**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**“The Lord Is My Shepherd”**

**A Psalm of David – 23:2-3**

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August 27th In the Year of Our Lord 2023

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

**P s a l m 23**

**A Psalm of David**

**1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

**2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.**

**3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

**4 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.**

**5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:**

**thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.**

**6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:**

 **and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

**KJV - David wrote ca. 1000 BC**

Today, we will read the whole 23rd Psalm, focusing on verses 2 and 3 under the context of verse 1.

The song (Psalm) of David numbered 23 is one of the most read and prayed passages of the Hebrew sacred Scripture. Remember, David is credited with writing 73 of the 150 Psalms.

Psalm in Hebrew: מזמור (mizmor, Strong’s #4210).

From the root Hebrew word זמר (Z.M.R, Strong’s #2167),

Meaning “to pluck.” A verb to describe the “plucking” of fruit or “plucking” a stringed musical instrument. So, “mizmor” means the bringing forth of bright music from a stringed instrument or melody.

The book of Psalms, containing one-hundred and fifty separate Psalms, is included in the **TaNaKh,** an acronym made from the titles of the three divisions of the Hebrew scripture. The Jews count 24 books in their TaNaKh because they combine books together and count the twelve Minor Prophets as one book.

1. **Torah** (Instruction, or Law/Pentateuch/ 1st Five books),
2. **Neviʾim** (Prophets) – Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel,

and Kings

Later Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,

and Twelve Minor Prophets

1. **Ketuvim** (Writings) – Poetic books (Psalms, Proverbs, Job),

 Five Scrolls: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes,

 and Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles

Last Sunday, we talked about the life of David, and we learned of the contexts of the Psalms he wrote. Like the rest of the biblical writers, David lived a challenged life. He was born into some of the challenges, but, due to poor decisions, David brought on himself other life difficulties.

In reality, the Bible chronicles the lives and events of people who were constantly at war and in turmoil in their relationships with God and with domestic and foreign national leaders. These people include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, the twelve Judges, the prophet Samuel. . . who also functioned as the last Judge. The turmoil continues with Saul, David, Solomon (Three Kings for the United Monarchy Period).

God held David accountable for being a *“man of much blood shed. . .”* not allowing him to build the Temple. David’s son (Solomon) built the Temple in Jerusalem by 957 BC (First Temple). Following the family tradition, Solomon also rebelled against God, which consisted of marrying many foreign wives, building pagan temples for them and worshiping their gods (1 Kings 11). Therefore, God allowed the Kingdom to be divided. There became the Northen Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern kingdom (Judah). The northern ten tribes (Israel) did not have one leader who did good in the sight of God and was destroyed, at God’s allowance, in 722 BC, at the hands of the Assyrians. The Southern Kingdom of Judah had a few good kings but due to the people’s turning from God. . . He allowed Judah to fall to the Babylonians, who deported the people (600 BC -586 BC) to Babylon for the traditional citing of seventy-five years. This is called the Babylonian Captivity which ended in about 536 BC by the new king of Babylon (King Cyrus – Ezra 1). The returning tribe of Judah eventually rebuilt the core-base of the Temple, (Second Temple) in Jerusalem, dedicating the structure to God in 515 BC. God stops communicating through “called’ Prophets in about 430 BC, with Malachi being the last.



Now that we have a solid understanding of the context of the book of Psalms and David in the life of the nation of Israel and the Hebrew people, let us read the first three verses of Psalm 23.

From the first line, we see that David reflects upon his own understanding to being a shepherd. In David’s youth, he was the shepherd of his family’s sheep and other animals. We know from reading David’s account he gave to King Saul detailing him hunting-down the bear and the lion that took a sheep from the flock he was guarding. . .gave David real-life experience of what a shepherd does.

