

LET US PRAY... "May the words —

REFLECTS ON

A Layman ~~looks at~~ the
23rd Psalm

①

O.T. - The 23rd Psalm
N.T. - John 10/ 11 - 16

Much of the language, terminology and teaching in the Bible is couched in what could be called "rural language". ~~dealing with outdoor subjects and natural phenomena. The audience for whom these writings were originally addressed were, for the most part, people familiar with nature outdoor life the countryside about them.~~

But, today many who read the Bible and study the Scriptures come from urban ~~the~~ ~~environment~~ and backgrounds. City people ~~are~~ unfamiliar with such subjects as ~~the~~ crops, ~~the~~ fruit trees, ~~and~~ - **AND SHEEP.**



~~Understanding~~ Understanding a familiar portion of the Scriptures particularly one as beloved as The 23rd Psalm is difficult. To do this ^(THIS MORNING) I would ask you to ^{TO THINK WITH THE MIND OF A SHEEP} ~~be~~ ~~with an open mind~~ ~~that~~ ^{AND SHOULD YOU A DETTER} ~~allow~~ ^(IT'S) insight concerning its author and ^{FOR} meaning. Hopefully, you will leave here this morning with a greater appreciation ^{FOR} the endless care and love our Savior, Jesus has for us. ~~His sheep... God's~~ So, let's look at the 23rd Psalm starting with...

"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD"

Source

"If Shepherd Looks at PSALM 23"
- Phillip Keller
2nd
"Who's Who IN THE Bible"
an illustrated Biographical Dictionary
- Reader's Digest.

HE WAS ALSO A WARRIOR, MUSICIAN, OUTLAW,
FAITHFUL FRIEND, EMPIRE BUILDER, SINNER,
SAINT, FAILED FATHER AND IDEAL KING.

2

David, the author of the 23rd Psalm, as you know, was a shepherd. He was the son of a shepherd. He stated emphatically "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD" He referred to Jahova, The Lord God of Isreal. His statement was confirmed by Jesus many years later. When He was God ~~among~~ ^{EMANUEL - WITH} us He declared " I am the Good Shepherd."

DAVID CONTINUES " I SHALL NOT WANT"

~~Obviously, this is a statement of a sheep totally satisfied with the shepherd who watches over it. It is perfectly content with its life. And, as christians we too should be utterly content in our Good Shepherd's care.~~

It may seem a strange statement for ~~a man~~ ~~like~~ David to make when we think in terms of ~~just physical or material needs.~~ ^{NOT HERE} ~~He~~ was a man who had been hounded repeatedly by the forces of his arch enemy Saul, as well as those of his own estranged son Absalom. David was a man who had known intense privation, deep personal poverty, acute hardship and anguish of spirit. Therefore, it is somewhat unrealistic to assert, on the basis of this statement, that we, as children of God...sheep in the Good Shepherd's care, would ever experience lack or need. But, consider the lives of Elijah, John The Baptist, even our Lord Jesus Himself and people of faith ~~through~~ ^{DOWN THROUGH HISTORY.} All of them experienced great personal privation and adversity ^{AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER.}

~~It is for this very reason that we Christians must know that we may experience a lack of material benefits. We must realize that~~
 our sojourn on this planet is but a brief interlude during which there ~~could be some~~ ^{ARE} troubled times. ~~In fact, it's a downright certainty.~~ Yet, we must remember that under our Good Shepherd's care we shall not want.

"HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN
 IN GREEN PASTURES"

Due to their nature it almost impossible for sheep to lie down unless four requirements are met.

1. ~~Because they are~~ ^{SHEEP} Timid by nature, ~~they~~ refuse to lie down unless they are free of fear.
2. Due to the "social behavoir" within the the flock, sheep will not lie down unless they are ~~free~~ free of any friction with others of their kind, ~~no hostility or hatred.~~
3. If tormented by flies or parasites sheep will not lie down. Only when these pests have been eliminated will the sheep relax.
4. Sheep will not lie down as long as they are hungry and ~~feel~~ feel the need to search for food. They must be free from hunger.

