

Sermon Notes for June 27, 2010

**Sermon Series On
The 23rd Psalm
“The Blessing Of Being A Sheep”
Psalm 23:6**

Introduction

A. The PROBLEM OF SHEEP

1. Throughout the Bible, **believers** are referred to as “**sheep**”
 - a. **Psalm 100:3** – “Know that the LORD is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are his people, the **sheep** of his pasture.”
 - b. **John 10:27** – “My **sheep** listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”
2. **AND THAT IS NOT A COMPLIMENT!**
 - a. sheep are **directionless**
 - b. sheep are **defenseless**
 - c. sheep are **dirty**
3. **HOWEVER, IS THERE ANYTHING POSITIVE TO SAY ABOUT SHEEP?**
 - a. are we, as believers, simply compared to this defenseless animal – with no positive traits at all?
 - b. are we to walk around and feel that we are totally inept?

B. The PROMISE OF SHEEP

1. Whereas, we have been focusing on the great **BLESSINGS** of the shepherd
 - a. that he takes care of his sheep
 - b. that he takes them to the green grass and clean water
 - c. that he protects the sheep with his rod and staff
2. We now focus on the **BENEFITS** of the sheep
 - a. there are blessings that sheep give to this world
 - b. and there will be a blessing that will be given to the sheep

I. BLESSING BROUGHT BY SHEEP

Vs. 6a – “Surely **goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life,**”

A. PHYSICAL BLESSINGS OF SHEEP

1. If sheep are **mismanaged**
 - a. if sheep are not properly managed or “not shepherded”
 1. sheep can be the **most destructive domestic animals on this earth**
 2. sheep, left unmanaged, can literally ravage land so badly that it can take years to restore the land
 - a. sheep will eat everything in sight, until there is no grass or vegetation left.
 - b. with no vegetation left, erosion can occur and the land becomes unusable
 - c. sheep must be moved from place to place by a shepherd so that they will not destroy the land
 - b. it all depends on the work of the shepherd

2. If sheep are **managed**
 - a. however, if sheep are properly managed by a shepherd, **sheep can be the most beneficial domestic animals on the earth**
 1. the manure of sheep is the most balanced of all produced by domestic livestock
 2. **Phillip Keller – A Shepherd Looks At The Twenty-Third Psalm** - “In my own experience as a sheep rancher, I have, in just a few years, seen two derelict ranches restored to high productivity and usefulness. More than this, what before appeared depressing eyesores became beautiful park-like property of immense worth **Where previously there had been only poverty and pathetic waste, there now followed flourishing fields in rich abundance.**”
 - b. ancient literature referred to sheep as “**those of the golden hooves**, because of the way that sheep can benefit the land
 - c. it all depends on the work of the shepherd
3. this is why the Psalmist says of the sheep “surely goodness and mercy will **follow me** all the days of my life”
 - a. in other words, what SHOULD FOLLOW THE SHEEP:
 1. is not destruction and devastation
 2. but goodness and mercy
 - b. again, it does not depend upon the sheep, but upon the shepherd
 1. for sheep have the “potential” to bring blessing, **DESPITE THEIR LIMITATIONS**
 2. it all depends on the work of the shepherd

B. SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS OF SHEEP

1. **mismanaged churches** can leave behind all kinds of damage
 - a. I am sometimes amazed some of the spiritual devastation that is caused by some churches and Christians:
 1. brokenness
 2. judgmentalism
 3. legalism
 4. arrogance
 5. division
 - b. I have talked to quite a few of our new members that have come from “broken churches”
 1. some of these people appear almost “shell shocked” from church fights
 - a. experiencing long-time battles in a previous church
 - b. where there have been divisions
 - c. these people are tired of “fighting”
 2. others have come from churches with demanding legalistic values and regulations
 - a. where churches are more concerned about:
 1. what you wear
 2. where you went
 3. what kind of Bible you read

