. *“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.

God's sheep do justly when they look alone to Christ's righteousness imputed for their whole salvation. God's sheep love mercy when they see how a holy God can justify them and remain holy. God's sheep walk humbly when they see their deservedness of eternal death and God's gift of grace.

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 cannot 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.

But, *“He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name sake,”* his glory.

2 Corinthians 4:6 *“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* The Shepherd leads us to his Father. He saved us for his glory. *“I shall not want.”*

My Shepherd is the Lord, He is my Light and he is my Life.

By Winston Pannell