

St. Matthew AME Church
Orange, New Jersey

Women's Bible Study Fellowship
Saturday, December 10, 2022

Fall Series: "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD. "
"The Lord is my shepherd, " Psalm 23:1a

Session III: "Restoration and Righteousness "

"He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name sake." Psalm 23:3

I. Review of Session I: Relationship and Resources "

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. " Psalm 23:1

- "The Lord is my shepherd " immediately implies a profound, yet practical relationship between God and us. In this psalm, David is speaking not as a shepherd, though he was one, but as a sheep, one of the flock. David knew from firsthand experience that the life of any particular sheep depended on the type of shepherd who owned it. Psalm 95:7
- The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways. Our fears, stubbornness and helplessness are all parallels of profound importance. Sheep often wander, get lost or get stuck. Basically, sheep can't save themselves.
- The "Lord is my Shepherd " means that we acknowledge God as the manager and keeper of our lives. If we are convinced that the "Lord is our Shepherd," then we will be content with not only His care and His love, but we will also be content with His leadership, His guidance and His discipline.
- A committed relationship with God, "The Good Shepherd " is based on our faith that I shall not lack the expert care and effective management of God. We can trust that God will always meet our needs.
- God will be on the job twenty-four hours a day. No trouble is too great as He cares for us.

II. Review of Session II: "Rest and Refreshment"

"He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters." Psalm 23:2

- The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very makeup, it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met.

1. Sheep refuse to lie down unless they are free of all fear.

2. Because of the social behavior within a flock, sheep will not lie down, unless they are free from friction with others of their kind.

3. If tormented by flies or parasites sheep will not lie down. Only when free of these pests can they relax.

4. Sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free from hunger. This of course is clearly implied by the statement, "He makes me lie down in green pastures. "

"He leads me beside quiet waters. " Psalm 23:2b

- Although sheep thrive in dry, semi-arid countries, they still require water. The key or the clue to where water can be obtained lies with the shepherd. It is he who knows where the best drinking places are.
- When sheep are thirsty, they become restless and set out in search of water. If not led to the good water supplies of clean, pure water, they will often end up drinking from polluted pot holes, where they pick up internal parasites or other disease germs. The shepherd alone knows where the still quiet, deep, clean, pure water is to be found that can satisfy his sheep and keep them fit.

- And in precisely the same manner Christ, our "Good Shepherd," made it very clear that thirsty souls of men and women can only be fully satisfied when their capacity and thirst for spiritual life is fully quenched by drawing on Him.
- Our Shepherd knows the "green pastures " and "quiet waters " that will restore us. We will reach these places only by following Him obediently. Rebelling against the Shepherd's leading is actually rebelling against our own best interests. We must remember this the next time we are tempted to go on our own way rather than the Shepherd's way.

III. "He Restores My Soul"

- In studying this Psalm, it must always be remembered that it is a sheep in the "Good Shepherd's care who is speaking. It is essentially a Christian's claim of belonging to the family of God. He boasts of the benefits of such a relationship.
- If we have this relationship with God, who is our "Good Shepherd, "Why then this statement..."He restores my soul?" It would be assumed that anyone in the Good Shepherd's care could never become so distressed in soul as to need restoration. The fact remains that this happens.
- The soul is part of you that consists of your mind, character, thoughts and your feelings.
- Even David, the author of the Psalm, who was much loved of God, knew what it was to be cast down, dejected, downhearted and despondent. He had tasted defeat in his life and felt the frustration of having fallen under temptation. David was acquainted with the bitterness of feeling hopeless and without strength in himself.
- In Psalm 42:11, David cries out, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."
 - Now there is an exact parallel to this in caring for sheep. Only those intimately acquainted with sheep and their habits understand the significance of a "cast" sheep or a "cast down" sheep. This is an old English Shepherd's term for a sheep that has turned over on its back and cannot get up again by itself.
 - A cast sheep is a very pathetic sight. Lying on its back, it's feet in the air, it struggles to stand up, without success. Sometimes they lie there in frightened frustration. If the owner does not arrive on the scene within a reasonably short time, the sheep will die. This is another reason why it is so essential for a careful shepherd to look over his flock every day.
 - It is not only the shepherd who keeps a sharp eye for cast sheep, but also predators. buzzards, vultures, dogs, coyotes and cougars all know that a cast sheep is easy prey and death is not far off. This knowledge that any cast sheep is helpless, close to death and vulnerable to attack makes the whole problem of cast sheep serious for the shepherd.