~~The unique aspect of this picture is that~~
 Only the shepherd can provide release from these
 anxieties. ~~A~~ ^{A SHEEP} ~~sheep~~ that is restless,
 discontented, agitated or disturbed for any
 reason will not do well. ~~And, so it is with~~
~~us Christians.~~ For Christians there is no
 substitute for the keen awareness of our Good
 Shepherd. When we realize His closeness to us ~~the~~
 the fear, the panic, the terror of the unknown
 black holes of life evaporate. ~~the~~ ~~of~~
~~our misfortunes there comes a~~ ~~new~~ ~~awareness~~
~~that Jesus is in danger of~~ ~~being~~ ~~there~~ ~~to~~ ~~care~~
~~for us and things are not as bad and bleak~~
~~anymore. Our outlooks change and there is hope.~~
~~We are delivered from our fears and torments.~~
~~Rest and restoration return~~ ~~and we are able to~~
~~rise up and meet the challenges we face.~~

"HE LEADETH ME
 BESIDE THE STILL WATERS"

Although sheep thrive in dry, or semi-arid
 country, they still need water. Without
~~adequate~~ ^{ADEQUATE} ~~adequate~~ water dehydration sets in. This ~~can~~ ^{CAN}
 result in serious damage to a flock. So, sheep
 in the pasture, and we sheep in the Kingdom need
 watering physically and spiritually. ~~The~~
~~scriptures point this out very clearly.~~ Our
 souls have need for the ~~eternal~~ ^{holy} water of the
 Spirit that flows from our eternal God.

When sheep ~~are~~ thirsty they become restless ~~as they search for water~~. If not lead ~~by~~ ^{BY} ~~the~~ ^{SHEEP} shepherd to ~~the~~ clear, cool water ~~they~~ will often end up drinking from polluted holes where they pick up all sorts of parasites and diseases

In the same manner, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, made it clear that thirsty souls can only be fully satisfied when their thirst for spiritual life is fully quenched by drinking in the essence of life in Christ. In Mathew 5/6 He said "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." At the great feast in Jerusalem He boldly declared, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." ~~He said that~~ We should accept and assimilate the very life of God in Christ to the point where it becomes part of us.

When David composed the 23rd Psalm he knew that his God alone ~~could lead him to~~ ^{COULD LEAD HIM TO} the still, quiet deep, clear, pure water for the soul ~~and~~ and he drank from it continually....

Sheep can go for months on end without water if the weather is not too hot and if there is heavy dew on the grass each morning. Sheep, by ~~their~~ nature, rise just before dawn and start to feed on the vegetation which is drenched with dew. ~~They~~ ^{Sheep} can keep fit on the amount of water taken in with their forrage when they graze just before or right after dawn.

And so it is with ~~STAGE / WHEN ONE RISES~~
~~AND TURNS TO THE SCRIPTURES~~
 early each day to feed on, and drink in God's
 word. It is in the quiet, early morning hours
 that ~~they~~ ^{WE} are led beside the still waters and
 drink in the very life of Christ to carry ~~them~~ ^{US}
 through the day.

HE RESTORETH MY SOUL

~~As we think together about the 23rd Psalm,~~
~~we must remember that it is a sheep in the~~
~~shepherd's care who is speaking. ~~Some~~ We would~~
 assume that anyone in our Good Shepherd's care
~~would~~ never become so distressed in soul as to
 need restoration. But, the fact remains that it
 does happen.

Even David, author of the 23rd Psalm, who was
 much loved by God, knew what it was to be "cast
down" and dejected. He had known defeat in his
 life. He had felt the frustration of having
 fallen under the temptation of evil. ^(MANY TIMES) David was
 tormented with bitterness...with hopelessness
 and without strength himself. ~~In the 12th Psalm~~
~~12th verse he writes...~~
~~disquieted within me...~~

~~Those~~ Those acquainted with sheep and their
 nature understand the significance of a "cast
down" sheep. It's an old English term for a
 sheep that has turned over on its back and can't
 get up again. It happens like this...a heavy,
 or long-fleeced sheep will lie down comfortably

in a ~~hollow~~ hollow or depression in the ground. It may roll on its side slightly to stretch out and relax. ~~In doing so~~ Suddenly the sheep's center of gravity shifts ~~so that~~ ^{AND} it rolls over completely on its back far enough that its feet can no longer touch the ground. A sense of panic sets in and the sheep begins to frantically paw the air. ~~This usually makes things worse.~~ ~~It rolls over even further.~~ Now, it's impossible for the sheep to regain its feet ^(THE SHEPHERD'S) without help ~~from the shepherd.~~