Shepherds are not figureheads. Shepherds are the necessary, “in the field,” manager /director/protector/guide of livestock. The flock would not survive in the open environment without a Shepherd. And the Shepherd must do his job or the sheep will not live. Without a Shepherd to guide the sheep to drinkable water and eatable vegetation. . . they will die. God scoops the word Shepherd into His plan for all people.

It is obvious that God knew what he was doing when His Spirit led David to write the Psalms utilizing the role of Shepherd. Up until the modern age, most of the world was organized around the agrarian culture and commerce. Many parts of the world are still agrarian and understand words and terms related to this lifestyle and worldview. Therefore, along with winemaking. . . Shepherding is one of the world's oldest professions reaching all parts of the world. Due to this world-wide agrarian worldview. . . the context of Scripture is easily understood by agricultural communities. Jesus identified himself the Good Shepherd in the Gospel of John. Jesus makes several illustrations and applications in teaching His life-mission.

**John 10:1** "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.

**2** "But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep.

**3** "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice,

and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.



**4** "When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them,

 and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

**5** "A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him,

 because they do not know the voice of strangers."

**6** This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them,

 but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

**7** So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

**8** "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

**9** "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me,

 he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

**10** "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;

 I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

**11** "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

**12** "He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep,

 sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees,

 and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

**13** "He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.

**14** "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,

**15** even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

**16** "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also,

 and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

**First Three Verses – Psalm 23**

 **1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

This witness to us by David establishes the life-context for the remainder of the 23rd Psalm. By David proclaiming that the “Lord is my shepherd”, he speaks from personal experience of actually shepherding sheep. . . that a “shepherd” is the one who is in charge of your life and without a shepherd doing their job. . . sheep and people are destroyed.

Notice that David’s first proclamation is that *the Lord is his shepherd”* in Psalm 23. The conclusion or outcome of the Lord being David’s shepherd is that he does not have any wants. Whatever material wants, or relationship wants, or physical wants David had. . . because the Lord is his shepherd, he lacks nothing.

 God in the flesh as Jesus, the Messiah, after fasting forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, was tested by the “tempter” (Satan).

And the tempter came and said to Him,

"If You are the Son of God,

command that these stones become bread." **(Matthew 4:3)**

 Here is one of Jesus’ greatest teaching moments when the “Tempter” pursued His defeat as the Messiah. The “Tempter” attacked the frailty of Jesus’ human body. The Tempter perceived that Jesus’ weaken human body would succumb to negotiations that if He had agreed would have negated the Cross. But Jesus was not a “sell-out”. What did Jesus do? He demonstrated to all of us that regardless of our physical vulnerabilities. . . with God operating in our hearts and minds, we cannot be defeated by Satan who is constantly testing everyone. Jesus’ response. . . (being in *one of* the physically weakened conditions a person can be) . . . stated clearly in verse 4:

But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’” (Matthew 4:4; Duet 8:3)

**1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

**Second Verse of Psalm 23 – Lead us to food and water.**

**2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.**

In verse 2, most English Bibles follow the Coverdale translation of 1535 and render the Hebrew word “piel” as “maketh” or “make”. However, in the Hebrew text. . . the word “piel” is the last word in the sentence. In order to make the sentence readable in English, the word order was changed. This is common in translations. I have noted the Hebrew definition of “piel” specifically means to *guide, help along, lead carefully***.** נהל: **piel**: 1. **guide, help along, lead carefully.**  The actual meaning of “peil” is more aligned with depicting a leader (shepherd) carefully leading his flock to good food (green pastures) and good water. The sheep willingly follow the shepherd, because they know they will not find good food and water on their own without a long search.

There are two temporal things people need to survive physically. . . food and water. Yes, a person can survive without eating for a number of weeks, but, after about three days without water, a person will die. After David proclaims that the Lord is his shepherd and he does not want. . . he points to the *must have* elements for survival. . . food and water.

Therefore, one of the major tasks a shepherd guides his sheep to is “water”. So why “still water” as opposed to “running water?” I have never raised sheep, so I researched this watering sheep issue. Here is what I found about the concerns of running water and sheep.

