

Call to Obedience #461
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The Lord Is My Shepherd

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Beloved of the Christ, the Messiah, the only Savior of the world:

Today, let us examine the shepherd's Psalm (Ps. 23:1-6). I know of no six verses of the Bible that promise us more than those verses of this Psalm. But before we can claim these promises, let us consider that for any promise offered by heaven, there must be corresponding right conditions on earth for the promise to be fulfilled. In other words, almost every promise God makes to man is conditional on man's behavior and relationship with Him.

So here we are in Psalm 23 where God promises everything to His sheep: everything we need to be blessed in the present and for all eternity. But that is conditional: provided that we are truly His sheep. We must realize that millions of people who claim these promises are deceived into thinking that they are sheep when indeed they are goats. The Bible teaches us that there are both sheep and goats. We are either one or the other. We learn this from one of Jesus's judgment parables: *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left* (Matt. 25:31-33).

There we have it, my friend. Sheep go to heaven; and as we read at the end of this parable, we see that goats go to hell: *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal* (Matt. 25:46). Jesus said that the way to life is narrow *...and few there be that find it* (Matt. 7:14). From this, we see that only a few will be saved. There are only a few who are sheep. Are you a sheep or goat? In chapter 25 of Matthew, Jesus then proceeds to describe some of the differences between sheep and goats. His sheep are selfless because they have crucified their self life. They feed the hungry..., clothe the naked, visit the sick and those who are in prison (verses 35-36). By living for others, His sheep also live for their Shepherd. They bring His love, His care, His light and His truth to others. His sheep find great joy in doing so and because of that, they harvest all the promises of Psalm 23!

On the other hand, goats are self-assertive. They have their plans and they pursue them relentlessly and mercilessly. They are never satisfied with the green pastures the shepherd leads them to because goats are never satisfied with anything for very long. Goats chew on everything. I have seen a goat chew on wood, on leather and on coal. Goats are destroyers; they are fighters and they do not want to be led. Sinners, carnal believers and backsliders are like goats. They chew on everything: meaning they criticize, judge and find fault with nearly everything. They like to argue, debate and disagree. They do not want to lose their life. Jesus spoke that he who saves his life shall lose it and he who loses his life for His sake shall find it.

Are you a sheep or a goat? Is Psalm 23 for you? Can you count on its promises? My friend, wherever you are, I have great news for you: if you are a goat, you can become a sheep. Jesus Christ is the great transformer. He came into the world to change goats into sheep. Repent of your sins, turn away from your sins and get to Jesus who is the door leading into His sheepfold. Begin to follow Him wherever He leads you from now on. That is all there is to it. Once you are one of His sheep, you can receive all the blessings of Psalm 23. Now let us cover this chapter verse by verse:

Verse 1. *The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing* (NET). How is this for a starter? Once you are under His care, you are under His care. His presence is always with you. Your needs and conditions are always known to Him and He provides (not what you want but what you need). Only He knows what you need and He will never spoil or ruin you.

Verse 2. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures*. He sees to it that you get the rest you need and His choice for your rest will always be in the life of abiding in Him. *He leadeth me beside the still waters*. The shepherd leads his sheep to the food they are to eat and to the waters they are to drink. It is all good. As the sheep follow him, they consume nothing that is hurtful or weakening: leading to sickness, discouragement, disbelief or doubt. When you allow Jesus to be your Shepherd and feast on what He provides, He will always help you to be in top spiritual condition. Some of you spend time watching television programs, reading books, going to movies, engaging in sports events or other types of entertainment. You may have certain relationships with others. Has the Lord led you into these activities or situations? Are they *green pastures* and *still waters* for your soul? If they are not, they will lead to lukewarmness, to leanness of soul and eternal damnation at the end. Are you really allowing the Lord to be your Shepherd? Are you getting the point?

Verse 3. *He restores my soul* (ESV). He knows that we need frequent restorations, renewals and refreshings in the spirit. Do not ever believe that you can get by on one experience in the Holy Spirit that will last you forever. *He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake* (ESV). Once you are one of His sheep, you will be led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me* (John 10:27). So, once you are one of His sheep, you stop following your own ideas, impulses and preferences. You look to Him for direction in everything that you do and you will live a life of holiness. Holiness is not so much a matter of rules but rather of following the Shepherd.

Verse 4. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* You will no longer fear death. The one who leads you in your life is the one who will send angels to carry you across the great divide into the actual throne room of God. In every danger coming your way, He will hold your hand. With His rod and staff, He will protect you and drive away the enemy. God will take care of you.

Verse 5. *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.* Even when you are in enemy territory and the enemy is all about tormenting you, mocking you and striking you, your Shepherd will still be preparing a table before you. At no time will it be just a cheese and cracker table event, but always a five course meal of spiritual riches at every location. Your Lord has a catering service for His children and that even includes you, my friend. He always delivers on time and He is able to deliver through enemy lines as well. He is able to deliver your spiritual meal when you are in prison, on the sickbed or forsaken by all. Just remember when Paul and Silas were locked up in the inner prison. At the midnight hour, God sent His catering service to their place of darkness and served them a delicious meal of heavenly delicacies. It made them happier than the king in his palace. Oh, my friend, Jesus knows how to lay tables and He knows what kind of meal you need. Do not lay your own table. That will bring death. Let Him do it for you.

But not only does Jesus prepare a table for you in the presence of your enemies, He lays a table for you every day of your life. Every morning when you awaken, He has a table of His riches prepared for you. But all of His riches do you no good if you do not sit down and wait for Him to serve you. He will serve you one thing at a time and you must consume it slowly with much praise and adoration. There is a place for spiritual table manners, my friend. You must not

gulp it all down in a few bites like a wild pig. Remember, you are a sheep. Sheep are grazers and not gulpers. And when Jesus is there serving you, He is also there to feast with you, to have fellowship with you and to commune with you.

Jesus wants you to be part of His flock. Do not miss or skip the breakfasts your Shepherd has for you each day. If you allow sufficient time for it, once you have consumed it and only after you have had the last bite of it, *He will anoint your head with oil and your cup will be running over*. You will not receive this anointing for your daily life by claiming it, by naming it or crying out loud to get it. You will not receive it by just reading the Bible. The Pharisees spent a lot of time reading the Bible, but they were still without the anointing. You receive it only by feasting from Him and with Him. It is here at His table that you become ready to face whatever the day may bring your way in ministries, battles and challenges. It is here where you become tuned-in to pursue His perfect and acceptable will. It is here where you calibrate your spiritual instruments before you take off. Every pilot has to verify that his flight instruments are calibrated before he takes off. Not to do so can lead to disaster.

So, first comes the feast, then follows the anointing and then your *cup will run over*, meaning you will have so much of this heavenly stuff that you are constrained to share it with others. Your timidity in witnessing will come to an end. From then on, you cannot help but speak the things that you have experienced with your Lord. The word of God will be within you as a hammer that breaks rocks into pieces or as a fire burning in your soul.

My friend, so it is with His sheep. They live this way and are happy this way. And at the end of each day, they kiss their Master on His cheek before they rest their head on the pillow of His love.

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