~~We must realize that~~ As Children of God we can experience "Cast down" periods in our lives. ~~But, our Good Shepherd is there for us.~~ We can rest assured that ^(OUR GOOD SHEPHERD) ~~He~~ will never expect us to face more than we can stand. ~~But, what He does~~. We can do all things with God who strengthens us. ~~He is our Good Shepherd and~~ ~~can be assured that He knows what He's doing.~~ Our souls are refreshed and restored in Him.

"HE LEADETH ME IN THE
PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
FOR HIS NAMESAKE"

Sheep are notorious creatures of habit. If left to themselves they will follow the same trails until they become ruts; graze the same hills until they become desert wastes; pollute their own ground until it is diseased with parasites. Many of the world's finest sheep ranges have been ruined beyond recovery by over **GRAZING,**

~~FLOCK~~
 AND poor management, ~~indifferent sheep owners and~~
 poor shepherding. The consequence of such
 mismanagement and indifference is that the
 sheep gnaw the grass into the ground to a point
 where even the roots are damaged.

The wise shepherd ~~knows this and~~ keeps the
 flock on the move from pasture to pasture. This
 prevents overgrazing and rutted trails. ~~In short~~
~~it makes for~~ ~~healthier and more contented sheep.~~
 THIS RESULTS IN

~~Examining this from the human aspect there~~
~~are parallels.~~ Our behavior patterns are so
 much like ~~(SHEEP)~~ sometimes that it becomes downright
 embarrassing. Isaiah 53/6 says " All we like
sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone
to his own way."...and we do this deliberately,
 repeatedly even to our own disadvantage. ~~But~~
 down through the ages echoes the words ~~of our~~ ~~(BUT)~~
 Good Shepherd ~~who~~ ~~He~~ tells us in John 14/6...
 " I am the way, the truth and the life. No man
comes unto the Father but by me." ~~And in John~~
~~10/10 He tells us...~~ " I am come that ye may have
~~life and have it more abundantly.~~ Amid our
 daily chaos and confusion Jesus, our ~~Good~~ ~~Shepherd~~ ~~us~~
~~shepherd~~ ~~says~~ ~~to~~ ~~us~~ ~~in~~ ~~Mark~~ ~~8/34...~~ " If anyone
will follow me, let him deny himself daily and
take up his cross and follow me . ~~With~~ ~~Him~~
 into the future. ~~He wants this,~~ not only for our
 own personal wellbeing, but also for the benefit
 of our loved ones. Our examples provide others
 with a path to follow.
 (GOD CHRISTIAN)

WE ARE
 INVITED
 TO WALK

"YEA, THOUGH I WALK
THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW
OF DEATH I WILL FEAR NO EVIL ~~FOR~~ THOU ART WITH ME."

Up to now the sheep have received excellent care on the home range ^(AND IN THE SHEEPFOLD) throughout the winter and spring months. ~~But~~ Now it's time for the long trek into the high country...to their summer grazing plateau. ~~The summer will be spent in close companionship and solitary care of the shepherd.~~ During this time the flock is entirely under the personal ^(CARE AND) attention of the shepherd day and night. ~~This is why the last verses of the 23rd Psalm are couched in such first person ~~terms~~ ^(DAVID) knew from experience all about the dangers and difficulties, as well as the delights, of the treks into the beautiful meadows of the high country.~~

In our Christian walk we ~~often speak of wanting to move onto a higher relationship with God. We~~ long to rise and live above the low lands of life. We want to move up out of the ~~the~~ dark valleys up into a more intimate walk with God. ~~We speak of mountain top experiences.~~ We envy those who have ascended ^{THOSE} the heights and entered into a more sublime way of Christian living. ~~Sometimes we wish we could be "air lifted" up onto higher ground.~~ But, on the rough trail of life this is not always so. As with ordinary sheep management

so it is with us ~~God's children~~. We can only gain higher ground by climbing the rough, rocky trail out of the valley. The Good Shepherd leads us gently, firmly and persistently up through the dark and treacherous ~~path~~ CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE to more abundant living. It is well to note here that we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. It does not say that we ~~stop~~ there, or ~~stay~~ there. LIFE'S Lead by the Good Shepherd we walk through trials and tribulations. The Good Shepherd tells us "Lo I am with you always." What a comfort that is!

