

THE SHEEP OF HIS PASTURE

Text: Psalm 100:3 – *“Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”*

Introduction:

- Probably the most familiar phrase in all of Scripture are the timeless words uttered from the mouth of David, the shepherd king of Israel, when he cried out in unbounded joy – “The Lord is my Shepherd!”
- While these words go on to introduce a great many benefits that are the believers, they contain an even more essential concept – the basis of all of the benefits that follow!
- These words tell us why we shall never want or lack what we need. These words tell us why we can expect the still waters and the green pastures. They explain why we can walk through the valley of death itself with no fear. They give us the reason behind the rod and the staff which are for our benefit and encouragement. They explain the goodness and the mercy that are now a part of our daily life. They give us the ground of assurance of our place at the table spread before the God of Heaven.
- All of these blessed benefits are our because of what David reveals in the first five words of the Psalm – The Lord is my Shepherd! It is my relationship to God that guarantees ne the blessings that follow.
- The Bible speaks often of my relationship to God. Theologically, I know that when I was “saved” or “redeemed” I entered into a personal relationship with God.
- To help me make my theology personal and practical – to make it clear and relevant to my daily life – God has described that relationship in the Bible through a series of “images” or pictures.
- We are going to look at one of these images or pictures this morning – the image described in Psalm 23:1, and verbalized in Psalm 100:3 – **as God’s children, we are just like sheep, and He is just like a shepherd.**
- **There are three key aspects of this image that will help us understand our role as sheep of His pasture.**

I. The Picture of God’s People: Sheep

Throughout the Bible, God uses the image of sheep to describe the people that belonged to Him and enjoyed a special relationship with Him.

A. Old Testament Israel seen as Sheep

- From its inception, the nation of Israel has been the special “flock” of God (Numbers 27:17).
- God is described as the shepherd of Israel (Psalm 80:1).
- David describes the nation as the sheep of God’s pasture (Psalm 100:3; 79:13; 95:7).
- When He led them out of Israel, “He led them like a flock by the hand of Moses” (Psalm 77:20).
- Jeremiah wept when he saw the “flock of God being led away” (Jeremiah 13:17).
- Under the wicked King Ahab, God’s prophet saw “all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep having no shepherd!” (I Kings 22:17).
- Isaiah looked at the wickedness and rebellion of God’s people and cried out in broken-hearted anguish – “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way!” (Isaiah 53:6).

- **POINT:** Over and over again God presents Himself as the Shepherd and His people as the sheep of His pasture.
- Sometimes they are responsive and submissive

- Sometimes they are wicked and rebellious
- Sometimes they are scattered and injured
- BUT – they are always, always, always HIS SHEEP AND HE IS THEIR SHEPHERD!
- KEY – the point that God is making here is this: As the sheep of His pasture, God’s people in the Old Testament enjoyed a very special relationship with Him that no other nation enjoyed!

B. New Testament Believers seen as Sheep:

- Old Testament Israel was pictured as the special sheep of God’s pasture – but in the New Testament, God comes to the lost sheep of Israel and they reject Him!
- We read in John’s account that He came unto His own and His own received Him not!
- We read that when He looked at the multitudes, He was moved to compassion because He saw them as sheep having no shepherd!
- He wept over the lost sheep of Jerusalem.
- The final act of rebellion was when the wicked undershepherds of Israel rose up and crucified the true shepherd!
- Now, God has chosen us to be His flock. The church is His “little flock” (Luke 12:32) made up of lost sheep that responded to His call and allowed Him to rescue them (Matthew 18:10-14). These sheep have entered into the door of the sheepfold and now go in and out under the sound of the shepherd’s voice (John 10).
- Now that we understand the clear picture that God presents in Scripture, we must try to understand the lessons that God has for us in this picture. Why does God compare us to sheep?

