

The Good Shepherd
Singing the Sacred
Core 52 – Week 11

The world needs a shepherd. We are lost sheep, wandering the wilderness and staggering from starvation. We are teetering on the edge of a great dark chasm. Ferocious predators surround us, licking their jowls waiting to sink their fangs deep into our flesh.

The world needs a shepherd.

Such a shepherd cannot be found in Washington DC. For the last 40 years, the church has looked to politics for leadership. We have poured millions of dollars, both as churches and individual Christians into the political process, believing the lie that somehow godliness, morality, and national revival will somehow flow from the top, if we can just get the right person or the right party into power.

Our political saviors are blind guides at best and ravenous wolves at worse. Can we please, once and for all dispel the notion that Washington can be our shepherd? Just a quick perusal this week found in the last 20 years we had leaders on the federal level convicted of felony theft, manslaughter, money laundering, obstruction of justice, witness tampering, cocaine possession, domestic violence, misuse of campaign contributions, DUI, and multiple instances of perjury, bribery, corruption, wire fraud, sexual misconduct, and false testimony. And let me assure you, neither side of the aisle takes the high road when it comes to morality and ethics.

The world needs a shepherd.

We can't look to corporate America to guide us. Do we really think Amazon, Target and Google care for us? They care for our dollars. They care for our data. They do not care for you. They spy on you to sell you out. These corporate wolves do not have our best interests at heart. These are the same companies that regularly censor Christian speech and tell us that gender is nothing but a social construct and we can make believe whatever we want in whatever bathroom we choose.

The world needs a shepherd.

We can't trust academia to feed us. Institutions of higher learning are cesspools of foolishness masquerading as wisdom. They are highly lettered morons jumping off a cliff and telling society to follow. The cost of education rises faster than cases of the Coronavirus while the value of their pretty pieces of paper plummets faster than the stock market. We've graduated a whole generation of kids who are qualified to be baristas at Starbucks. Meanwhile, parents continue to blow their retirement to pay for these schools to brainwash their kids and undo in 4 years what the parents spent 18 years instilling.

The world needs a shepherd.

The world is in desperate need of leadership. Sadly, it will not find it in most churches either. The church today is more confused and confusing than ever. The leadership of most churches is ignorant of Biblical truth. Many pastors have abandoned their God-given call to teach and preach the word. These Sunday morning snake oil salesmen are little more than purveyors of pop psychology designed to make their flock feel good about being bad. Immorality is as rampant inside the church as out. God's grace has become something to be taken advantage of rather than something that changes us.

The world needs a shepherd. The church needs a shepherd.

Maybe now is a good time to look back more than 2,500 years to song first sung by King David. We don't know when he penned the poem that became the 6 verses of Psalm 23, probably the second best known passage in the entire Bible. These verses are among the few that even the most ardent non-Christians have heard.

Maybe it was the end of his life and as he looked back over everything that God had done for him throughout his life, he could see how God had been there the whole time, watching over him, guiding him. Maybe, he wrote this Psalm at some crisis point during his reign and he wondered how he would ever get through it. It was then he was reminded of the lessons he learned as a boy watching over his daddy's sheep. Maybe he was still a teenager. Samuel has already anointed him as the next king, he's already face the giant Goliath, but there he is still watching the family flock. He wonders what God is doing, and how his plan will work out, and then he realizes that God's got him, just like he's got his sheep.

The world needs a shepherd, and David knows who that shepherd is.

The Lord. The Lord is my shepherd. For David there is no other choice. There is no alternative. The shepherd is none other than the Lord God. Yahweh, the God of Israel and Creator of heaven and earth.

David was sure the shepherd was not Baal or Asherah, or Moloch. The shepherd is not to be found in Washington or in the corporate board room or on any university campus. The shepherd isn't to be found on Wall Street, Main Street, or Madison Avenue.

God is the shepherd. David doesn't want us to miss it. Throughout this whole Psalm he puts the focus on Him. *He makes me lie down. He leads. He restores.*

David gets even more personal and switches to the first person. *You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare. You anoint.*

You see not only does the world need a shepherd. David needs a shepherd. I need a shepherd. You need a shepherd.

It is critically important for the well-being, security and satisfaction of the sheep, that the sheep know who their shepherd is.

Of course, like so much with David, this Psalm also looks ahead, not to another shepherd, but a fuller revelation of who that shepherd is. In John 10:11, Jesus says, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* By saying this Jesus is identifying himself with David and the God of David.

David knows who his shepherd is. Do you?

The Lord is...

Let’s just pause there for a moment. *“The Lord is.”* Present tense. Not *“The Lord was.”* Not *“The Lord could be.”* Not *“The Lord might be later.”* No. *“The Lord is”*

The Lord is my...

