

## BOOKLET SERMON No.4

By: Ray Ewart

# **THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP**

- Unless otherwise noted all quotations from Scripture are from the New King James Version.
- I often type words in capitals for EMPHASIS. You will notice it occurring in the expression of my own thoughts AND in quotations.
- All my comments and opinions are given from my viewpoint as a Christian who believes that the text of the Holy Bible, as originally given, is the Word of God. My opinions are based on my understanding of God's opinion as expressed in the Bible and I offer them with good intention without any will to cause offense to anyone holding a different opinion. They are offered in the hope of shedding light and providing help to anyone open to receive it.
- The text of this booklet would be too lengthy if I typed out in full every Scripture referred to, but you will miss much of the message if you do not turn to, and read, each of the Scriptures concerned.

# **THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP**

My comments on this heart-warming subject have been arranged under three headings:

- 1. THE GOOD SHEPHERD**
- 2. THE SHEEP**
- 3. THE RELATIONSHIP**

## **1. THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

In studying this subject we could not do better than to begin by reading the Lord's own words as we have them in John 10. 1-18 + 27-29.

Jesus used the SHEPHERD AND THE SHEEP as an illustration of His relationship to His followers (John 10.6). When He used it, in response to a question from the Pharisees (John 9.40), they did not understand Him, but it is a remarkably good illustration. Even a brief study like this will show how many lessons we can learn from it.

Our SHEPHERD is the great "I AM" (Exodus 3.13-14). In the passage we read from John's gospel He is "the DOOR" (v.9) and "the GOOD SHEPHERD", but John sees Him in A WHOLE SUCCESSION OF "I AMS",

for example:

- “the BREAD OF LIFE” (John 6.48)
- “the LIGHT OF THE WORLD” (John 8.12)
- “the RESURRECTION and the LIFE (John 11.25)
- “the WAY, the TRUTH and the LIFE” (John 14.6)
- “the TRUE VINE” (John 15.1)
- “the ALPHA and OMEGA, THE BEGINNING and THE END, THE FIRST and THE LAST” (Revelation 1.8, 1.11 and 22.13)
- “HE WHO LIVES, and was dead” and is “ALIVE FOR EVERMORE” (Revelation 1.18)
- “the ROOT AND THE OFFSPRING OF DAVID and the BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR” (Revelation 22.16)

And so much more! When Jesus says, “I and My Father are ONE” (v.30) we understand something of what Paul means when he writes, “in HIM dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2.9). Just think for a moment of a few of the things Paul writes in Colossians concerning the One Who is our SHEPHERD:

“HE is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created BY Him and FOR Him. And He is before all things and in Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the body, the church, Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence, for it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (1.15-19).

In Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2.3)

How can we take in all of these truths? It is little wonder Paul concludes that we “ARE COMPLETE IN HIM, Who is the Head of all principality and power” (2.10). What else could we wish to have? All our needs are met in Him!

We will never fully appreciate, this side of the resurrection, the full extent of the blessings we have in Jesus Christ, but if we study HIS PERSON AND WORK, as it is revealed in the Word of God, we will begin to understand how safe and privileged we are in His care. The barest outline would cover such things as His:

- **HIS PERSON**
  - His DIETY (To the SON, God the Father says, “Your throne O GOD, is for ever and ever” - Hebrews 1.8)
  - His POWER (“ALL POWER is given unto Me” – Matthew 28.18, King James Version)
  - His KNOWLEDGE (“You KNOW ALL THINGS” – John 16.30)
  - His ABILITY (“I will GIVE YOU REST – Matthew 11.28)

- **HIS WORK**

- WHAT HE HAS DONE (In Him we have “REDEMPTION through His blood, the FORGIVENESS of sins” – Colossians 1.15)
- WHAT HE IS DOING (Christ has entered heaven itself “now to APPEAR IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD FOR US” – Hebrews 9.24)
- WHAT HE WILL DO IN THE FUTURE (“I will COME AGAIN and RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF; that where I am, there you may be also” John 14.3)

This is all true of our GOOD SHEPHERD and when He used this illustration He said, concerning us:

- “I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10.10).
- “I lay down My life for the sheep”(John 10.15)

He was speaking to Jews, but He told them He is also Shepherd to the Gentiles, “other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one Shepherd” (John 10.16).

