

Psalm 23

In John Chapter 10 we hear Jesus say, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Lord often speaks of Himself as shepherd in both the Old and New Testaments. Consider these words from the Prophet Isaiah, "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 who have young." The text for today's sermon is the 23rd Psalm. This Psalm is surely one of the best known portions of the Bible and as we study the Psalm today I would like you to consider *How Blessed you Are to Be a Sheep of the Good Shepherd*. We are going to look at the relationship between the Shepherd and His Sheep, what the Shepherd does for His Sheep and then What He will do for them in the future.

"The Lord is my Shepherd." That confession of David presents a beautiful picture. A shepherd is someone who cares for sheep. He leads them, he protects them, and He sees to it that they have sufficient food and water. However Jesus shows us that He does much more for His sheep. Normally shepherds live off of their sheep. They make a living selling their meat and wool but that is just reversed in the kingdom of the Good Shepherd. He loves His Sheep and He lays down His life for the Sheep.

Sheep, on the other hand are not very wise or very strong. They can easily wander and put themselves in danger. They can wander into a place where there is no food or water or they can make themselves an easy prey for wild dogs or wolves. They need their shepherd.

David says he has no fears as long as He is has the Lord as his shepherd. Remember the word Lord means the God of steadfast love and faithfulness. With the Lord as His shepherd he will never lack anything in time or in eternity. His Shepherd is so loving, so wise and so strong that He will always give His sheep exactly what they need. We could say, if the shepherd does not give it, the sheep does not need it.

How does one become a sheep of the Good Shepherd? We heard earlier that the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the Sheep. They were not always His sheep. They had wandered away from Him by sinning. They were under the control of the devil, being led to death and hell. But the Shepherd loved them, took the responsibility for their sin and suffered the punishment their sins called for. Because of what He did for them God forgave the sins of all people. They become Jesus' sheep through faith in Him. Now Jesus calls and invites the scattered sheep with the good news of forgiveness and He makes them His sheep by working faith in their hearts. Whoever believes on Jesus is a sheep of the Good Shepherd.

Since he laid down His life for the sheep they can also be confident that He will supply all of their needs. The Psalmist mentions what the Good Shepherd does for Him. "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters." Imagine a sheep in Palestine. Most of the country is desert, without water and without adequate grass to support a sheep. But the Good Shepherd takes care of His sheep. He knows what they need and were to find it. He leads them to a place where there is lush green grass, where they can eat and be satisfied. He takes them to a pool of cool clear water where they can easily drink their fill and He gives them rest.

Naturally this is a picture to show how the Lord lovingly cares for His believers. The food and water that satisfies their souls is His sweet Gospel in Word and Sacrament where He speaks comfortingly to them and says, "Peace be to you, your guilt is removed, I have made your peace with God, you will not die in your sins, and instead I have given

you everlasting life. Further more I will guard you and keep you and bring you into your heavenly home. Jesus gives rest for the soul.

When one is troubled by sins committed, hurt and grieving, The Shepherd's Word restores his soul. In days of disappointment and heartbreak the shepherd again and again comes with that blessed assurance, "I love you and I will cause everything to work for your blessing. "Be at peace; never will I leave you never will I forsake you."

By His word the Shepherd guides His sheep in the paths of righteousness. He brings them to faith which leads to eternal life. These paths of righteousness are not their righteousness and good works but the way to eternal life opened by Christ's righteousness.

Why does He do this? It is for His own name's sake, because that is who He is. He is gracious. Though we do not in any way deserve it He has chosen to shower His love upon us. He has chosen to shower His love upon you. How blessed you are to be a sheep of the Good Shepherd!

The Good Shepherd will never, never desert His sheep. We read, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me. " While in this life the believer will walk through some dark times. David experienced many such times. Some of His trouble was of his own making. For a long time he was hunted like an animal by King Saul. He had fallen into the sins of adultery and murder of and felt sick and tormented. One of his children died as a baby. His son Absalom rebelled and tried to take his kingdom. Yet in all of this the Lord was with Him to lead him back and to comfort Him.

The last and darkest valley that the believer must pass through is the valley of death. No one can go with us- except Jesus and so we can say with David, I will fear no evil. He will take us by the hand and go with us to take us safely into paradise. One might be concerned, "Will I lose my faith in that last hour? The Psalm says You need not fear. Jesus will be there to supply and to protect in life's darkest hour.

The Good Shepherd is super good to His sheep. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup over flows. Even if sheep of the Good Shepherd were surrounded by ten thousand devils all raging to destroy them, they need not fear. The almighty is their shepherd.

At the time of David, people who dined with a king were anointed with perfumed oil. Oil was a symbol of joy. A cup running over was a symbol superabundant blessing. This dear friend is what the Good Shepherd does for you. How fortunate you are to be His sheep. And now concerning the future- it is only going to get better. David sang, "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life." As I said earlier, the Good Shepherd is faithful to His sheep. He will be with them through life and into eternity. Everything that happens to them, even when they do not see or understand, is for their blessing. In eternity they will look back and know, "Yes, the Lord was good to me." His love will follow them. The love that is spoken of here is grace. It is undeserved love. The Shepherd's forgiveness will never run out. His righteousness will cover them and never wear thin. And at last, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. The sheep and the lambs of Christ will be gathered and will live with their loving Shepherd forever.

How blessed you and I are to have been made sheep of the Good Shepherd. We are at peace and our hearts are glad. We are loved. My friends never forget how you became a sheep of the Good Shepherd. It was by the Word of the Gospel. You would not

know any of these things were it not that the Lord came and spoke to you through His Word. Remember, too, that is by the Word that the Lord keeps you in this relationship. Don't turn away from His Word. People forsake the Lord when they stop hearing the Word, when they stop receiving the Sacrament. With out Christ's good word there is no rest, no comfort, no protection, only a spiritual desert and death.

Last week we heard about the glory that our Lord Jesus has now in heaven. He is surrounded by millions of angels. He posses all the power and glory that are His as true God, yet He sill remains our Good Shepherd, ever loving, ever caring and personally interested in the welfare of each of us.

Don't leave Jesus but rather snuggle up in His arms and let Him carry you. Come back again and again to the assurance of this 23rd Psalm and all of Scripture so that you can always say with confidence, "The Lord is my Shepherd."