

The Good & Great Shepherd

Psalm 23

Introduction: God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Nearly 2000 years ago, **The Good Shepherd** gave his life for the sheep by dying on the cross and paying the price for our sins. But He was not going to stay in the grave. He would rise from the dead; give us instructions on what to do until He came again to gather His sheep to be with Him forever. In the meantime, **Christ, our Great Shepherd** is living in the hearts of believers to guide us and protect us.

The 23rd Psalm was written by a shepherd and every aspect of the psalm relates to how a shepherd cares for his sheep. Psalm 23 is written from a “**sheep’s-eye view**” of their Shepherd. The 23rd Psalm can help you love and trust Jesus Christ as your personal shepherd.

Verse One: With Christ as our personal shepherd, we can be sure that He has thought of our every need and is prepared to be our all-in-all. We can say,

- “I shall be fed and cared for.”
- “I shall be guided and protected.”
- “I shall not be forgotten.”
- “I shall be content with my shepherd.”
- “Jesus Christ is enough for me.”

Jesus said, “**My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.**” (John 10:27-28) We should follow Christ, as good sheep follow their shepherd.

Verses Two & Three: Sheep need to lie down after eating. Why? They have two stomachs. They chew their cud and need peace and quiet. They just can’t “eat and run.”

Sheep can't lie down & rest unless these conditions are met:

- Not afraid of predators / enemies
- No friction with other sheep
- No flies / pests bothering them
- No worries about hunger

Jesus, like a shepherd, can take care of every problem in our life, so that we can have joy and peace in a world full of problems. Through Christ, we can be free from worry and fear.

Sheep need clean fresh water, where they can safely drink (still water). Jesus wants us to be filled with His Word, which is like water that refreshes our minds and hearts.

Our Psalm tells us that "He restores our souls." Sometimes sheep fall over and end up on their backs, unable to get up. The shepherd watches for this and gently gets them back on their feet. Jesus also watches for us when we fail or get ourselves into a mess that we can't fix. He gets us back on our feet when we fall. He puts us on the paths of righteousness, so that we don't keep falling over and over.

Verses Four – Six: In the spring, the sheep graze in the lower pastures, near the ranch. But in the summer, they head to the higher pastures in the mountains. To get there the sheep must travel through dangerous ravines / valleys, but the shepherd finds safe paths & protects them.

Jesus has things for us to learn and do. In leading us to "higher ground," we too will face dangers and difficulties. Jesus will guide and protect us. He will never forsake us.

When our Psalm says that "**He prepares a table before us,**" this is referring to a big flat area of land (called "table land" – Spanish "mesa"). The sheep can stay in the middle, grazing safely, while predators are kept at a distance. The world is full of dangers, but Jesus will keep us and preserve us.

The **oil** the shepherd uses on the heads of the sheep is a special mixture that is used like ointment – to heal and to comfort the sheep from the irritations of flies and parasites. The ointment also serves as a repellent to keep pests away. It is not always the big problems that take us down. Sometimes it's the many little things that bother us. Jesus understands and will help us with any problem. See I Peter 5:7.

When it turns fall and it is getting colder, it is time to come down from the mountains and return to the ranch / lower pastures. Frost and early snows can make the sheep cold and numb. The shepherd has mixed wine and water together, so that it can be put in a **cup** for the sheep to drink and get a warm boost, so that they can keep moving. Over and over Christ will warm us and motivate us through the promises of His word, assuring us of His love. He will never leave nor forsake us. See John 6:63; Ephesians 3:14-19; II Peter 1:2-4.

When the sheep arrive home at the ranch, they have a relationship with the shepherd that is stronger and closer than ever. They love Him and trust Him and will follow Him where ever He leads.

- Is Jesus Christ your personal Lord and Savior?
- Do you trust Him / follow Him?
- Do you feed on His Word?
- Can you say, with the Apostle Paul –

“...The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”
(II Timothy 4:18)

Benediction: Hebrews 13:20-21 – “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Note: Much of the technical information about the shepherd and his care of the sheep was obtained from the excellent book by Phillip Keller, “A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23” (Zondervan).