"SO TRUE FOR US"

- I Peter 5:8- "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."
 - Lions attack sick, young, or stragglers animals, they choose victims who are alone or not alert. Peter warns us to watch out for Satan when we are suffering or being persecuted. Feeling alone, weak, helpless and cut off from other believers, so focused on our troubles that we forget to watch for danger, we are especially vulnerable to Satan's attacks.

IV. "The Good Shepherd Rescues Us!"

- When sheep are "cast down " and immobilized, the shepherd, (who is the attentive owner) is quick and ready to come to the rescue of the helpless sheep. The shepherd is ever patient, tender and helpful.
 - Similarly, in the Christian life there is an exciting and comforting parallel.
 - Many people have the idea that when a child of God falls, when he is frustrated and helpless in a spiritual dilemma, God becomes disgusted, fed-up, and even furious with him.

"THIS SIMPLY IS NOT SO"

- One of the great revelations of the heart of God given to us by Christ is that of Himself as our "Good Shepherd." He has the same concern and compassion for cast down individuals as a shepherd has for his sheep. This is precisely why Jesus looked on people with compassion. This verse(3a) discloses the depth of His understanding of undone people to whom Jesus comes eagerly and quickly, ready to help, to save, to restore.
- God comes quietly, gently, reassuringly to us no matter when or where we may be cast down.

V. "Where He Leads Me, I Will Follow"

"He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name sake." Psalm 23:3b

- Sheep are notorious creatures of habit. If left to themselves, they will follow the same trails until they become ruts, graze the same hills until they turn to desert waters and pollute their own ground until it is corrupt with disease and parasites. Many of the world's finest sheep ranges have been ruined beyond repair by overgrazing, poor management, and indifferent or ignorant sheep owners.
- A commonly held, but serious misconception about sheep is that they can just "get along anywhere." "The truth is quite the reverse. No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detailed direction, than do sheep. No doubt David, as a shepherd himself, had learned this firsthand from rough experiences. He knew beyond dispute that if the flock was to flourish and the owner's reputation was to be held in high esteem as a good shepherd, the sheep had to be constantly under His meticulous control and guidance.
- The greatest single safeguard which a shepherd has in handling his flock is to keep them on the move. This is to say, they dare not be left on the same ground too long.
- There must be a predetermined plan of action, a deliberate, planned rotation from grazing ground to another in line with right and proper principles of sound management. This is precisely the sort of action and the idea David had in mind when he spoke of being led in paths of righteousness.
- The owner's entire name and reputation depends on how effectively and efficiently he keeps his sheep.
- Now as we turn to the human aspect of this theme, we will be astonished at some of the parallels. It is no mere whim on God's part to call us sheep. Our behavior patterns and any life habits are so much like that of sheep.
 - First of all, Scripture points out most of us are stiff-necked and stubborn. Acts 7:51, Nehemiah 9:16-17
 - We prefer to follow our own ways.
 - Sometimes we deliberately, repeatedly ignore God. Sometimes we insist we know what is best for us even though the disastrous results may be self-evident. Proverbs 16:25MSG
- The person who decides to do what God asks him has moved onto fresh ground which will do both him and others a world of good. Besides it will please the Good Shepherd.
- God wants us to move on with Him. He wants us to walk with Him. He wants it not only for our welfare, but for the benefit of others as His own dear reputation.

SUMMARY

- We have to be realistic about the life of the child of God and face facts as they really are. Most of us, though we belong to Christ and desire to be under His control and endeavor to allow ourselves to be led by Him, do on some occasions find ourselves cast down.

PRAISE GOD! HE IS A RESTORER!

- Perhaps there are those who think God expects too much of us. Maybe we feel the demands are too drastic. Some may even consider His call impossible to carry out. It would be if we had to depend on self-determination or self-discipline to succeed. But if we really want to do His will and to be led,

God makes this possible by His own gracious Holy Spirit who is given to us. That energy is God's energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give Him the most pleasure.

Philippians 2:13

" HE WILL ALWAYS LEAD US RIGHT"