

A Sunday school teacher decided to have her young class memorize one of the most quoted passages in the Bible: Psalm 23. She gave the youngsters a month to learn the chapter. Little Rick was excited about the task, but he just couldn't remember the Psalm. After much practice, he could barely get past the first line. On the day that the kids were scheduled to recite Psalm 23 in front of the congregation, Rickey was very nervous. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone and said proudly, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and that's all I need to know.

How much do you need to know? How much do you know the Great Shepherd?

Last week we looked at a picture of Jesus from prophesy that portrayed Him as a Servant. He came to serve. He came to seek and to save those that are lost.

Today we are going to see a different picture. Today we will look at Jesus the Shepherd.

Toward the end of Jacob's life, he called for his son Joseph to come and see him. Joseph brought along his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. As a grandfather, Jacob decides to bless his two grandsons and in the process we find the first reference to God as a shepherd in the Bible.

*"May the God before whom my grandfather Abraham and my father, Isaac, walked—the God who has been my shepherd all my life, to this very day, <sup>16</sup> the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm— may He bless these boys. Genesis 48: 15-16 NLT*

One chapter later Jacob is blessing all his sons and included in these holy words is yet another reference.

*But his bow remained taut, and his arms were strengthened by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel. Genesis 49:24 NLT*

From there all throughout the Old Testament God is often referenced as The Shepherd and His people are referred to as the sheep of His pasture or His flock.

Of course the most quoted Psalm in the entire Bible is Psalm 23, written by King David. *"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. . ."* are words that resonate with people from every part of the world.

This picture is continued again in Isaiah 40.

*Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in power. He will rule with a powerful arm. See, He brings His reward with Him as He comes. <sup>11</sup> He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young. Isaiah 40:10-11 NLT*

For today I want to focus on Jesus the Shepherd. For that we are going to look at three images of Jesus as found in the New Testament.

## 1. He is the Shepherd that rescues and rejoices

In Matthew 18 Jesus is teaching the disciples in response to their childish question about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. Embedded within this teaching is the following story.

*“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t wander away! <sup>14</sup> In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father’s will that even one of these little ones should perish. Matthew 18:12-14 NLT*

This story is an attempt to get the disciples to come to understand the way the God views us; the way He views people whom others may view as useless. In this case it was children but quickly moves to the analogy of a lost lamb that has gone astray.

The fact is most of us would cut our losses and stay with the ninety nine but not God. Just prior to telling them the story of the lost sheep He uttered these words:

*For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. Matthew 18:11 NKJV*

This is God’s story. He sent His Son to seek and to save and when He saves He not only rescues us but He rejoices as well.

Do you know that today He is looking for you? You may have lost your way. It happens to the best of us. The circumstances of life may overcome us and before you know it we are wondering around in a spiritual wilderness. We are lost. We have no idea how to get back to where we need to be but hear this: there is One who never quits looking for you. There in One that never gives up on you. His love never fails. He will keep looking and if you will let Him He will rescue you no matter how lost you may be or feel.

Your love never fails, it never gives up, It never runs out on me,  
Your love never fails, it never gives up, It never runs out on me,  
Your love never fails, it never gives up.

And its higher than the mountains that I face  
And its stronger than the power of the grave  
And constant in the trial and the change  
This one thing remains

And on and on and on and on it goes  
Yes, it overwhelms and satisfies my soul  
And I never ever have to be afraid cause this one thing remains!

We learn from this story that God's love as a shepherd not only rescues but that He will rejoice when we come back to the fold.

Luke records it this way:

<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them a picture-story, saying, <sup>4</sup> "What if one of you had one hundred sheep and you lost one of them? Would you not leave the ninety-nine in the country and go back and look for the one which was lost until you find it?" <sup>5</sup> When you find it, you are happy as you carry it back on your shoulders. <sup>6</sup> Then you would go to your house and call your friends and neighbors. You would say to them, 'Be happy with me because I have found my sheep that was lost.' <sup>7</sup> I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven because of one sinner who is sorry for his sins and turns from them, than for ninety-nine people right with God who do not have sins to be sorry for. Luke 15:3-7 NLT

You want to make God happy today? Come home! Turn around, turn away from the sinful place or the wilderness place you are in and you will find Him there waiting to rescue you and oh the rejoicing that will take place.

## 2. He is the Shepherd who gives reassurance

*But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.* <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. **He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.** <sup>4</sup> After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice." John 10:2-5 NLT

*"I am the good shepherd. **The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.***

<sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, <sup>15</sup> just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. **So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. . .**

<sup>27</sup> **My sheep hear My voice and I know them. They follow Me.** <sup>28</sup> **I give them life that lasts forever.** They will never be punished. No one is able to take them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father who gave them to Me is greater than all. No one is able to take them out of My Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> My Father and I are one!" John 10:17-30 NLT

Chilton notes, "The sheepfold Jesus was thinking about was an open space surrounded by a wall, with but one opening and here the shepherd took up His position at the door. It was this that the sheep literally and actually came in and out through Him. Thus they were watched over, cared for, counted and examined to see if any were hurt. If they were hurt, the Good Shepherd would anoint with a healing oil to help facilitate healing in the sheep. He would know His sheep so well they would be named and the sheep would also know their shepherd's voice.

