

Sermon Notes for June 6, 2010

**Sermon Series On
The 23rd Psalm
“The Tools Of The Good Shepherd”
Psalm 23:1-4**

Introduction

A. WHERE IN THE WORLD DO WE GET THE IDEA THAT BELIEVERS HAVE IT ALL TOGETHER?

1. Where did we get the idea that Christians:
 - a. should never make a mistake?
 - b. never fall into sin?
 - c. never do something they should not do?
2. **THIS IS NOT A BIBLICAL TEACHING!**
 - a. some believers think that, once we are saved, that we are no longer sinners.
 1. “I am no longer a sinner, but a saint who sins.”
 2. John Wesley’s belief in “perfectionism”
 - b. can you imagine being married to a person with such a view?

B. Scripture Is Replete With The Teaching THAT BELIEVERS WILL NEVER BE PERFECT IN THIS LIFE.

1. **Romans 7:14-18** – “We know that the law is spiritual; **but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do.** For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, **but it is sin living in me.** I know that nothing good lives in me, **that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.**”
2. **I John 2:1** – “**My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin,** we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”
3. **The 23rd Psalm**
 - a. In the 23rd Psalm, believers are described as sheep
 - b. sheep are:
 1. **directionless** – sheep do not know how to find their way home.
 2. **defenseless** – sheep have no means of protecting themselves
 3. **dirty** – sheep will allow mud, dirt and debris to weigh them down since they cannot clean themselves.
 - c. so, the teaching of the 23rd Psalm about believers is that:
 1. we are sheep!
 2. and sheep are “far from being together”

I. The SECURITY OF THE SHEPHERD

A. SHEEP NEED A SHEPHERD

1. **SHEEP MUST HAVE A CARETAKER**
 - a. unlike most animals who can care for themselves, sheep are totally dependent on their shepherd
 - b. sheep cannot feed themselves, clean themselves or protect themselves.

2. Sheep that have no caretaker **WILL EVENTUALLY DIE.**
 - a. they will not take care of themselves
 - b. they will not make it

B. BELIEVERS NEED A SHEPHERD

Vs. 1 – “The LORD is my shepherd,”

1. Despite going against every belief that independent Americans have, **BELIEVERS NEED A SHEPHERD!**
2. Based on the fact that we are spiritual sheep, left to ourselves, we will not make it.
3. The sooner that you realize that you need a shepherd, the better—**SO, GIVE IT UP!**

II. The SURETY OF THE VALLEY

A. The PLAN OF THE EARTHLY SHEPHERD

1. Every summer, the shepherd would take his flock of sheep up to the mountains where the:
 - a. grass was green and lush
 - b. the water was clear from the melted snow
 - c. the air was cool so that the sheep would not be overheated because of their thick wool.
2. On the journey from the low country to the high country, the shepherd would take his flock through a valley.
 - a. This valley could be a place of shadows and darkness
 - b. As well as a place where predators could hide
 - c. There was always the potential that the sheep could be killed while going through these valleys
 - d. Thus, these valleys could be called “the valley of the shadow of death”
3. Here, the sheep had to absolutely rest in the protection of their shepherd

B. The PLAN OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

Vs. 4 – “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,”

1. If a sheep of the Good Shepherd desires to go to the “spiritual high country,” he/she can EXPECT that he/she WILL go through the “valley of the shadow of death.”
 - a. it may be the “fear” of physical death
 1. a “possible” car wreck
 2. a bout with cancer
 3. a heart attack
 - b. but, it may be an encounter with God where He requires you to “die to self”
 1. my experience as a high school student
 2. my belief that every believer must die to self “at least once”
Romans 12:1 – “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.”
2. as a physical shepherd will take his flock to the “high country,” so will our Good Shepherd take us to the “high country,” usually through the valley of the shadow of death.

