

The Shepherd's Care

~Nelson Yoder

Psalm 23 may well be the best-known Psalm today and yet it may hold many deeper concepts that are missed by people who have not been a shepherd or never owned sheep. I first came to recognize the deeper meaning in Psalm 23 when asked to give a topic on this Psalm. The topic time length was to be about 45 minutes and I wondered what I would be sharing for 45 minutes that was not the same as we have always heard. Well I came across a book entitled *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, by Philip Keller. I want to give him credit for many things that I learned about sheep and shepherding.

Ways the Shepherd cares for me.

Verse two says, speaking of the shepherd, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." Now for sheep to lie down there are four requirements.

1. Sheep must be free from fears.

If an animal like a jackrabbit runs toward the sheep they will easily spook and sometimes stampede in fear. They must feel free from this fear before they will lie down. Are we allowing the Shepherd to protect us from the fears or do we stampede in fear running from the Shepherd? Instead 1 Peter 5:7 calls us to *"cast all our cares upon Him for He careth for you."*

2. The sheep must be free from friction with other sheep.

If there is friction in the flock the sheep will not lie down and rest. In fact it sometimes seriously affects their health because they don't eat much and won't rest. It is the shepherd who works to bring peace to the flock of sheep for the good of his flock.

What about us? Are we allowing the Shepherd to bring rest and peace in our relationships with others? Matthew 5:9 says *"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."*

3. The sheep must be free from pests.

Sometimes bugs and small insects torment the sheep and there is even one insect that will lay eggs on the sheep's nose. It is called the nose fly. These eggs will hatch in just a few days into a larva like creature that will burrow its way up inside the sheep's head and cause terrible pain to the sheep. Sometimes a sheep in such torment will go crazy trying to get rid of the pest even to the point of ramming its head against trees and can even kill itself from such destruction of its head hitting the trees. God promises that we can have deliverance from pests today. Psalms 91:2-3 says *"I will say of the Lord He is my refuge and my fortress my God in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence."*

4. The sheep must be free from hunger.

A sheep that is hungry will not lie down till it has been well fed. God calls us today to find our hunger met in Him. Isaiah 55:1-2 says *"Ho every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money come ye, buy and eat; yea come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which*

satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

In each of these four requirements for sheep, the shepherd plays a role in providing for the sheep. He clears the area of small animals that would spook his sheep. He tries to bring peace between his sheep. He does his best to deal with the pests that would torment his sheep. He also leads his sheep to the green pastures where there is rich green grass for them to feed upon.

Our Jesus does these things perfectly. We do have part to play in this though. Verse 1 says "the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Have you made this commitment and are you committed to hold it fast that no man takes your crown?

We noticed four ways the shepherd cares for his sheep in making them to lie down in green pastures. He brings freedom from fear, friction with others, pests, and freedom from hunger. Now we will continue looking at verse two. *"He leads me beside still waters."*

Sheep have a body that is composed of about 70% water. This means that water is crucial to the animal's survival. A shepherd will work hard to provide his sheep with good clean water. He leads them to streams where there is water or bails water out of a well for the sheep. The sheep also can receive water from eating grass that is soaked with dew in the early morning. When a sheep is not getting enough water it becomes thirsty. This is a sign that the sheep needs to quench its thirst. A sheep that is thirsty will sometimes start to drink from dirty puddles of water. This water often is contaminated with bugs and parasites that are harmful to the sheep. These sheep have become restless and thirsty and therefore have to drink from these filthy puddles.

Our good Shepherd Jesus Christ has done much to provide clean fresh water for our thirsty souls. Jesus stood and cried out in John 7:37-38. *"If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me as the scripture hath said out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."* Jesus has died for us and He provides what we need in Him to quench our thirst as Colossians 2: 10 says, *"And ye are complete in Him."*

Jesus did not say if you are thirsty stop being thirsty, He does not call us to squelch our thirst. Instead He said *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled."* Let us not be as the thirsty sheep that turn to the dirty, harmful water to try to satisfy the thirst of our souls.

There is a part that the Shepherd does here. *"He leadeth me beside the still waters."* He is faithful in providing the still waters. Our part is to take these living waters into our lives. There is a saying you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink. Whether we drink of the living waters or not is a choice we each make.

~Ephrata PA