He speaks:

In this day of many voices it is imperative that we learn to hear God's voice. In a day of constant media and social media connection it becomes a matter of discipline and discipleship. Our lives

our bombarded daily with noise, information and data. Turn some things off. Back away from things that are wasting your time. Put God first and you will be surprised how much He has to say in your daily lives.

I'm glad people have listened to God's voice throughout Biblical history:

Adam and Eve heard the sound of God walking in the garden in cool of the day. . .

Moses heard Him in a burning bush . . .

Abraham heard Him on a mountain in the act of total obedience. . .

Joshua heard Him when God said, "As I was with Moses I will be with you, I will not leave you or forsake you."

Gideon heard the voice of God and instead of relying on numbers he did it God's way.

Samuel heard Him and said, "Speak for your servant is listening."

David heard God speak through an old prophet and allowed God to change and cleanse his heart.

Elijah heard Him in a cave and responded to the "still small voice."

Nehemiah heard God and went to work.

Isaiah heard Him in the temple and said, "Here am I send me!"

Daniel heard Him in a lion's den . . .

Listen if you think you can come to church and never crack your Bible and never spend time with God alone and not surrender and submit every area of your life to what the Bible teaches you are not a Christian you are a just a person that attends church. Jesus speaks and He said, "My sheep know my voice." Based on the way some of us live our lives I don't think we are listening. And sadder yet I don't think there is much concern about it.

He sacrifices:

Jesus said that He sacrifices His life for the sheep. This is not just some cute story designed to give you goose bumps or warm fuzzes. This is a fact and a promise from the Son of God Himself. He not only said it but He did it. I want to go back to some verses I pointed out to you last week. It is critical that you know these verses and believe them.

Philippians 2:

*Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.*

*<sup>7</sup> Instead, He gave up His divine privileges He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When He appeared in human form, He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

What is there in you or me that makes us stronger than any other Christian? What is there about me that I should stand when so many others have fallen?

There is nothing to hold me up if I am left to myself; but if, confessing my liability to fall, confessing my liability to be seized by the lion, and the bear, and the wolf, I can still say, "The Lord is my Shepherd," I am safe!

The sheep is not safe because it says, "I am stronger than the lion;" or, "I am able to escape from the bear;" or, "I will always be able to avoid the wolf." We are only as strong as the Great Shepherd that we truly follow. Go your own way, refuse to follow and you and I are susceptible to all kinds of dangers.

If you and I follow the Great Shepherd there is a promised reward.

### **3. He is the Shepherd who will reward**

I had a funeral this week for someone I have never met. That alone is not unusual because the majority of funerals I do are for people I have never met. What made this unusual is that when I got the call last Sunday afternoon, I was told that there were no relatives and that an appointed guardian had made the arrangements and that she didn't really know if there would be anybody at the funeral. Normally I sit down with family members a day or two before the funeral but in this case there was no one to call. They scheduled calling hours for two hours before the funeral on Wednesday to see if anyone would show up.

I came to the funeral home and found a wonderful surprise. No it wasn't a room full of people but gathered in the lounge were five lady friends of the deceased woman. I sat with them and they chatted about their friend and a story emerged. One hour later we had a memorial service together with a total of nine people.

You know what made it easy? The second thing someone said to me in that meeting was, "She loved the Lord." You know what? If when I come to die and people gather at my funeral and they can say, "He loved the Lord." I will have been a success in my life. At this funeral I sat on a stool in front of nine people and opened the Bible and read these words from the most familiar Psalm in all the world: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Because this woman had loved the Lord, the Great Shepherd and had chosen to follow Him, her friends could vouch for her and we sat and celebrated this promise. It was a most amazing moment.

Listen to what Peter wrote to church leaders as He was preparing to see the end of his ministry on this earth.

*And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in His glory when He is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: <sup>2</sup> Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. <sup>3</sup> Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. <sup>4</sup> And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor. 1 Peter 5:1-4*

I never tire of this C.S. Lewis quote: "Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to

go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

If you can just see Jesus today as He really is I don't think there is anyone in this room that would not want to follow Him. I'm not talking about half-hearted following but whole-hearted following. How could you not fall in love with a Shepherd that goes looking for you when you are lost? How could you not follow the one who speaks and you can recognize His voice when all others around you are muffled and unclear? How could you not love and follow the Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep?

Characteristics of a shepherd:

The shepherd is patient with his sheep  
The shepherd knows his sheep  
The shepherd values his sheep  
The shepherd loves his sheep  
The shepherd observes his sheep  
The shepherd leads his sheep  
The shepherd feeds his sheep  
The shepherd rests his sheep  
The shepherd preserves his sheep

I have a feeling that Jesus the Great Shepherd is looking for some of you today. I have another feeling that tells me that some of us desperately need to hear His voice.  
Don't be afraid. Don't be alarmed.

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Yea, 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.*

*<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23 NKJV*

Can you hear one more reference to our Great Shepherd?

*<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. <sup>36</sup> But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Matthew 9:35-36 NKJV*

Jesus cares for you today. He is here and He is looking for you.

There's an old invitation song that includes these words:

Verse 1: Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, Calling for you and for me;  
See, on the portals He's waiting and watching, Watching for you and for me.

Chorus: Come home, come home, You who are weary, come home;  
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, Calling, O sinner, come home!

Verse 2: Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading, Pleading for you and for me?  
Why should we linger and heed not His mercies, Mercies for you and for me?

Verse 3: Oh, for the wonderful love He has promised, Promised for you and for me!  
Though we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon, Pardon for you and for me.