III. The SAFETY OF THE SHEPHERD

A. The DEFENSELESSNESS OF THE SHEEP

1. If a sheep goes through the valley of the shadow of death alone, that sheep has little or no chance of surviving.
2. It is simply a matter of time before “the elements” kill this solitary sheep
3. That is why the sheep not only must have a shepherd, but the shepherd himself must have the means to protect his sheep
 - a. no shepherd would attempt to protect his sheep from predators with his bare hands
 - b. every shepherd would have two means of protection
 1. a rod
 2. a staff

B. The DEFENSE OF THE SHEPHERD

1. The rod.

Vs. 4 – “your rod and your staff, they comfort me”

a. the physical

1. each shepherd made his own rod (slide)
 - a. each shepherd boy, from the early years of becoming a shepherd, takes special pride in selecting a rod suitable to his own strength and size
 - b. to find his rod, the young shepherd boy would go into the brush and select a young sapling and dig it from the ground, root and all
 - c. from this sapling, this young shepherd would carve and whittle the sapling with great care and patience so that it will fit properly in his hand
 - d. after finishing the shaping of the rod, the shepherd boy learns to throw it, so that it becomes his chief weapon of defense.
 - e. **Phillip Keller**, “I used to watch the native shepherd boys having a competition to see who could throw his rod with the greatest accuracy across the greatest distance. **The effectiveness of these crude clubs in the hands of skilled shepherd was a thrill to watch.**”

2. the rod was used in several ways by the shepherd:

a. the rod was used as a **defense against predators**

1. shepherds could become quite accurate in throwing these clubs at the sheep’s predators
2. **Phillip Keller – once in Kenya**
 “Once in Kenya, while photographing elephants, **I was being accompanied by a young Masai herder who carried a club in his hand.** We came to the crest of a hill from which we could see a herd of elephants in the thick bush below us. To drive them out into the open, we decided to dislodge a boulder and roll it down the slope. As we heaved and pushed against the great rock,

a cobra, coiled beneath it, suddenly came into view ready to strike. **In a split second, the alert shepherd boy lashed out with his rod killing the snake on the spot.** The rod never left his hand even while we worked on the rock.

- b. the rod was a tool to **evaluate sheep**
 1. as the shepherd walked by his sheep, he would often take his rod and part the wool of the sheep to see how healthy the sheep was
 2. While the sheep's wool may "look" good, it would take careful inspection to accurately see the condition of each sheep
- c. the rod was used to **"correct" the sheep**
 1. often when a sheep would leave the flock or become disobedient, the rod would be used to get the sheep's attention
 2. thus, the rod was used to "discipline" the sheep
- b. the **spiritual (the rod of the good shepherd is seen as the Word of God)**
 1. the Word of God is **used for our protection**
 - a. I find it interesting that Moses used his rod to deal with Pharaoh
 1. when he first met with Pharaoh, Moses threw his rod down and it became a snake.
 2. Moses, as well, lifted up his rod to bring on some of the plagues that were sent to Egypt
 3. Moses raised his rod as the Red Sea parted
 4. Apparently, Moses' rod represented authority, as does God's Word.
 - b. what did Jesus "use" when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness? He "used" the Word of God.
 1. when tempted by Satan to create His own food, Jesus quoted **Deuteronomy 8:3:**
Matthew 4:4 – "Jesus answered, **"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God.'"**
 2. when tempted by Satan to throw Himself down so that His heavenly father could save him, Jesus quoted **Deuteronomy 6:16:**
Matthew 4:7 – "Jesus answered him, **"It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"**
 3. When tempted to bow down and serve Satan, Jesus responded with **Deuteronomy 6:13:**
Matthew 4:10 – "Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! **For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"**

c. what does Paul call the Word of God in:

Ephesians 6:13-17 – “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the **breastplate of righteousness** in place, and with your **feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace**. In addition to all this, take up **the shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take **the helmet of salvation** and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.**”

1. all of the “other” five weapons in the Christian’s armor in Ephesians 6 are defensive
2. however, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is the only offensive weapon
3. thus, the believer should be as able and competent to use the Word as a shepherd with his rod.
 - a. as if the Word of God “fits” perfectly in our hand.
 - b. is referred to quickly, in any and every situation that faces us as believers:
 1. How can a know that a person is saved?
 2. How do I answer someone who questions who Jesus is?
 3. How can a person become a Christian?
 4. Does the Bible teach that Jesus is the only way?
2. the Word of God is used **for our perspective**
 - a. it is only when we read and mediate on the Word of God that we realize truly who God is and who we are
 1. that God is holy
 2. and that we are not
 3. you show me an arrogant Christian, and I will show you a Christian that does not read and meditate on God’s Word