David doesn’t say He’s my mother’s shepherd, or my father’s shepherd, or my friend’s. This is very personal for David. He is MY shepherd. The Lord is mine. Right here. Right now. He belongs to me and I belong to him. He knows me and I know him.

Jesus says in John 10:14, *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.”*

Is he your shepherd too? Not just your mom’s or your dad’s or you’re your husband’s or your wife’s or your friend’s? Is he yours?

The Lord is my shepherd.

There’s a lot of things David could have said here. Potter. Farmer. Fountain. Rock. Lion of the tribe of Judah. Fortress. Father. The Bible compares God to all of these things and more, but David chose shepherd.

The shepherd gives. The shepherd guides, and the shepherd guards.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want

“I shall not want.” This means I don’t need anything. I’m not lacking anything that’s essential. It doesn’t mean that God gives us every little, petty desire. It means he supplies our needs.

Another translation renders it this way, *“The LORD is my shepherd: I have everything I need.”*

The apostle Paul tells us this about our good shepherd in Php. 4:19 *“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”*

A young boy was quoting Psalm 23 for his Sunday School class. He nervously sputtered the words, *“The Lord is my Shepherd, and that’s all I want.”*

Bad memory, but good theology. When God is all you want, all your other needs will fall into place. You do not need more FROM Him; you need more OF Him.

Verse 2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

This is not like the times you tell your child, *“Go back to your room and lie down. It’s way past*

your bedtime. You've already gone to the bathroom, had a drink of water. I've read you two stories and sang 3 bedtime songs, now get back in there and lie down."

It's not that kind of making us lie down' Green pastures are what sheep need for food. A shepherd will lead his sheep many miles just to find suitable pasture. However, when the sheep are able to lie down in green pastures, that means they have all they need. They have eaten their fill. We don't need to go anywhere else. We can lie down and rest.

He leads me beside still waters.

This is right up there with the green pastures. The other essential that sheep need besides good food is good water. This isn't a raging, violent, flooded river that might sweep the sheep away. These are still waters. The sheep can walk right up drink their fill of good, clean water, and then go lie down and take a nap in the green grass.

Verse 2 is all about satisfaction and sufficiency. This is about rest and being content. It is about peace and having a life that is free from anxiety. God's bigger than a Corona virus scare. He's bigger than a stock market in freefall. You have a good shepherd. You can lie down at night and close your eyes and rest, because God's got you.

Verse 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

The shepherd gives the sheep what they need. He also guides them where they need to go. Sheep have a tendency to wander off and get themselves in dangerous situations. They can be kind of like the cat that climbs a tree they can't get down. A sheep can stray from the flock and not be able to find green grass and good water. A sheep can wander out on some rocky ledge along a steep ravine and get stuck there.

Have you every wandered from where you should be thinking you find something you want somewhere else on to discover that it wasn't really want you wanted? Nope, it isn't there. Have you ever strayed and got yourself stuck in a jam you couldn't get out of. Sheep are like that.

You know what Jesus says about sheep who do that? He told a story about a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep just to go find the 1 lost sheep. A good shepherd will risk life and limb to rescue just that one sheep.

Jesus tells us that He is just like that, that God is just like that. He will go to the greatest lengths just to rescue one lost sheep. He loves lost sheep and He will do anything to find that sheep no matter how far it has strayed, no matter what rock and hard place it's gotten itself stuck in. Jesus wants to rescue that sheep.

That's what David means when he says "He restores my soul." He makes me whole again. He leads me back to where I should be. He guides me where I should go.

Verse 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil

This is the line that causes Psalm 23 to be the most read Scripture at funerals. This is why everyone has heard Psalm 23. It's certainly appropriate, but verse 4 is about more than just death. You see, it could also be translated as the *valley of deep darkness*. How many of you have been through some dark valleys in your life? Some of you are in a dark valley right now.

David grew up in Bethlehem. That's where he watched his sheep. Bethlehem itself was fertile and lush. The danger was that only a couple miles away, you would make your way into the Judean wilderness. In a matter of minutes, you could go from green grass and fresh spring water to a rugged, harsh wilderness that could find a thousand ways to kill a sheep that wandered that way. No grass and no water for miles and miles if you go the wrong way. Hungry predators with nothing to protect you. Dangerous ravines where one wrong step could kill you. It was literally a valley of deep darkness.

Life can be like that. One moment, it's all green grass and still waters, and the next moment you've wandered in the wrong direction and you find yourself in a very dark place.

Some of us have found ourselves in the dark valley of depression where anxiety and worry seem ready to pounce from every direction. Some of us wander the valley of post-traumatic stress where there is that memory, that moment, that experience that seems to haunt us at every turn. Others of us travel the dark valley of debt where the bills are always more than the bucks and there is never an escape in sight. Others of us walk the dark valley of loneliness and we fear we will always walk it alone.

