

I Am a Sheep, and the Lord Is My Shepherd

I've been called a lot of things, and interestingly, several things related to animals:

- I've been called a bear for being grumpy and grouchy.
- I've been called a pig for being messy and sloppy.
- I've been called a mule (or something like that) for being strong-willed and stubborn.

And I think in the 58 years of my life, I've also probably been called a rat, a weasel, and snake.

How about you? Have you been called similar animal names in your life? None of them are flattering, are they? Nor is being called a sheep. The funny thing is, I am guessing that none of us have ever been called a sheep by our family or friends ever. Yet, that's exactly what our Lord calls us. Why? Because of all the animals in the animal kingdom, that's the animal we are most like in this sinful world.

Being a sheep is not easy to admit. Who wants to confess they are a sheep? But the longer I live, the more I realize it. On my own or left to myself, I am a defenseless, wandering individual. Just like a sheep. On my own or left to myself, I am not strong enough or smart enough to resist or fight off the predators in my life – such as the devil, the world, and my sinful flesh. Just like a sheep. And if it weren't for my God and Savior, for his holy Word, and for his everlasting promises, I would be devoured. Just like a sheep. Can you relate?

Well, by God's grace, the Bible tells each of us, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Those words are music to a sheep's ears. Again, just think of this: Where would you be if he wasn't your Shepherd? Too often we think of all the bad, difficult things that befall us. But have you ever thought of all the things that don't because the Lord is shepherding you?

Read Psalm 23 with me.

¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,

He leads me beside quiet waters, ³ He restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

**⁶ Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

“The Lord is my shepherd”

God knows we are sheep, and he knows, often better than we do, how defenseless, helpless, and timid we are. Just like sheep, we don't even have enough sense to come in out of the rain. It's the truth! We speak of wandering sheep, and just think where your mind wanders with sinful thoughts. We speak of weak sheep, and just think how often you cave to sinful peer pressure. We speak of oblivious sheep, and just think how often you act with little common sense or care of consequence. Isn't it amazing that the Lord even wants us as his sheep? But because he is fully aware of the consequences of sheep without a shepherd, he cared enough to rescue us. ***“The good shepherd (laid) down his life for the sheep”*** (John 10:11). Look at the cross where the Good Shepherd died to save you from all your sin. Need anymore be said about his shepherding?

“I shall not be in want”

To put this phrase in perspective I am reminded of this story: A Sunday school teacher asked her class if anyone could recite the 23rd Psalm. One four-year-old raised her hand and started out the Psalm this way: ***“The Lord is my shepherd, and that's all I want.”*** She didn't quote it exactly but explained it perfectly. ***“I shall not be in want”*** means that we are totally content with the shepherd's care and don't want anything else. Again, just to put that in perspective, what could be greater than forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life in heaven that the Shepherd provides?

“He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside quiet waters”

Phil Keller writes in his book, [A Shepherd Looks at the 23rd Psalm](#), that for sheep to lie down a few things must happen: 1) Sheep must be free from fear, 2) they must be free from the aggravation of flies and parasites, 3) and they must be free from hunger. Now think of the reasons why many of you don't sleep well. Fear? Pesky things in your life? A hunger for something more than life gave you on a particular day? Now think of the Lord, who is your Shepherd. Is there anything that is bothering you that he hasn't already taken care or already conquered for you? Is there anything that has happened in your life that he hasn't promised to work for your good? The answers to those questions will help you sleep at night.

“He restores my soul and guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake”

You drive cattle. You don't drive sheep. You lead sheep. And that's how the Lord shepherds us. He leads the way to forgiveness and mercy. He leads the way to righteousness and holiness. He leads the way to heaven and eternity. This is the path he took in life and trailed for us all the way to heaven, and it's the path he wants us to follow. He invites us, “Come, follow me.”

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me”

I have one thing to say about this: “Christ has risen!” (Response: He has risen indeed!) Because Jesus walked through the valley of death and emerged victorious, we will too. We have nothing to fear.

“Your rod and your staff, they comfort me”

The rod was a club used to keep sheep in line. The staff was a long stick to guide and rescue the sheep. God’s Word acts the same way as the Lord shepherds us. There are times we need to be kept in line and there are times we need to be guided and rescued. The comfort is to know that the Lord is doing what he has to return us to his flock and keep us in his flock.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”

The shepherd takes his sheep to graze, and hidden behind trees and bushes, the enemy lurks. The shepherd knows this, yet he dares to feed his sheep even in the face of the enemy. That’s what is happening right here, right now. Lurking outside the walls of this sanctuary are our enemies, but our Shepherd has led us here anyway, and we dare to feed on God’s true Word. We know we are safe under his watchful eye and in his protective care.

“You anoint my head with oil”

Sheep are especially bothered by the nose fly or nasal fly. These flies buzz around the sheep’s head trying to deposit eggs on the damp nose of the sheep. So, at the beginning of fly season, the shepherd uses a mixture of olive oil, sulfur and spices and applies it to the sheep’s head. Oil is also used to cure “scab,” which is a highly contagious disease among sheep. This is God’s figurative way of saying that he knows the pests and diseases in our life, and he will provide the care and healing we need. You might recall the hymn that goes, **“Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work’s in vain, but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again. There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.”**

“My cup overflows”

There is no doubt that as defenseless and helpless as sheep are, sheep are blessed. They are blessed because of their shepherd. They have food, water, protection, love, and care. We have the same because of our Shepherd – the Good Shepherd, who is also the Bread of Life and the Fountain of Living Water and the Salvation of Souls, Jesus Christ. Truly, where would we be without him?

So there you have it. We are sheep. But we have the Shepherd, whom we personally can call “my Shepherd.” And because we do, goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life and will continue to do so all the way to heaven. Amen.