What He did, He did WILLINGLY (John 10.17-18) and What He does He does COMPLETELY and PERFECTLY (John 10.27-28).

WHAT A SHEPHERD! WHAT A SAVIOUR!

## 2. THE SHEEP

In a Rumanian village, when Russian communism was at its peak, a communist scientist was speaking about evolution in a crowded hall. At the end of his talk he asked a question, “Can anyone tell me any reason why we should not believe in EVOLUTION?” A man, toward the back of the hall stood up and said, “Yes! SHEEP!” “What do you mean, SHEEP?” shouted the speaker. “Well”, said the man, “If what you said about the SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST is true we would not have any SHEEP”. “My Bible tells me that the first man born, Abel, was a keeper of sheep, and down through the years since then there have always been shepherds, be it Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David or whoever else. I prefer to believe the Bible and it teaches CREATION, not EVOLUTION!”

You see, one of the first things you learn about them is that:

**SHEEP NEED A SHEPHERD**

AS one of God's sheep you need to remember that. God has made sheep that way. Stay close to the SHEPHERD! You need HIM!

That is one of the differences between SHEEP and GOATS. Goats can do very nicely by themselves. And it is not the only difference for you LEAD sheep (as Psalm 23.1-3 confirms, "The Lord is my Shepherd.....He LEADS me"), but you have to DRIVE goats! The Lord knows the differences and he will separate them before we enter eternity (Matthew 25. 31-32, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats.")

Matthew 9.36 says, "When Jesus saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion for them, because they were WEARY and SCATTERED, LIKE SHEEP HAVING NO SHEPHERD."

There are **REASONS** why they need a shepherd:

**1. THEY CANNOT PROTECT THEMSELVES**

I remember vividly the horror and anger a friend of mine had when a fox invaded one of his paddocks and went on a killing spree on the ewes and lambs. Jesus said, "Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10.16).

Jesus condemns the hireling who will not defend the sheep (John.10.11-13).

**2. THEY LOSE HEART EASILY**

Sheep have been known to fall into a hole, or get caught in a hedge, and, after a HALF-HEARTED STRUGGLE, give up and just die. Perhaps that is why the exhortation has been given to us to "consider Jesus who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" (Hebrews 12.3). The writer tells them to "strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" (Hebrews 12.12).

**3. THEY ARE NOT GOOD AT FINDING NEW PASTURES OR SUPPLIES OF FRESH WATER**

It is the shepherd who makes them "lie down in green pastures" and leads them "beside the still waters".

**4. THEY CANNOT CLEANSE THEMSELVES**

When flies get into their fleece the shepherd has to cut out the affected parts or infection will set in and they could die. Sheep tend to just rub themselves on a rock or some such thing and make the problem worse. As the Lord's sheep, we are dependent on him, for initial cleansing (Titus 3.3-7), and for ongoing day-to-day cleansing (1 John 1.7 – 2.1).

**5. THEY GET LOST EASILY, EVEN CLOSE TO HOME**

More than one Scripture reflects this tendency:

“All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isaiah 53.6).

“I have gone astray like a lost sheep (Psalm 119.176)

“You were like sheep going astray” (1 Peter 2.25).

How like sheep we are in these respects. But it is also true that:

### **SHEEP NEED COMPANY**

They do best in flocks. As God’s sheep we need FELLOWSHIP. We are told to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10.24-25). There is a chapter in Proverbs that begins by saying “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgement” and ends by saying “A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18.1 + 24).