- b. and when they hear the message of God's grace, they almost feel as if they have been "betrayed"
 - 3. as a result, "these broken people" almost have to decide whether or not they want to go to church ever again
 - a. when I hear some of your stories of church experiences, I want to scream!
 - b. S.
 - 1. sabbath – Friday night until Saturday night
 - 2. certain foods
 - 3. raised on Jewish dietary laws
 - 4. **HAVE YOU READ THE NEW TESTAMENT?**
 - c. F. would not look at me at lunch
 - c. Godly churches should not leave behind destruction but "goodness and mercy"
2. **managed churches** should leave behind "**goodness**"
 - a. goodness **defined**
 - 1. good, better
 - 2. to be pleasing
 - 3. agreeable
 - 4. to be better; **to make something better**
 - b. goodness **applied**
 - 1. in other words, when a good shepherd properly raises sheep, the sheep should leave a pasture in better shape than when they got there
 - 2. **IN THE SAME WAY, CHRISTIANS SHOULD LEAVE THIS WORLD IN A BETTER PLACE WHEN THEY GO TO HEAVEN!**
 - a. this "assumes", as one of our ministries as believers, that we **SHOULD** positively affect the culture around us
 - b. instead of "counting the days" that christians will be on this earth until we go to heaven
 - 3. **DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY TIMES THAT SCRIPTURE CALLS CHRISTIANS TO "DO GOOD" WHILE WE ARE ON THIS EARTH?**
 - a. **Jesus did good works:**
 - 1. when Jesus announced the purpose of His ministry in the synagogue
 - Luke 4:18-19** – ""The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and **recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

b. **Jesus' attitude toward the broken**

1. **Matthew 9:35-36** – “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and **healing every disease and sickness**. When He saw the crowds, He **had compassion** on them, because they were harassed and helpless, **like sheep without a shepherd.**”
2. **Matthew 4:23** – “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and **healing every disease and sickness among the people.**”
3. **Acts 10:37-38** – “You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached-- how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around **doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.**”

c. **believers are to do good works**

1. **Titus 3:14** – “Our people **must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good**, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.”
2. **Matthew 5:13-16** – “**You are the salt of the earth**. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”

a. **salt seasons**

1. salt keeps life from being drab
2. salt makes food palatable; tasty
3. salt “adds tang to life”
4. **CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT BE BORING!**

b. **salt preserves**

1. salt is key to prevent decay (meat)
2. salt is used to “inject a morality”
3. salt must “permeate” in order to be effective

c. **salt heals**

1. salt heals sores, cuts
2. believers should help heal the broken world around us
3. **Matthew 5:16** – “In the same way, **let your light shine before men**, that they may see **your good deeds** and **praise your Father in heaven.**”

3. **managed churches** should leave behind “**mercy**”

a. **mercy defined**

1. kindness
2. patience
3. **KJV – lovingkindness**
4. Scripture:
 - a. **Genesis 32:9-10a** – “And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which said unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: **I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies**, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant;
 - b. **Psalm 100:5** – “For the LORD is good; **His mercy is everlasting**; and His truth endureth to all generations.”
 - c. **Psalm 145:5-9** – “I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. **The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.** The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works.”

b. **mercy applied**

1. the word for mercy here is the gracious, patient, merciful attitude of God toward His children
2. **DO YOU DOUBT THAT GOD IS MERCIFUL TOWARD YOU?**
3. **THEN, IF GOD HAS BEEN MERCIFUL TO HIS CHILDREN, THEN HIS CHILDREN SHOULD BE MERCIFUL TO THOSE AROUND THEM!**
4. **THAT IS WHY I DO NOT UNDERSTAND”ARROGANT CHRISTIANS.”**
 - a. **THINK THEOLOGICALLY WITH ME FOR A MINUTE . . .**
 1. as a christian, what have you got to be arrogant about?

2. after all . . .
 - a. you were a lost sinner who did not want to hear about anything spiritual
 - b. God began to change your mind and attitude by becoming involved in your life
 - c. He began to call you to Himself
 - d. and then HE SAVED YOU.
 1. not because of anything that you could do or even would do
 2. but He saved you based on the sacrificial death of His son
 - e. and even as a Christian, you continue to sin
 1. AND HE DOES NOT KILL YOU!
 2. But instead, GOD FORGIVES you and continues to be merciful to you
 - f. and He will, one day, take you to His blessed heaven, DESPITE who you are and what you have done
3. **SO . . .WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO BE ARROGANT ABOUT?**
 - a. if you are arrogant, you do NOT TRULY understand the mercy of God.
 - b. So . . . rethink your life.
4. So, a **church managed by a “good shepherd” . . .**
 - b. should not “leave” judgmentalism, legalism and division behind
 - c. but instead goodness and mercy
 1. the culture around us should know who Jesus is because of the ways that we are making our world around us a better place.
 2. that is why I am so excited about:
 - a. our mission trips to Kentucky
 1. Rocky
 2. Tyler’s trailer
 - b. our mission trip to the Bahamas (slide)
 1. a family of 17 living in 300 sq. ft.
 2. our youth group is building a 1800 sq. ft. house for this family
 - c. building ramps for those who are wheelchair bound
 - d. and our current plans to develop a ministry of mercy to touch our community with the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