Sheep have wool that quickly absorbs water. Thus, your sheep will soak if they fall into running water, making it hard for them to climb out, and they can easily drown. Older or sick sheep and pregnant ewes are more vulnerable to being swept up and drowning in running water. Moreover, it’s hard for sheep to move against flowing water, and the water can be contaminated despite looking clean. And finally, your sheep can also lose balance when they step on the rocks. <https://www.animalovin.com/will-sheep-drink-from-running-water/>

 One of the most reviewed accounts in the life of Jesus is when He reached-out to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. . .

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." (John 4:13,14)

**American Religious Church Landscape**

 **Who are God’s Shepherds?**

 **In whom do we trust to lead/shepherd people to spiritual food and water?**

From America’s founding state papers to the visit by the Frenchman, Alexis Charles Tocqueville, to today. . . America is a tapestry of Christian Churches and other beliefs. After traveling through America, Tocqueville, who is best known for his works Democracy in America (two volumes, 1835/1840) and The Old Regime and the Revolution (1856), it became known to Europeans that America was a different place. Tocqueville analyzed American living standards, social conditions, economic systems and the religious landscape. . . noting that there were many different churches. This eclectic religious culture begged the question. . . “How can a country be united with so many different churches?”

 Those of us who are Biblical Believers, look around and see that about two hundred years after Tocqueville visited and wrote about America, his observations remain a constant truth. America is first and foremost separated by what people believe. . . which transfers to their social and cultural values. In reality, what a person believes migrates over to their political life. . . which has divided America even more.

 But our observations. . . is that the “Belief” part of a person directs their whole life. Every community desperately needs shepherds called by God. . . who do not “sell-out” to the fallen world. Where a person goes to receive *belief-water* and *belief-food* that fills them up to *become* *who they are and what they do*. This is nothing new. Over twenty-five hundred years ago, God’s prophet, Ezekiel, proclaimed to the Hebrew people remaining in Judah and before they were deported to Babylon. . .

**Ezekiel 34:1** Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? [I encourage you to read the entire 34th chapter of Ezekiel.]

**Jesus Directed Disciples – Feed My Lambs!**

Jesus makes the comparison for and to Peter to feed (tend) His sheep, recorded in the Gospel of John. Here, by saying “feed my lambs”, Jesus is actually charging Peter to teach all that He had taught them to others. Peter was not the only one Jesus charged/commissioned. Other examples in the New Testament include the Great Commission in Matthew 28, and in John 20:19ff, and is to all the Church.

**John 21:15** When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." (ESV)

**Third Verse of Psalm 23 – Restoration, Right Path for God.**

**3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

 When we pursue our own interest over others, we have a problem. Yes, God wants us to pursue those things to provide for our basic needs. However, I know that we all see the “me first” culture has not produced pursuit of the “Golden Rule” or a right moral biblical life for many. We are now confronted by those who are raised to be selfishly absorbed with their own consumption of the vices of the fallen world. America has the largest prison population in the world. God calls us to consider, plan and pursue the path He has for our lives (Eph. 2:8-10) . . . which will bless us and elevate those around us.

**Summation**

We can clearly read and see that the model and representation of a *shepherd* is one that existed with the Hebrew understanding and life-culture from their beginning. Abraham, the Father of the Hebrews, the lead Patriarch was also sheepherder. We read more of the shepherd role from God’s prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and Micah. In these passages, there is an obvious foretelling of Jesus. . . the Lamb to come.

**Isaiah 40:11** Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

**Ezekeil 34:23** "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.

**Micah 5:4** And He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, Because at that time He will be great To the ends of the earth.

 In the Gospel of John, Jesus emphasizes His Messianic Cross-bound mission as the good shepherd.

**John 10:11** "I am the **good shepherd**; the **good shepherd** lays down His life for the sheep.

**AMEN**