I have, however, read about THREE KINDS OF SHEEP THAT LIKE BEING LONERS:

#### (i) PET SHEEP

You might say that this is a sheep that has too many privileges. It is one that is kept separate as a pet. It is pampered and spoiled and does not feel at home in the flock.

God has no pets. Job says of God, “He is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of His hands” (34.19). Neither should we have favourites!

#### (ii) HERMIT SHEEP

This is a sheep, missed out in the muster, and against the odds, survives, perhaps finding shelter in a cave or hollowed-out tree. It develops BAD HABITS (like the man who “isolates himself” – Proverbs 18.1). It will run and hide at the sight of a shepherd or his dog. It becomes CRANKY! (In New Zealand they are known in the trade as CRANKY SHEEP). One was located in New Zealand with fleece 23.5 inches long. The marks on its fleece showed it had been on its own for five years. A similar one was found in the highlands of Scotland. Do not become a hermit!

Sheep like them have a lot to offer (their fleece). Share the gifts God has given you!

#### (iii) JUDAS SHEEP

This is a sheep kept apart and TRAINED TO LEAD OTHER SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER. When a group of sheep is taken to the abattoir the Judas Sheep leads them down a ramp, escapes through a trap door, and goes back to lead another batch through. In terms of the Church, and the people of God, no one would wish to be a Judas sheep.

## **SHEEP ARE VALUED BY THE SHEPHERD**

A friend of mine was cycling near Echuca when a passing car stopped. The driver, a farmer, asked him for help. Several sheep had escaped and he was searching for them. My friend travelled with the farmer looking for the sheep and as he drove the farmer said, "I value my sheep and I will not stop searching until I find them". Sheep have, however, been known to run from the caring shepherd until they drop dead from exhaustion. Surely we can learn a lesson from that.

There are reasons why shepherds value their sheep (be it for the wool they get or the profits they make from them) but our Shepherd values us because He loves us. So much does He love us that He died for us (John 10.11 + 3.16).

I once had the privilege of listening to a Lebanese Christian shepherd who had a small flock of sheep. He had a name for each sheep and a special call for each one. He could use that call and that individual sheep would come to him. Jesus relates to us as individuals.

- Do you hear His voice? (John 10.3 "the sheep hear His voice")
- Do you follow Him? (John 10.27 "they follow Me")
- When you have gone astray, have you felt the strength of His arms and the security of His shoulders as He recovered you? (read Luke 15.3-7)

-----

Incidentally, if you feel downcast at being likened to a sheep, do not lose heart. Sheep are really quite clever. I know they occasionally do things that seem a bit silly (when one jumps they all jump, even if there is nothing to jump over) but a study in Britain in 2001 (led by a Professor Kendrick) showed that sheep can remember the facial features of up to 50 other sheep and up to 10 humans. They can even remember them from photographs for up to two years. In part of the research sheep were put in a darkened barn and their stress levels were measured by their restlessness, heart rate and bleating and by measuring the cortisol and adrenaline levels in their blood. When they had life size images of sheep projected onto a screen their stress levels reduced, showing their need for company. Projected images of goats did nothing to reduce their stress).

## **2. THE RELATIONSHIP**

No passage of Scripture describes our relationship with the Lord better than PSALM 23. It is a proof of what David said in 2 Samuel 23.2, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me". It is truly inspired!

As a young believer I went to a meeting where a Jewish lady was speaking on what she called THE COVENANT NAMES OF GOD (names that indicate what God PROMISES to do for believers). She used **SEVEN NAMES:**

1. JEHOVAH RAHA (The Lord my SHEPHERD) v.1 "The Lord is my shepherd"
2. " JIREH (The Lord my PROVIDER) (Genesis 22.14) v.1 "I shall not want"
3. " SHALOM (The Lord my PEACE) (Judges 6.24) v.2 "He leads me beside the still waters"
4. " RAPHA (The Lord my HEALER) (Exodus 15.26) v.3 "He restores my soul"
5. " SHAMMAH (The Lord my COMPANION) (Ezekiel 48.35) v.4 "You are with me"
6. " NISSI (The Lord my PROTECTOR) (Exodus 17.15) v.4 "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me"
7. JEHOVAH TSIDKENU (The Lord my RIGHTEOUSNESS) (Jeremiah 23.6) v.3 "He leads me in the paths of righteousness"

You can see a reflection of every one of these names in these six simple verses!