4. **Hebrews 4:12-13** – “For the Word of God is living and active. **Sharper than any double-edged sword**, it **penetrates** even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; **it judges** the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. **Nothing** in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and **laid bare** before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”
 - a. **THIS IS THE BOOK THAT CHANGES US**
 - b. if believers do not spend time in this book, they will not be changed by it.
 - c. notice: “it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit; **it judges** the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”
 - b. typical seminarians
 1. they have studied God's Word (left brain) for classes
 2. many have not meditated on God's Word (right brain) for their devotional life.
 3. the end of my three years in seminary – “dry as a desert” after studying for the ministry for 3 years!
 - c. the need for spiritual discipline in our reading of the Word
 1. yes, it is a “spiritual discipline”
 2. illustration of the locomotive
 3. my preaching ministry
 - d. **Keller** – As has been said of the Scripture so often, “**This Book will keep you from sin!**” It is the Word of God that comes swiftly to our hearts, that comes with surprising suddenness to correct and reprove us when we go astray. It is the Spirit of the Living God, using the living Word, that convicts our conscience of right conduct. **In this way we are kept under control by Christ who wants us to walk in the ways of righteousness.**
3. the Word of God is used **for our punishment**
 - a. the Word of God is used of God to rebuke and correct us
II Timothy 3:16-17 – “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, **rebuking**, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (slide)
 - c. the Word must rebuke first **BEFORE** it corrects

1. **I Cor. 13:4-7 – (The Message)**

Love never gives up
 Love cares more for others than for self.
 Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
 Love doesn't strut.
 Doesn't have a swelled head.
 Doesn't force itself on others.
 Isn't always "me first."
 Doesn't fly off the handle,
 Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
 Doesn't revel when others grovel,
 Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
 Puts up with anything,
 Trusts God always,
 Always looks for the best,
 Never looks back,
 But keeps going to the end.

2. **Matthew 6:14-15** – “– “For if you **forgive men** when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you **do not forgive** men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

2. The **staff**

Vs. 4 – “your rod and your staff, they comfort me”

a. the **physical**

1. the shepherd is the only person who uses a staff in his work

a. the staff is a long stick that usually had a crook on the end (slide)

b. uses of the staff for the shepherd:

1. using the staff to **move newborn sheep**, so that the shepherd wouldn't have to touch the newborn; otherwise the mother sheep would reject the newborn
2. using the staff to **draw sheep to himself** for a closer examination – this would especially apply to a shy and timid sheep that often avoided the shepherd
3. the staff was also used for **guiding sheep** through a gate or a dangerous pass
4. finally, the shepherd would often use the staff itself to **lean on** after a long day with the sheep.

2. the staff was not an offensive weapon, but a gracious “supportive” tool of the shepherd

b. the **spiritual (the staff of the Good Shepherd is seen as the Holy Spirit)**

1. for the **new Christian**

- a. IMMEDIATELY, the newborn Christian senses that something is different when he becomes a Christian
- b. that is because the gracious, tender Holy Spirit has entered his life
- c. the Holy Spirit quietly asserts Himself in the inner man, gently touching the soul of the new believer.
- d. **Mary Glenn Peebles – All We Like Sheep**
 I sat back in my chair. I remember saying, “God, I am so tired of trying to find satisfaction in life. I am so sick of struggling to satisfy my thirst. I am so ashamed that I have so much and it is not enough. **God, if Jesus can give this woman a drink that will satisfy someone forever, could He give me one, too?** I don’t understand all this but I want an abundant life and I want my life to count for something so if you could do this for me, I want you to.”
That is all I said; no amen, no kneeling. I just sat in my chair with my head back and my eyes open.

I was not aware that anything happened to me that day. Several days later I was cleaning my house and **I realized I was enjoying it.** Later I was washing dishes with a song in my heart. I must be sick. **How could a college graduate enjoy such mundane chores as washing dishes and dusting furniture!**

My children did not get on my nerves as they had before. I actually had a song in my heart for no reason. Nothing had changed about my lifestyle but something was different inside of me.

The grass looked greener and the sky seemed more beautiful. The flowers were more apparent to me. I had never noticed their brilliant colors.

I began to have an interest in reading the Bible. I was so shocked at my interest and my understanding of it. I did not want anyone to know that I was sitting home reading the Bible. .