II. The Parallels presented:

- Phillip Keller, in his book *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23*, makes this observation: “It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways as will be seen in further chapters. Our mass mind or mob instincts, our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are all parallels of profound importance!”
- There are many parallels in scripture between sheep and believers, but there are six key parallels that I would like for us to examine this morning that will help us understand why God calls us the “sheep of His pasture.”

A. Sheep are “clean” animals (Leviticus 11:1-8)

- Leviticus contains a long list of different types of animals that can be utilized for food or for use by the nation of Israel.
- Each animal basically fell into one of two categories: clean or unclean.
- This had really very little to do with the physical cleanliness of the animal because all animals were dirty to one extent or the other. Rather, this had to do with the acceptability of the animal for use or consumption.
- For example: A cow was considered a “clean or acceptable” animal for food whereas a dog or a serpent was considered as “unclean or unacceptable” for food.
- Sheep were classified as “clean” animals.
- It is interesting to note that the Bible divides up the human race into two groups – “clean and unclean or saved and unsaved.”
- This morning, you are either a sheep of God’s pasture cleansed by the blood of Christ, or you are lost and on your way to hell.
- In other words, there is a clear difference between you and the large majority of people on this earth!

- Just like the majority of the nations that surrounded Israel were lost – even so the majority of people on the earth have chosen to reject Christ!
- This morning, if you are saved, then you have been “cleansed” by Christ and are part of His flock.

B. Sheep are productive animals

- A second comparison made in scripture between sheep and the believer is the comparison of productivity or usefulness.
- Sheep not used for food in Biblical Times for the most part.
- Usually used for one of 3 things: Sacrifice to God, wool for clothing, milk for cheese and beverage. (Upon occasion a sheep would be slaughtered and eaten)
- Usually a shepherd was able to develop relationships with his sheep because the sheep did not have to die to be productive – their job was to produce wool and they did this on an ongoing basis.
- As God’s sheep, we are to be productive and useful to God! We are to be producing spiritual wool!
- Paul tells us that we were created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing good works!
- NOTE: Paul specifically tells us that we cannot do good works to get saved! God does not save us because He saw that we were doing good works! BUT – He saved and now that He saved us, He wants us to fulfill our purpose – to do good works!
- We are told to let our light shine before men so that they may see our “good works” and glorify our Father in Heaven!
- Problem – there are a great many sheep that are part of God’s pasture that really don’t look like sheep! They have wallowed in the mud pit of sin and they look more like pigs than sheep!
- II Timothy 2:19 *Let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity*

C Sheep are safest in the flock.

- It is the nature of a sheep to want to herd together with the flock
- Used to have sheep in Texas – only two – but they had a natural desire to want to be together
- A lone sheep was in great danger – why? Because sheep have a great many natural enemies and very few defenses
- There are wolves and wild animals who love to feed on the tender meat of a well fed sheep
- There are serpents hiding in the grass that the sheep love to eat
- There are hidden holes which may break the frail leg of a sheep
- There are cliffs and ravines which may swallow up a sheep
- As long as sheep herd together around the shepherd, these dangers are virtually eliminated (Same thing with a believer – we need one another)

D. Sheep tend to stray

- When Isaiah looked for a way to describe the tendency of God’s people to rebel against God – the image that came to his mind was that of the tendency of a rebellious sheep to wander away from the shepherd and the safety of the path and the flock. “All we like sheep have gone astray – we have turned every one to his own way – just like sheep!”

