

PICTURE JESUS  
The Good Shepherd  
A Sermon by  
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John 10:1-18 and Psalm 23

Psalm 23

*The Divine Shepherd*

A Psalm of David.

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;<sup>a</sup>

<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.<sup>b</sup>

He leads me in right paths<sup>c</sup>  
for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the darkest valley,<sup>d</sup>  
I fear no evil;

for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup>Surely<sup>e</sup> goodness and mercy<sup>f</sup> shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
my whole life long.<sup>g1</sup>

John 10:1-18

*Jesus the Good Shepherd*

**10** “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>7</sup>So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be

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a Heb *waters of rest*

b Or *life*

c Or *paths of righteousness*

d Or *the valley of the shadow of death*

e Or *Only*

f Or *kindness*

g Heb *for length of days*

<sup>1</sup>*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1996, c1989 (Ps 23:1-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

<sup>11</sup>“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup>The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes<sup>a</sup> it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”<sup>2</sup>

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The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm or the Shepherd Psalm is perhaps the most familiar passage of Scripture in the whole Bible. It is set in an agricultural society, but it still speaks to something deep within each believer. However, there is a problem with the Psalm. It is become so familiar to us that it loses much of its meaning. This is true of many of the songs, poems, and brief passages of literature that have importance in our lives. For instance, how many of us stop to contemplate the words we say as we pledge allegiance to the flag, sing the National Anthem, recite the Apostles’ Creed or say the Lord’s Prayer. Often, we set our brains on auto-pilot and the words just tumble out. Familiarity does not breed contempt as much as it breeds the ability to speak without thinking and feeling. For all these reasons, we need to ask, “What is this Psalm really saying? Who is this Good Shepherd to me?”

## **THE SHEPHERD HAS A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH ME**

### **The Personal Pronoun**

The Psalmist uses the personal pronoun “my.” He could have just as easily used the article “the” or “a” and still affirmed something important about the character of God. However, something is lost when we say, “The Lord is the shepherd” or “The Lord is a shepherd.” The Psalmist, instead, affirms something important about his own relationship with God. When we read and recite this Psalm, we also affirm something important about our relationship with God.

#### **B. The Present Tense**

The Psalmist also uses the present tense. This is where he lives. The Lord is his shepherd right now. There is no longing for a past moment when the Lord was his shepherd or a future moment when the Lord will be his shepherd. Consolation and peace are the result of knowing that the Lord is my shepherd.

#### **C. Am I Really A Sheep?**

To recognize the Lord as shepherd places the believer in the role of the sheep. This is affirmed in another favorite Psalm, Psalm 100, where the Psalmist writes, “*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.*” Thus, it comes as no surprise that Jesus reveals Himself to be the Good Shepherd in our Gospel reading this morning. Jesus choice of imagery is very much in keeping with the nature of the Good Shepherd and a sheep.

Let’s look at sheep for a moment. What do we know about them? The Camden, Maine, *Herald* ran two photos on the same page: one of Camden’s Board of Selectmen and the town manager; the other of a flock of sheep. Unintentionally the captions were reversed. Under the picture of the sheep the caption identified them, left to right, as the town officials; the one under

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a Other ancient authorities read *has taken*

<sup>2</sup>*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1996, c1989 (Jn 10:1-18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the photo of the town fathers grouped around a table read, “The Sheep Fold—naive and vulnerable, they huddle for security against the uncertainties of the outside world.”<sup>3</sup> (*Down-East*)

Although the caption was misplaced, the truth is real. Sheep are naïve, vulnerable and insecure. Sheep are dumb and willfully stubborn. Sheep tend to be dirty. Sheep are timid and easy prey for wild animals. They follow the pack blindly. They are near-sighted. A typical sheep only sees what is directly in front of his face. That is why sheep will wander away from the flock if only they continue to find green grass in front of their noses. Perhaps this is why the Prophet Isaiah described the nation of Israel in this way, “*All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned each one to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*” (Isaiah 53:6) Sheep are totally dependent upon the shepherd for their care. Sheep are defenseless. The shepherd must protect them from injury and wild animals. Sheep are not predators. They cannot feed themselves. They must depend upon the shepherd to lead them to pasture and watering holes. The good shepherd cares deeply for the sheep. The good shepherd can identify each of his sheep. The sheep know the shepherd’s voice.

#### **D. Where Do You Find Your Security?**

The affirmation “The Lord is my shepherd” indicates where the Psalmist finds his security. Where do you find your security? In a bank account? Social status? Family? Friends? Your ability to make a living? Your education? Your spouse? Know that all these things in which many find their security are shabby foundations upon which to build your whole life. Each of these can be lost or robbed from us. Our ultimate security can only be found in that which is permanent and trustworthy. Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd who desires a relationship with his sheep.

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and sup with him.*” The Psalmist affirms, “The Lord is my shepherd.”

#### **E. Who Is Your Shepherd?**

This affirmation begs the question, “Who is your shepherd?”