II. BLESSINGS BROUGHT TO SHEEP

Vs. 6b – “and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

A. PHYSICAL BLESSINGS THAT COME TO SHEEP

1. after the sheep have spent the summer months in the high country, the shepherd will take them back “home” to the ranch
 - a. here the sheep will return to very familiar surroundings
 1. the same barn
 2. the same fields
 3. the same house of the shepherd
 - b. this is truly “home” for the shepherd and the sheep
 1. although the sheep have greatly benefited from being in the high country and eating the green grass and drinking the cool water
 2. they are indeed home, where they “belong”,
2. the “good shepherd” treats his sheep very differently than the “bad shepherd”
 - a. whereas, the good shepherd has taken great pains to take his sheep to the high country to enjoy a cool summer and return them to their true “home”
 - b. the “bad shepherd” does not really care what happens to his sheep
 1. they are simply a “means to an end”
 2. all that he cares about is the profit
 3. **Philip Keller** – “As winter, with its cold rains and chilling winds came on, my neighbor’s sickly sheep would stand huddled at the fence, their tails to the storm, **facing the rich fields in which my flock flourished.** Those poor, abused, neglected creatures under the ownership of a heartless rancher had known nothing but suffering most of the year. With them there had been gnawing hunger all summer. They were thin and sickly with disease and scab and parasites. Tormented by flies and attacked by predators, some were so weak and thin and wretched that their thin legs could scarcely bear their scanty frames.

Always there seemed to **lurk in their eyes** the slender, faint hope that perhaps with a bit of luck they could break through the fence or crawl through some hole to free themselves. Occasionally this used to happen, especially around Christmas. This was the time of **extreme tides**, when the sea retreated far out beyond the end of the fence lines which ran down to it. The neighbor’s **emaciated, dissatisfied, hungry sheep would wait for this to happen.** Then at the first chance they would go down on the tidal flats; **slip** around the end of the fence and come sneaking in to gorge themselves on our rich green grass.

So **pitiful and pathetic** was their condition that the sudden feast of **lush feed**, to which they were unaccustomed, often proved disastrous. Their digestive systems would begin to sour and sometimes this led to death. I recall clearly coming across three of my neighbor’s ewes lying helpless under a fir tree near the fence one drizzly day. They were like **three old, limp** gray, sodden

sacks collapsed in a heap. Even their bony legs would **no longer support them.**

I loaded them into a wheelbarrow and wheeled them back to their **heartless owner. He simply pulled out a sharp killing knife and slit all three of their throats. He couldn't care less.**

B. SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS THAT COME TO SHEEP

1. There will be a day when God's sheep return home from the "high country"
 - a. where we have lived our lives "away from home"
 - b. this would represent our life on this earth
 1. we have had good things
 2. we have experienced a good life
 3. but, we ultimately are not truly "home"
2. **DO YOU REALIZE THAT, AS SHEEP OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, YOU ARE NOT HOME YET?**
 - a. no matter how "beautiful" the high country is
 1. no matter how well your good shepherd has taken care of you in the high country;
 2. you are not home yet
 - b. believers "know" that they are not "home yet"
 1. I don't fit in this world
 - a. as I look at what people think is important, I know that I don't fit in this world
 1. when people think that life is all about:
 - a. winning football games
 - b. racing cars in a circle at 200 mph
 - c. and thinking that building a financial empire is what this life is all about.
 2. when I go to the mall and people have no concept that there is "another world"
 3. when I hear about what people's philosophies of what life is about
 - a. that there is no God
 - b. that there are many gods
 - c. that there is no heaven and there is no hell
 - b. when I wonder why NOTHING in this life brings me ultimate satisfaction
 1. no manner of creature comforts
 2. no manner of wonderful vacations
 3. no manner of financial blessings or success achievements
 4. everything in this life eventually leaves a hole that needs to be filled by something else.
2. C. S. Lewis, in his wonderful story of the **Chronicles of Narnia** (The Last Battle) tells of the UNICORN who

with the others, were taken to the “new Narnia”
 “It is as **hard to explain** how this sunlit land was different from the **old Narnia**, as it would be to tell you how the **fruits of that country taste**. Perhaps you will get some idea of it, if you think like this. **You may** have been in a **room** in which there was a window that looked out **on a lovely bay** of the sea or a green valley that wound away among mountains. And in the wall of that room opposite to the window there **may** have been a looking glass. And as you **turned away** from the window you **suddenly caught sight of that sea** or that valley, all over again, in the looking glass. And the sea in the mirror, or the valley in the mirror, were in one sense just the same as the real ones, **yet** at the same time they were **somehow different—deeper, more wonderful, more like places in a story**: in a **story** you have never heard but very much **wanted to know**. The difference between the **old Narnia** and the **new Narnia** was that the “new Narnia” was a **deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can’t describe it any better than that. If you ever get there, you will know what I mean.**