- We had two sheep that loved to go their own way
- Used to have them tethered on long ropes so that they could graze in “safe areas”
- We used to have a canal bank that had rich tall green grass for them to feed
- Would beat the grass with a long stick or palm branch so that any snakes or animals hiding in the grass would move on to other areas and the sheep would be safe
- One of these sheep would constantly try to get away and get into areas where she was not supposed to be. She constantly pulled at the end of her rope
- We would give her just enough rope so that she could eat grass that grew fairly high on the canal bank but not enough to eat at the very top so she would not fall into the canal itself
- She constantly pulled against the stake and finally loosened it just enough so that she could get to the very top of the bank. When she got to the top, she turned around and began to pull even harder. She apparently lost her balance and her back legs fell over the bank and into the canal and she ended up choking to death strangled by the very rope that was designed to keep her safe and happy
- God has taken time to put us in a safe place to feed. He has carefully warned us about the terrible dangers that wait for us outside the boundaries of His word. He has placed us on a long leash and has given us the richest and best grass upon which to feed – and yet many of us are just like sheep. We want to go our own way!
- We pull and pull until finally we break away from the rope and end up destroying our lives in the field of sin!
- Illustration: Uncle Larry – a man who knew the Scriptures – a man who was a youth pastor. Got away from the Lord – one of the vices he picked up was smoking. He knew it was wrong – but like sheep that went astray he stubbornly refused to give it up. It ended up destroying his life and he died a relatively young man of lung cancer.

E. Sheep need a Shepherd

- Sheep are relatively helpless animals (short sighted, fall and can’t get up, very weak, defenseless, fearful)
- The one thing that enables a sheep to survive and flourish is the care of the shepherd!
- If it were not for the tender watchful care of the shepherd – the sheep would not survive!
- The shepherd must provide guidance and direction
- The shepherd must provide protection and deliverance
- The shepherd must cleanse the sheep from filth and disease
- The shepherd must provide sustenance
- How like sheep we are! God must do all of these things with us!
- Throughout the Bible God is pictured as our provider and defender
- We see God protecting us and guiding us
- God has even provided “undershepherds” to meet our needs in a visible and tangible way! (OT – Priests and Prophets; NT- Pastors and Elders)

F. Sheep know the voice of their Shepherd

- One last parallel found in John chapter 10 – sheep know the voice of the shepherd and respond to it!
- Bible Times – one large corral and many flocks of sheep. In the morning the shepherds would come and one by one they would stand at the entrance and call their sheep. All the sheep milling around would hear the voice – but only the sheep who belonged to the shepherd would respond

- As they came to the shepherd they would pass beneath his staff and he would count them. Invariably he would be missing a sheep or two and he would wander through the mingling sheep until he spotted the identifying mark (usually on their ears) and he would take his staff and with the crook he would nudge or sometimes drag the wayward sheep to rest of his flock.
- Every one of us as God's sheep know the voice of God when he speaks.
- There are times when we do not respond to His voice – but it is usually not because we did not hear it or recognize it – it is because we did not want to do what He asked to do!
- From time to time in your life – maybe even this morning – God has spoken to your heart about a particular matter. Perhaps a sin that is in your life. Perhaps a job or a calling that He wants you to surrender to – and just like a sheep – you continue to mill around the flock as though God had never spoken to you!
- Then God must take his staff and come and find you and nudge you or even drag you to the place where you need to be!

III. The Point of Focus: on the Pastor or Shepherd

A. Our shepherd presented as the Good Shepherd who purchased the sheep: John 10; Psalm 22

- He is called the Good Shepherd, for one reason – he gave his life for the sheep!
He purchased them with his blood!

Philip Keller “I truly belong to Him simply because He has bought me again at the incredible price of His own laid-down life and shed blood! Therefore he was entitled to say, ‘I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.’”

“I recall quite clearly how in my first venture with sheep, the question of paying a price for my lambs was so terribly important. They belonged to me only by virtue of the fact that I paid hard cash for them. It was money earned by the blood, sweat, and tears drawn from my own body during the desperate grinding years of the depression. And when I bought that first small flock, I was buying them literally with my own body which had been laid down with this day in mind. Because of this I felt in a special way that they were in very truth a part of me and I a part of them. There was an intimate identity involved which, though not apparent on the surface to the casual observer, made those thirty lambs exceeding precious to me! BUT the day I bought them, I also realized that this was but the first stage in a long ongoing endeavor in which, as their owner, I would have to continually lay down my life for them if they were to flourish and prosper – for you see- sheep do not ‘just take care of themselves!’ They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care!”