#### **THE GOOD SHEPHERD PROVIDES FOR ALL MY NEEDS**

##### **A Place of Contentment**

The Psalmist says, “I shall not want” . . . “I want for nothing.” Please note that this does not say, “I get everything I want. It does intimate that want will not be something with which I must regularly contend. Perhaps it is because having God fulfills all those empty areas of my life so that my wants decrease to the point where God only has my needs to meet. That is contentment.

There is a story told of a king who was suffering from a painful ailment, whose astrologer told him that the only cure for him was to find a contented man, get his shirt, and wear it night and day. So, messengers were sent through the king’s realm in search of such a man, with orders to bring back his shirt.

Months passed, and after a thorough search of the country the messengers returned, but without the shirt.

“Did you find a contented man in all my realm?” the king asked.

“Yes, O king, we found one, just one in all thy realm,” they replied.

“Then why did you not bring back his shirt?” the king demanded.

“Master, the man had no shirt,” was the answer. (*Evangelistic Illustration*)<sup>4</sup>

Why may I be content, no matter the circumstances? It is because I am a sheep in the flock of the Good Shepherd. I belong to Him. As a result, I can trust the Good Shepherd with my present

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<sup>3</sup>Tan, P. L. (1996, c1979). *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations: [a treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers]*. Garland TX: Bible Communications.

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and my future. The Scriptures constantly affirm God's goodness and God's care for His people. Psalm 37:24 records, *"I have never seen the righteous man forsaken or his children begging bread."*

What about the times of insecurity? What about war, famine, unemployment, terrorist threats? Let me ask you a question. Do we live in less secure times than the Psalmist? The world has always lived with the threat of war, famine, drought, natural disaster, personal injury.

#### A Place of Abundant Life

The Good Shepherd tells us not to be anxious about the material things we need. God knows that we need them. God will provide them.

The business of the Good Shepherd is to provide for the sheep. In Matthew 6:26 are recorded the words of Jesus, *"Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"*<sup>5</sup>

The Good Shepherd abundantly supplies my needs. When the Psalmist writes, *"He makes me lie down in green pastures..."*, he states an important truth. Only hungry sheep stand up. Sheep that are well-fed lie down. The Good Shepherd *makes* me lie down. Jesus affirms this truth in today's gospel lesson where he says, *"I am come that men may have life and have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10)

What is this abundant life? It is the strength to continue, the hope that saves and peace in the inner person, that peace that passes all understanding. It is contentment amid the stresses of life.

The Good Shepherd leads me beside still waters. Sheep are so timid that they will not go near rapidly flowing water. It frightens them. The Good Shepherd will not intentionally expose His sheep to that which frightens them. He will seek the quiet water, for that is what is best for the sheep. It is at those quiet oases that we have opportunity for restoration.

The Good Shepherd restores my soul. Sheep cannot always be on the move. The shepherd must rest them on occasion. Rest leads to restoration. How often do we work and slave to feed and pamper the body, but never get rest? Our priorities are often misplaced. It was Charles Swindoll who wrote, *"We are so often caught up in our activities that we tend to worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship."* Materially we are rich. To often, we are spiritually bankrupt. Only following the Good Shepherd to quiet pools of water will restore us.

The Good Shepherd leads me in the right paths for His name's sake. That is why the relationship is so important. It would do no good for the shepherd to lead where the sheep want to go. It would do no good for the shepherd to go one and allow the sheep to go their own way. The Good Shepherd chooses the right path and leads the sheep in the right way because the shepherd's reputation is on the line. To lead in any other way would be to contradict the title "Good Shepherd." The shepherd has a responsibility to lead rightly; however, the sheep also have a responsibility. The sheep must follow in the way the shepherd leads. It is the right path that leads back to the sheepfold.

Whom or what do you follow? What are your priorities? Are you living the abundant life, or will all you have to show for your time on earth are the things you must leave behind?

#### **THE SHEPHERD IS THE ONE WHO PROTECTS ME**

Notice that the refreshing time beside the still waters comes before the time of trial. We live in a dangerous world. The Shepherd knows this. These are the times when the presence and protection of the shepherd are especially important.

#### **A. When We Walk through the Valley**

Woody Allen writes, *"I'm not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens."* Fear can paralyze us. Sometimes death is not the thing we fear the most. Death can be a blessing in times of great suffering and pain. What we fear is the shadow of death, the specter that

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<sup>5</sup>The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. 1996, c1989 (Mt 6:26-27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

overwhelms us with anxiety; that causes us to wonder if we can make it one more day; that terrorizes us with the thought that the pain and suffering will never end.

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”* Everyone will go through the valley of the shadow of death or a valley of deep darkness. St. John of the Cross called it the “dark night of the soul.” This dark night, this deep valley will be different for each person. It may merely be difficult and trying or it may be horrifying. One thing is sure. The valley of the shadow of death will drive you closer to the shepherd or it will drive you further away. It will cause you to rely on your own resources or make you follow the Shepherd more closely. Know this, however. Even if the circumstances in the valley cause you to run in fear and terror from the Shepherd and away from the flock, the Shepherd will come to find you.