As I read this Book, I began to realize that Christianity is not a way of life. It is a man. It is a person of Jesus Christ. He will satisfy the thirsty feelings deep inside of me.

2. for the **growing Christian**

- a. the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian is to enter the life of the Christian and to make that Christian more like Jesus
 - b. a Christian CANNOT change themselves – it is a work of the Holy Spirit
 - c. **John 14:26** – “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will **teach you all things** and will **remind you of everything I have said to you.**
3. for the **tired Christian**
- a. much like the tired shepherd, the Holy Spirit invites you to rest upon Him
 - b. **Keller** – “Some of the most moving memories I carry with me from Africa and the Middle East are of **seeing elderly shepherds in the twilight of their life**, standing silently at sunset, **leaning on their staffs**, watching their flocks with contented spirits.

IV. The SATISFACTION OF THE SHEPHERD

A. The NEED OF SHEEP TO BE COMFORTED

- 1. because sheep are:
 - a. directionless
 - b. and defenseless
- 2. the sheep’s only hope is its shepherd.
 - a. the sheep will **not** survive without a shepherd
 - b. and, obviously, the sheep will not find rest or comfort without their shepherd

B. The NEED OF BELIEVERS TO BE COMFORTED

Vs. 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.**”

- 1. Please notice what brings the believer comfort in the confusion of this world; it is not:
 - a. success
 - b. money
 - c. family
 - d. friends
 - e. the church
- 2. **It is the rod and staff**
 - Vs. 4** – “your rod and your staff, **they comfort me**”
 - a. **it is God’s Word – the rod**
 - 1. when life gets hard
 - 2. when there are more questions than answers
 - 3. when you need direction
 - 4. you find your comfort in God’s infallible, powerful, comforting Word
 - a. Scripture
 - 1. **Psalm 1:1-2** – “**Blessed** is the man who does

not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. **But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.**"

2. **Job 23:12** – "I have not departed from the commands of His lips; **I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread.**"
3. **Joshua 1:8-9** – "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. **Then you will be prosperous and successful.** Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; **do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.**"

b. illustrations:

1. my grandmother, while cooking for the whole family at Thanksgiving, was reading her Bible
2. my own experience
 - a. my devotional life; yes, I learn, but the time in God's Word brings me comfort, security, and direction
 - b. my devotional life and preaching

b. **it is God's Spirit – the staff**

1. PLEASE REALIZE THAT YOU CANNOT LIVE A CHRISTIAN LIFE WITHOUT GOD'S STAFF – HIS HOLY SPIRIT
 - a. the Christian life is not about rules and regulations
 - b. it is about a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit.
2. ASK GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT TO TAKE OVER YOUR ENTIRE LIFE
 - a. to rule and reign
 - b. to give you the comfort that you need
 - c. DO NOT BE FOOLED:
 1. fellow believers cannot give you comfort
 2. the church cannot give you comfort
 3. I, as your Pastor, cannot give you comfort
 4. only God's Holy Spirit can truly give you lasting comfort.

Conclusion:

1. **PLEASE DO NOT FORGET THAT WE ARE SHEEP!**
 - a. And sheep need a shepherd
 - b. Any sheep that thinks that it does not need a shepherd **WILL LOOK LIKE IT HAS NO SHEPHERD!**
2. Years ago the great actor Richard Burton was given a grand reception in his childhood church. While replying to the complimentary speeches in the church auditorium, he asked if there was anything the church wanted to hear from him. After a minute's pause, his old Pastor asked him if he could recite the 23rd Psalm which he had taught Burton in his Sunday school. A strange look of surprise came over the actor's face. He paused for a moment, and then said, **"I will, on one condition – that after I have recited it, you, my Pastor and teacher will do the same.** Then said the old and retired Pastor **"I am not an actor, but, if you wish it, I shall do so."** Impressively the actor began the Psalm. His voice and inflection were perfect. He held his audience spellbound, and, as he finished, **a great burst of applause broke from the audience.** As the applause died away, the old Pastor rose from his chair and began to recite the same Psalm. **His voice was feeble and shivering and he struggled with his tone.** But, when the old Pastor finished, **there was not a dry eye in the room.** The actor rose and his voice quivered as he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I reached your eyes and ears, but my old Pastor has reached your hearts. The difference is just this. **I know the Psalm but he knows the Shepherd."**