

The Lord is my Shepherd

Bible Readings: Psalm 23 and John 10 v 11-30

The shepherd motif is the primary pastoral image presented in scripture, and although most of us have not and do not reside on farms or work with sheep, the theme resonates powerfully in our minds. For this and other reasons, Psalm 23 has always been such a precious and deeply personal assurance and blessing to believers down through the centuries. Yet, we must be careful not to view this pastoral scene through romantic, idyllic, and nostalgic eyes that exclude the biblical teaching that puts shepherding alongside kingship specifically, and leadership more generally. Thus, in scripture, Jacob acknowledges that God himself has been his shepherd throughout his long life, and King David, called from his shepherding duties in Bethlehem, is the shepherd of his people and the prototype of the Great Shepherd to come, our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Prophet Ezekiel excoriates the useless and evil leaders of Israel who have not cared for, but rather ill-treated the weak and the downtrodden amongst the people. He also prophecies that God himself will come to the rescue of his people and do what the leaders of Israel have failed to do in the person of another David - great David's greater son.

This is then fulfilled as the New Testament makes clear when Matthew's gospel points to Jesus as the Son of David, and John's gospel reports Jesus calling himself 'The Good Shepherd'. So we find all that Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34 point to and promise is fulfilled and accomplished in the person and work of our Saviour.

Let us note some of the benefits and privileges we have for having God as our shepherd:

- 1) The personal dimension. We can say the Lord is *my* shepherd. He knows his sheep and we recognise the call of the shepherd. He knows and calls us by name and we hear his distinctive voice in the scriptures.
- 2) The Lord Jesus has laid down his life for the sheep. He came to save his people, those the Father has given to Him from all eternity, and He will not fail in completing that task.
- 3) Jesus has come to bring life, to restore and then strengthen his sheep. He will not let the weaker ones be lost. This does not in any way minimise our

responsibility to follow Him closely, and the psalm reminds us that He will use his 'rod' to keep us in line when required.

4) He will protect us from our evil foes. He will be with us when we go through the dark times. His calming, loving, grace-supplying presence will strengthen and uphold us. He is there by His Spirit to comfort us in our sorrows, bind up our wounds, and even carry the weakest in his arms until they regain their strength.

5) He will keep us, and will not lose one of his sheep, but bring them all, those from every tribe and nation, to his everlasting kingdom and glorious resurrection. Nobody and nothing can snatch his beloved from his hand. Our God is greater than all our enemies. He will never let us down.

What a wonderful assurance and comfort for us in tough times. It is then with praise and wonder that we sing the last verse of Psalm 23

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me;

And in God's house for evermore my dwelling place shall be.

God willing, Mike Moore will be writing next week's letter. He was due to visit next Sunday evening, but we pray that He will be able to visit us in the not too distant future. Let us continue to support him in prayer, and also the gospel work amongst Jews in Israel and throughout the world.

Pray too that this unusual time will encourage us even more in the work of making Jesus known.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen. Hebrews 13.20-21.