My grandmother lived with us as I was growing up. I remember a poem on a flowered card, encased in a small brass-plated picture frame that stood on her dresser in her bedroom. My grandmother lost her husband to blood poisoning when she was still a young woman in her thirties. She broke her back in a car accident while traveling to the hospital to see him. They both ended up in the same hospital. Because of her back injury, she never got to say goodbye to him or to attend his funeral. She raised my mother and my two uncles by herself, working in a grocery store, scrubbing floors and selling Avon. She later took her own mother in to live with her...all this while living through the Great Depression. The poem speaks volumes about trusting God in the dark valleys. The poem is entitled, “God Hath Not Promised.”

God hath not promised skies always blue  
Flower strewn pathways all our lives through.

God hath not promised Sun without rain

Joy without sorrow Peace without pain.

But God hath promised Strength for the day

Rest for the labor Light for the way

Grace for the trials Help from above

Unfailing sympathy Undying love.

Author Unknown

## **B. Correction and Protection**

When we are in the dark valley, the presence of the Shepherd is enough. The shepherd carries a rod and a staff. The rod is for the wolf. The staff is for the sheep. “Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” Protection is there for the sheep. The Lord’s Prayer carries a similar sentiment. “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

Even in our darkest moments, we can still expect and be comforted by the discipline of the Lord. Sheep are most likely to scatter and run when they are afraid. The shepherd never promises that there will not be times of challenge, that there will not be dangers along the way. The Good Shepherd, instead, promises his presence and protection. It is when sheep are afraid that the shepherd’s staff becomes most useful to correct, to guide and to rescue.

Proverbs 3:11-12 records, *“My son, do not spurn the Lord’s correction or take offense at his reproof; for those the Lord loves, the Lord reproofs, and he punishes a favorite son.”*

Can you face the deep dark valleys of life alone? Can you confront the shadow of death itself and yet be at peace? Who goes before you? Who fights your battles? Have you perhaps run away in fear from the Shepherd and the flock? Has the Valley of the Shadow of Death frightened you? The Shepherd is looking for you and He wants to take you home.

## **THE SHEPHERD RECEIVES ME AS A GRACIOUS HOST**

### **Generous Hospitality**

When trouble comes, while enemies pursue, the Shepherd provides a table for me and welcomes me to it. It is a Middle Eastern custom that the Tent of Refuge need only to be touched by the refugee. When that happened, the accusers could no longer pursue him. They could stand outside

and glare, they could shout, and they could jeer, but they could not come after him. The refugee was protected.

To eat together in the East was at one time a sure pledge of protection. It is at the Lord's Table that I find refuge and protection and peace.

The Shepherd goes beyond the normal bounds of hospitality to treat me as an honored guest. Refuge would be enough. Protection would be sufficient.

### **B. Indications of Abundance**

The Good Shepherd goes beyond these duties to the extravagance of hospitality. He anoints my head with oil. Anointing indicated the special significance of the guest within the home. Common courtesy and hospitality required that a guest, particularly after a long journey, be welcomed into the house and given the opportunity to be refreshed. A servant washed the dust from the feet. The guest was given an opportunity to wash his hands and face and the head was anointed with sweet-smelling oil. But that was not all.

For special guest who were to stay for any length of time, the beginning of their visit included the bringing of the host's cup. This cup was placed in the visitor's hands. It was then filled to overflowing with wine. This indicated the bounty that the visitor could expect to find within the house...not just common courtesy, not merely the bare necessities, but the very best of everything in prodigal amounts!

Jesus gives us the image of the man who threw the banquet and because the guests would not come, sent his servants out to the "highways and the byways" to find new guests. In the presence of your enemies, in your most difficult struggles, your hardest trials, when nothing seems to be going right, know that God has prepared a table for you. God waits to welcome you with open arms so that you might "taste and see" that the Lord is good...so that you might experience His love and His bounty. Have you responded to His gracious invitation to you?

### **THE SHEPHERD MAKES THE FUTURE SECURE**

The ultimate end of the believer is good because the ultimate end of the believer is God. Someday, our journey here on earth will come to an end. The God who led us as the Good Shepherd in this life will keep us with Him. The believer, like the Psalmist can know this for a certainty. "Surely, goodness and mercy..."

Life in the meantime can be lived in the confidence that God is in control. Goodness and mercy do not precede or walk beside. They follow. Often, we cannot see the goodness and mercy of the Lord before us or even beside us. We must look back to see where God's goodness and mercy have been an integral part of our lives. An old Scottish preacher once said of this passage, "The Lord is my Shepherd, aye, and more than that, He has two fine collie dogs, Goodness and Mercy. With Him before and them behind, even poor sinners like you and me can hope to win home at last."

Time after time, Scripture calls human beings' sheep. Can you say with the Psalmist, "The Lord is my Shepherd?" Can you say, "His sheep am I" with confidence? Are you the lost sheep waiting to be found? Are you the lost sheep content with being lost? Are you a hurt sheep waiting for the Shepherd's healing? Are you a hungry sheep waiting to be fed?"

Hear what the Shepherd is saying to you:

*"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. <sup>c 30</sup> The Father and I are one."*<sup>6</sup>

Who is your shepherd? Whose sheep, are you?

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<sup>c</sup> Other ancient authorities read *My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of the Father's hand*

<sup>6</sup>*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1996, c1989 (Jn 10:27-30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.