

# The Lord Is My Shepherd

Psalm 23

## Introduction

1. Today's lesson comes from one of most well known and most loved Psalms. It is frequently sung and is often used at funerals because of its encouraging and comforting message. In fact, many of us could probably quote most of it. I am talking about Psalm 23.

2. Let us begin by reading this precious Psalm.

*"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalms 23:1-6 NASB).*



3. I would image that all of us have seen a picture of Jesus holding a sheep in His arms. I think this is a fitting image because it captures the love that Jesus has for us as our Shepherd, and how He cares for us and will hold us up in His loving arms.

*"... We are His people and the sheep of His pasture" (Psalms 100:3 NASB).*

4. This Psalm is very comforting, and Christians can relate to David as he talks about God being our shepherd. God is our Shepherd and we are His sheep. Although we may know a little about shepherds and sheep from various sources, I think it is safe to assume that most of us do not know much about either. So let's learn some more about the shepherd and the sheep and how it relates to us today.

## I. The Characteristics of Sheep

A. Since the Bible teaches us that we are like sheep, we need to learn more about them. We need to realize that being called a sheep is not the most complementary term because sheep are not that smart. In fact, some say that they are probably one of the dumbest animals that God has created. Here are some characteristics of sheep...

1. Have you ever seen a trained sheep? No! They are just too dumb to train.

2. If a sheep gets separated from the flock, they become hopelessly lost and have no idea what to do. Many times they will walk around in endless circles in a confused state because they have no sense of direction.

3. Sheep are weak and helpless. I am sure you have never heard of a sheep attacking anyone, have you? No! On the contrary, they tend to run away from you. Think about some of the sayings people use to indicate strength: "You're as bold as a lion," or, "You're as strong as an Ox." Have you ever heard anyone say anything like this about sheep to indicate their courage or strength?

4. Sheep are very dirty: their wool is not nice and fluffy, it is greasy, and everything sticks to it. Other animals clean themselves, but not a sheep, which is why they stink. The only way they will get clean is if someone cleans them.

B. Sheep are weak, helpless, dirty, stinky, and have no sense of direction, and this, sadly, is an accurate description of all of us! O how blessed we are to have a Good Shepherd like Jesus.

1. A sheep does not clean itself so it has to rely on the shepherd to clean it. Without God's help, we are just like the dirty sheep because we cannot clean ourselves from our sin, and we have to rely on our Good Shepherd, Jesus, to cleanse us. Without Him we could never be purified (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7). Every person needs Jesus as his Shepherd.

2. Just like a sheep, if we try to live our life on our own without God, we are going find ourselves lost and running in circles (Ephesians 2:1-3). As Jeremiah said, "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23), and Solomon says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). This is why it is important for sheep to have a shepherd they can trust and rely on, which is why we must learn to allow our Shepherd to direct our path:

*"Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6 NASB).*

3. Sheep are weak and vulnerable, and without a Shepherd to guard us, the Lion will devour us (1 Peter 5.8), but if we submit to God and resist the devil, then he will flee from us (James 4.7; cf. 2 Timothy 4.18; Isaiah 41.13).
4. Without a shepherd, sheep are easily frightened and scattered. Likewise, we need to stay close to our Shepherd and allow Him to protect and comfort us when we become troubled or frightened. Job went through a great trial of suffering (Job 1.1-2.8) but trusted in the Shepherd of his soul, and we know how the Lord blessed him in the end (Job 42.10-17). What a comfort it is to know that we have a Shepherd that loves, protects, and guides His sheep in every trial we face.

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalms 23:4 NASB).*

*"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39 NASB).*

5. David also says, *"He leads me beside the still waters"* (Psalms 23.2). Did you know that sheep are afraid of running water? This is why a shepherd has to lead them to a body of *still* water before they will drink. Many animals can sniff out water and find it on their own, but not sheep. Without a shepherd, they would die of thirst. Similarly, God knows our fears and weaknesses (Psalms 69.5; 103.14), and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle (1 Corinthians 10.13). Only our Shepherd can lead us to the water of life and keep us from dying of spiritual thirst (John 6.35; 7.37).

## II. The Characteristics of Shepherds

A. A good shepherd is one that leads, guides, protects, and even gives his life for his sheep.

B. Does Jesus bear the characteristics of a good shepherd?

1. The shepherd is the leader, and the sheep will follow him. The shepherd knows that sheep cannot be driven like cattle, but they will follow their shepherd because they trust him and know his voice. Jesus refers to this when speaking about His own sheep:

*"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. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers" (John 10:1-5 NASB)*

- a. The shepherd knows his sheep and the sheep know their shepherd, and they will not follow a stranger.
  - b. In the same way, we should know our Shepherd's voice. The way we can be sure that we know it is by studying God's Word (2 Timothy 3.14-17) and putting it into our hearts daily (Psalms 119.11). When we do this, we cannot be lead astray by a stranger (Psalms 119.67) who is pretending to be like Jesus because their words will not match up with His Words (Cf. 1 John 4.1).
2. Jesus is portrayed as the Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep:

*"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 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. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10:11-15 NASB).*

- a. Without a doubt, Jesus is our Shepherd and we shall not want. The shepherd is willing to give his life for his sheep and that is exactly what Jesus did for us, even though we did not deserve it (Romans 5.10; Ephesians 2.5-9; Titus 3.5). Isaiah prophesied about Jesus giving His life for us:

*"He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.*

*All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him" (Isaiah 53:3-6 NASB).*

- b. We are described like sheep that have gone astray, yet Jesus died for us anyway because He loves us and He knew His death would save us (John 10.17; Ephesians 2.4-7; 5.2). From this, we can see the difference between a hireling and a shepherd. The hireling was paid to watch the shepherd's sheep for a short while, but since they were not his sheep, he would flee if a wolf or some sort of enemy came along. But as I pointed out earlier, the shepherd would fight for his sheep until he died because the sheep belong to him, and he loves them. As Christians, it should give us great joy and comfort to know that Jesus is our shepherd and that He knows all of us by name, and that He will always be there for us.

3. Jesus' commitment to His sheep:

*"So He told them this parable, saying, What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'" (Luke 15:3-6 NASB).*



- a. The shepherd is committed to all his sheep. If he was not, he would have the attitude, "I still have 99 sheep and that is good enough – the lost sheep will just have to fend for himself." Thankfully, a shepherd does not think that way because every sheep is important to him, and he will do everything in his power to bring the lost sheep back to its fold.
- b. Since Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10.11, 14), He has the same attitude because every soul is important to Him, and He will do everything He can to lead that lost soul back to the fold. Just like the shepherd in the parable, Jesus will not scold or beat the sheep back into submission. Instead, He will seek him out and encourage him to come back, and He will extend His loving arms and carry the sheep back to the fold on His shoulders because that is the kind of Shepherd Jesus is.

### Summary

1. Being called a sheep is not the most complementary term because sheep are dumb! They cannot be trained, they wander from the flock, and they get lost and confused. They are weak and helpless, and they are dirty and smelly. Just as sheep are dependant on the shepherd, we are dependant on the Lord.
2. A good shepherd leads and guides his sheep, he is committed to his sheep, and he even gives his life for his sheep. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, has all these characteristics to the fullest degree.