It was the **Unicorn** who summed up what everyone was felling. He stamped his right fore-hoof on the ground and neighed and **then cried**:
“I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this.

He **shook his mane** and **sprang forward** into a great gallop---a **Unicorn’s gallop** which, in our world, would have **carried him out of sight in a few moments**. **But** now a **most strange thing** happened. **Everyone else began to run**, and they found, to their **astonishment**, that they could **keep up with him**: not only the dogs and the humans but even fat little Puzzle and short-legged Poggin the Dwarf. The air flew in their faces as if they were **driving fast in a car without a windscreen**. The country flew past as if they were seeing it from the windows of an express train. **Faster and faster they raced, but no one got hot or tired or out of breath.”**

3. But, until believers go to heaven, His sheep will depend on the Good Shepherd
 - a. do you realize how “good” your shepherd is; especially compared to the “bad shepherd”?

Philip Keller – “Sometimes I feel we Christians should be much more like this. **We should be proud to belong to Christ. Why shouldn’t we feel free to boast to others of how good our Shepherd is? How**

glad we should be to look back and recall all the amazing ways in which He has provided for our welfare. We should **delight** to describe, in detail, the hard experiences through which He has brought us. **And we should be eager and quick to tell of our confidence in Christ.** We should be bold to state fearlessly that we are so glad we are His. By the contentment and serenity of our lives we should show what a distinct advantage it is to be a member of the **“household”** of His flock.”

- b. well; just “how good is our shepherd?
 1. well, not only did Jesus come to this earth to become our shepherd
 2. He came to this earth to “become a sheep”
 - a. **Isaiah 53:6** – “We all, **like sheep**, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; **and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.**”
 - b. record book of sins
 3. have you ever read the Psalm that comes before **Psalm 23**? It is obviously **Psalm 22**. See if you recognize some of these verses:
 - a. **Vs. 1** – “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”
 - b. **Vs. 7** – “All who see me mock me; **they hurl insults, shaking their heads:**”
 - c. **Vs. 16** – “Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, **they have pierced my hands and my feet.**
 - d. **Vs. 17-18** – “**I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.**”
 4. **Psalm 22** is a prophecy, predicting the death of Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd
 - a. so, not only did Jesus Christ leave His glorious heaven to come to this earth to be born as a baby
 - b. Jesus Christ knew **THAT HE WOULD BE CRUCIFIED, HUMILIATED AND KILLED ON THE CROSS FOR YOUR SINS AND MINE BECAUSE IT WAS ALL PROPHECIED IN DETAIL HOW HE WOULD DIE.**
 - c. “This” is the “kind of Good Shepherd” that we have.

Conclusion:

1. **Psalm 100** (KJV)– “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before His presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; **we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.** Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; **His mercy is everlasting;** and His truth endureth to all generations.
2. How can you not live to praise Him?

Pastor Adrian Rogers told a story in his book on the Twenty-Third Psalm: “**A godly woman loved the Lord with all of her heart.** In her later years, she began to lose her memory. Details about everyday life seem to fade. Even names of her family began to elude her. And finally, even the faces of her loved ones slipped from her recollection.

Throughout her life she treasured the Word of God, memorizing many texts from her threadbare Bible. Her favorite verse had always been **2 Timothy 1:12**, which says, “For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto **Him** against that day.”

As her memory worsened and her body became more and more weak, her family decided she should live out her final days in the care of a nursing home. Her family came often for visits, and each time she would quote her favorite verses, including the passage from 2 Timothy.

Weeks passed, and though her love for Jesus never waned, her body weakened and her voice became faint. **As she was dying, her family could still hear her repeating 2 Timothy 1:12, but the words became fewer and fewer.** At the end there was only one word left she could say: “**Him**”

She whispered it again and again with her dying breath. “**Him. . Him. . Him**” It was all she could say and all she had left. She held on to the word that was closest to her heart and indeed the word that is at the heart of His own Word: “**Him**”