Whatever your dark valley, hear me, and especially hear David in Psalm 23. Your good Shepherd can see you through it. Notice he doesn't promise you will never have to go through the dark valley. He doesn't always promise an immediate escape. What he does promise is that you have nothing to fear while you're there. Why?

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

With Jesus as your good Shepherd you never walk your dark valley alone. He knows the way back to the green grass and the quiet waters. He can protect from the bloodthirsty wolves. He is the good Shepherd.

The tool in trade for the shepherd was the shepherd's staff. Sometimes, a shepherd would carry a separate rod, like a club used for defensive purposes, but by most accounts. The shepherd's staff served both functions.

- Counting the sheep to make sure they were all accounted for
- As a weapon to defend the sheep from predators.
- To work the sheep's wool so the shepherd could check for wounds or injury
- To guide and correct. If a sheep starts to wander off or eat something it shouldn't he can prod them.

- To rescue a sheep that had fallen out of the reach of a shepherd.

Be assured of this, even when you travel the valley of deep darkness, when you walk with your shepherd, he can guide you in the way you should go, and he can protect you from what threatens. He has the tools for the job. His Word both guides and guards. Fellow believers can encourage and warn. His spirit is always present within you.

Verse 5 *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies*

“Preparing a table” here isn’t about having company over for dinner. The way this phrase is used in Scripture, it means a show of respect; to provide what is needed. Picture what this verse is showing. The table is before you, but it is also in the presence of whom? Your enemies, right? Which means you are also in the presence of whom? Your enemies.

Who’s the one who set the table? The shepherd. God is the one who set the table. So God puts this table between you and your enemy. You could see this, perhaps, as a peace offering. This could mean that God is the one who gives us peace with our enemies. At the very least, it means that God gives us what we need to be respected in the face of our enemies. This table, this show of respect, means you will either find peace, or you will find victory.

Here’s what you need to understand. There is no enemy you face. There is nothing that threatens you that God cannot provide you peace or victory. If you let him be your shepherd.

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Don’t think of the anointing of king or anything like where a little bit of oil is ceremonially poured on someone’s head. That kind of anointing is a completely different word in Hebrew. This word means to make well. Make healthy. Make fat. Okay, no fat head jokes. In the ancient world fatness was synonymous with health. And it makes sense, if you think about it. In a world where famine and drought were common and food could be hard to come by, if you had a little extra meat on your bones, it meant everything was going good.

The kind of oil being applied was a healing balm, a tonic meant to soothe sores and treat wounds. At night when the shepherd would bring the sheep back into the sheep pen, he would examine each sheep as they came in, checking them for any injuries, and if he found one he would anoint them with oil. It was a healing medicine. The other thing the oil did was help keep flies and insects out of their face.

In the case of this shepherd, there is plenty of oil to go around. The cup overflows with oil. The sheep have all they need.

What you need to know is this. You have a good shepherd who wants to heal your deepest wounds and make you well again. He will anoint you where you are cut deepest and there apply the healing balm of his love and grace to make you whole again.

Verse 6 wraps everything up with these words of promise, *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

The journey through the valley of deep darkness is only temporary, but we have a forever home where goodness and mercy will be our inheritance...well, forever.

Our good shepherd sufficiently supplies, he abundantly satisfies, he sovereignly guides, and he safely secures those under his care.

The world needs a shepherd. I need a shepherd. You need a shepherd.

Isaiah 53:6 says, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned- every one- to his own way.”*

Let me ask a question. I need everyone to close their eyes. We need some anonymity. I need you to be honest and open. I'll be watching, because I need to count. Don't worry, I won't tell anyone. Anyway, my own hand will be raised. So, everyone, close your eyes.

How many of you feel like you are, or have been the black sheep? You feel like you're the one sheep that's wandered off. You've been the one sheep no one wants to go after. You're the one sheep that all the other sheep leave behind. You're the sheep that constantly gets itself into trouble. How many of you have been the black sheep?

It's more than you would imagine.

I've already told you how our Good Shepherd feels about that one sheep. He loves black sheep. He goes after that one. He takes that sheep into his arms, and he carries it home. He knows that sheep. He calls that sheep my name.

Isaiah 53, after saying that all of like sheep have gone astray, goes on to say this, *“and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* Iniquity is sin. What this means is that God has laid on Jesus all of our sins. Every time we've wandered. Every moment we've gone astray. Jesus took that sin. It's already taken care of. It's already forgiven. He's ready to bring you home.

You need a shepherd. Do you know him? If not, he's ready to bring you home.