For those of us who remain here on earth, there is still a life to live here and now. There will be valleys to walk through, ~~disappointments~~ disappointments, lonely days and nights. But, our Good Shepherd helps us with loving care and guidance ^{leads} brings us to higher ground and better days.

"THY ROD AND THY STAFF
THEY COMFORT ME"

Some modern day shepherds carry rifles and staffs. In David's day the rifle was a sturdy rod. The rod was what you might call an extension of the shepherd's right arm. And, as in David's case a sling shot came in handy. The rod stood as a symbol of his strength, power and authority in any dangerous or serious situation. It was also AN INSTRUMENT OF INSTRUCTION AND DISCIPLINE TO CORRECT ANY

wayward, wandering sheep. Sheep sense the shepherd's rod and staff to be a source of assistance, comfort and protection.

The rod speaks to us ~~Christians~~ signifying the power and divinity of God almighty. It carries with it the convincing power and impact of the words... "Thus sayeth the Lord!" or "Be still, and know that I am God!"

We live in an era of numerous confusing and conflicting philisophies ~~AND THEOLOGIES~~. It is reassuring to us ~~us~~ God's children, under the care of the Good Shepherd, to turn to the Word of God and know it as His hand of authority...a clear cut powerful manual of operations for our lives. There is no substitute for the Scriptures in coping with the complexities of our present day social order.

The shepherd's staff is emblematic of the Sprit of God. There is an essence of sweetness, comfort and gentle correction brought about by the guidance of the ever-present Holy Spirit. The shepherd uses his staff to move the flock together...to gently lift a newborn lamb and bring it to its mother should they become separated.

As Christians we find the Holy Spirit... the Comfortor, drawing us together in warm Christian fellowship with each other. The Holy Spirit draws us to Christ. We are told explicitly in the Scriptures by Jesus ~~himself~~ ^{HIMSELF}

that He would send His Holy Spirit to guide us and lead us unto all truth. ~~It is this same Holy Spirit that takes the truth...the word of God and makes it plain to our hearts and minds and spiritual understanding.~~ He gently, yet firmly says to us..." This is the way... my way...walk in it. ~~As~~ As we comply and cooperate with Him and respond to His gentle promptings, a sense of safety and wellbeing envelopes us.

" HE PREPAREST A

TABLE BEFORE ME "

IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES"

In some of the finest sheep country in the world, especially in the western United States and southeastern Europe, the high plateau of sheep ranges are referred to as mesas...the Spanish word for "table". ~~These~~ ^{BUT-} These mesas may ~~BE~~ ^{TAKES} been remote and hard to reach, the energetic, aggressive shepherd ~~spends~~ the time and trouble to prepare the mesas or "tables" for the arrival of the flock. He will make a preliminary survey trip up through the rough trail to the flat grazing land...the mesa. There, sometimes observed by the sheep's enemies wolves, cougars, wildcats, he lays out a good summer-long supply of salt and minerals at strategic spots for the benefit of the sheep during the hot summer months.

The parallel in the Christian life is clear.
~~We sometimes do things that cause us problems.~~
 We need to remember that our Good Shepherd has been there ahead of us coping with every situation and condition that would cause us harm. Our Lord wants our mountain top, high country, mesa experiences to be tranquil.
~~experiences of the high country.~~ And, they will be if we ~~have the common sense to~~ stay near Him where He can protect us. We must read and heed His Word each day. WE MUST Talk with Him. Listen to Him. Be still and give Him the opportunity to communicate with us...to guide us by His Holy Spirit.

"THOU ANNOINTEST
 MY HEAD WITH OIL
~~MY CUP RUNNETH OVER."~~

Summer time in the high country is fly and pesky insect time. Hords of ~~the little~~ THEM! ~~beasties~~ emerge with the warm weather (AND DESCEND ON THE FLOCK) to make the life of a sheep miserable. Insect attacks on the flock can easily turn a golden summer of pleasurable, tranquil grazing into an agonizing time of continuous torture for the sheep, ~~and drive them~~ ~~crazy~~. For relief sheep will beat their heads against rocks, tree trunks or posts. They will rub their heads on the ground. In extreme cases sheep have been known to kill themselves in a FRENZIED ~~frantic~~ effort to find relief from the insects bites.

