

The Good Shepherd And Gracious Host

Of all the psalms written by David Psalm 23 is undoubtedly the most loved. One historian said, "It has poured balm and consolation into the hearts of the sick, of captives in dungeons, of widows in their grief, of orphans in their loneliness. Dying soldiers have died easier as it was read to them; ghastly hospitals have been illuminated; it has visited the prisoner and broken his chains. It has made the dying Christian slave freer than his master." In Psalm 23 David is looking back upon his life. David spent many years caring for sheep. The image of a shepherd with his flock represented his relationship with God.

In this psalm David used two metaphors to describe his relationship with the Lord.... First, the first metaphor is that of the good shepherd. David said, "The Lord is my shepherd." The word my emphasizes a deep and personal relationship. A shepherd's work in ancient Israel was considered the lowest of all work. A shepherd would live with his sheep twenty-four hours a day both in good weather and bad. He nurtured, guided and protected his sheep. The shepherd assumed full responsibility for the needs and safety of his flock. God assumes full responsibility for His people!

Because of God's greatness and care David concluded, "I shall not be in want." Left to themselves sheep are helpless and defenseless. They cannot care for themselves. But under the care of a loving shepherd all their needs are met. David boasted, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." Sheep are fearful animals. They are easily panicked. They won't lie down to rest without the calm assurance of a faithful shepherd. God's presence makes all the difference in our lives.

David said, "He leads me beside the still waters." Sheep are afraid of running water. The shepherd must pick up a few large stones and dam up a fast flowing stream. This causes the rushing stream to slow its current. The flock then drinks with no fear. God gives peace to His people. The psalmist continued, "He restores my soul." The Lord restored David to physical health. God brings spiritual renewal into the lives of His people.

Sheep lack a sense of direction. They easily get lost even in familiar territory! They are prone to wandering. "He guides me in the path of righteousness for His name's sake." Through His Word and the Holy Spirit the believer is led in the right path. Even when the Christian sins, God is committed to leading him back to the right path.

David portrayed the shepherd as protecting his sheep even in the moments of greatest danger. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." The shepherd led his sheep from one grazing place to another. It would often involve passing through a narrow valley between high jagged cliffs. The sun would often be obstructed from shining creating darkness or a shadow. Even in the midst of such danger God was present to guard and guide His flock. God protects you!

"Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." The shepherd's rod was an oak club about two feet long. It was used to defend the sheep from wild animals such as lions and bears. It was used for counting, guiding and protecting the sheep. The shepherd's staff was bent

or hooked at one end. It was used to pry sheep loose from thickets, to push branches aside, to pull fallen sheep out of holes and to drive off snakes. David faced many dangers and difficulties in his life. God's Word and loving hands were the most faithful means of guiding and guarding David.

Second, the second metaphor is that of a gracious host. David wrote, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Even though he was surrounded by many enemies God was with him. The Lord met his needs as a host cared for his guest. Even under the most adverse circumstances David lacked nothing.

A gracious host provided oil for the head of a tired and weary traveler. "You anoint my head with oil." God revived David. "My cup overflows." An attentive host provided a constant supply of drink. God's abundant grace provided more than enough strength to meet any situation. His cup was always filled to the brim. It overflowed with the most abundant drink imaginable.

He concluded, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." God was with David no matter the circumstances. On a triumphant note David said, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

How do we experience this type of relationship? In John 10 Jesus built on this theme. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). As we own Jesus as the God-Man, the Messiah, the One who died for our sins we experience this type of relationship. The sufficiency Jesus provides in the life of a believer is astounding. Jesus, the good shepherd and gracious host, is able to meet every need.

Ethan Hansen
Pastor, Faith Bible Fellowship
Big Lake, AK