~~All this agitation and excitement has a devastating effect on the flock.~~

~~At the first sign of insects among the flock~~ An observant, caring shepherd applies a balm or salve to their heads and snouts. In David's time the remedy for this infestation was olive oil mixed with sulphur and spices. One by one the shepherd would pour this mixture over the heads and snouts of the sheep using a cup or bowl and dipping into the large vat of ^(THE) mixture. Most times the cup or bowl would be filled to overflowing as ^(THE SHEPHERD) ~~the~~ ^(POURED) pouring the ointment. So, now we know what David was referring to when he wrote "Thou annointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over." **After** the "annointing" of the sheep there **would** be a calming **change** in the flock. No more frenzied behavior to rid themselves of the insects. The **sheep** would return to quiet grazing.

In our lives the continuous annointing of God's gracious Holy Spirit ~~is~~ helps us counteract and overcome the ever-present agrivations and temptations of our daily lives. Some contend that a **Christian** needs only one ~~initial~~ initial annointing of God's spirit. But, the frustrations and delimeas of our daily lives ~~that try our souls~~ demonstrate that we must have His continual annointing if we are to quiet our troubled minds and hearts.

"SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY
SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE
DAYS OF MY LIFE"

~~Here David makes one brave statement.~~

Sheep with a good, protecting shepherd know that no matter what comes the shepherd's goodness and mercy toward them will protect them.

But, there are times that test our confidence in the constant care of Christ, ^(OUR GOOD SHEPHERD) when the chips are down...the loss of a loved one...the loss of a good job...when ^(OUR) plans and everything ^(IN OUR LIVES) ~~seem to~~

^(SEEM TO) come unglued and fall apart...when there seems to be no future ^(FOR US) we sometimes have trouble with the fact that God's goodness and mercy does follow us . With our limited understanding of His Holy Ways we cannot always comprehend His infinite wisdom. With our natural tendencies to fear and worry it's not always easy for us to understand that God does follow us in goodness and mercy. If we think back on the good times and the bad, His management of our affairs, in His time frame, has picked us up and carried us back to His fold with great tenderness and ^(COMPASSION) ~~compassion~~. Isaiah 40/31 says it well.

" They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not grow weary; they shall walk and not faint. Teach me Lord to wait."

"AND I SHALL DWELL IN
THE HOUSE OF THE LORD
FOREVER"

~~The 23rd Psalm opens with the proud, joyous, positive statement... "The Lord is my Shepherd", and it closes with an equally positive, bouyant statement. From the outlook of the sheep they are so utterly satisfied, so fully contented, so much at home with the Shepherd that there is no desire for a change.~~

We have ~~gone~~ ^{gone} through a full year's activities in the life of ~~sheep~~ ^{the} sheep. We have gone from the green pastures and still waters of the home range, up through the trecherous mountain trail onto the tabletop highlands of the summer range. Now fall and winter approach with the storms of sleet, ^(WIND) rain and snow that drives the sheep down from the high country and back to the safety of the home range ^(AND THE SHEEPFOLD) for the long, safe quiet winter. The sheep are happy and satisfied to be home again. **CONCLUSION...**

Like the sheep, we ~~are~~ ^{AMAZED} followers of the Good Shepherd should be happy to belong to His fold. We are ~~glad~~ ^{AMAZED} to look back and recall all of the amazing ways in which He has entered our lives and provided for our wellbeing. He has seen us through the hard times, and He will continue to do so. We live surrounded by His presence He is aware of every circumstance we

encounter. He attends us with care and compassion because we are His sheep...His Children...and this will continue throughout eternity. We will dwell in His presence forever.

Let us pray...

Father God, we know that we are Your Children under the loving care of The Good Shepherd, Your Son, May this awareness allow us to so order our lives that we can rest assured that You are always with us...that Your Holy Spirit will counsel and guide us, and that we shall dwell in Your care forever....Amen.