It is reported that the well known theologian, Dr. Barnhouse, was being interviewed on radio and the interviewer asked him, "What is the MOST PROFOUND THOUGHT you have ever heard expressed. He paused for a moment, then replied, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so" (words we all know from the children's hymn). That the creator and sustainer of the universe should love ME, and cause a book to be written to tell me so, THIS IS PROFOUND! A profound statement in simple words. That is exactly what we have in Psalm 23!

This psalm is ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP (the MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP it is possible to have).

The **LORD** is MY **Shepherd!** It is vitally important to get this relationship right! This relationship:

1. PREPARES YOU FOR LIFE
2. PROTECTS YOU FROM EVIL, and,
3. PREVAILS FOR ETERNITY

1. PREPARES YOU FOR LIFE (v.1 "I shall not want")

Some people try to tell you that Christianity is a CRUTCH, or ESCAPISM. Nothing could be further from the truth! No one is as ready for life as the mature believer. THE MATURE BELIEVER is ready for all that life can throw at them, for he/she:

- (i) IS QUIETLY CONFIDENT ("You are with me" v.4)

Not in self (2 Corinthians 1.3-4 + 8-10) but IN GOD.

That is important for AN INDIVIDUAL (and for A NATION) (Exodus 33.12-16).

- (ii) HAS THE ANSWER TO FEAR ("I will fear no evil" v.4)



I have often thought that fear is a bit like the common cold (there is a lot of it around and it is infectious). Much like the cold, we treat it when we are under its effects (Psalm 56.3 “Whenever I am afraid I will trust in God”) but a much better way would be to prevent yourself from getting it (Psalm 56.11 “In God I have put my trust; I WILL NOT BE AFRAID”).

It is interesting to note that the exhortation that occurs most frequently in Scripture is, “FEAR NOT (Joshua 1.9, John 12.15 etc.). Psalm 27.1 says, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” I am told that the exhortation to NOT FEAR occurs 365 times in the Bible (once for each day of the year).

Fear is there to be dealt with and David had found the best answer. He wrote Psalm 34 and in it he gives a word of testimony, “I sought the Lord and He heard me, and delivered me from all my FEARS.....This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his TROUBLES” vs. 4 + 6). I have been told that 80% of the things we fear will happen never come to pass. That would leave 20% of our fears that have real trouble to back them up, but the Lord can also save us from our troubles!

May we receive the same sort of deliverance that David did!

- (iii) KNOWS HOW TO RELAX (“He leads me beside the still waters” v.2 – also translated “the waters of rest”)

The Lord knows our needs (“Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, ‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while’. For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they departed to a deserted place in a boat by themselves” – Mark 6.30-32). He makes us aware of our needs, but do we pay attention?

We can read the clear instructions, (“Be anxious for NOTHING, but in EVERYTHING by PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION, with THANKSGIVING, let your requests be made known to God; and THE PEACE OF GOD which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4.6-7) but do we fully apply ourselves to following them? “Perfect peace” is available (Isaiah 26.3-4).

- (iv) IS ASSURED OF RESTORATION (“He restores my soul” v.3)

We can sometimes come to wrong conclusions, or develop a wrong attitude (“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by God’”? – Isaiah 40.27) and everyone can have their down times (“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall” – Isaiah 40.30) but God has the ability to restore (“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” Isaiah 40.31).

Even when we go badly astray, God wants us to return to Him (“Seek the Lord while He can be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” – Isaiah 55.6-7).

The child of God can, and should, be positive (Romans 8.38-39 + 1 Corinthians 15.55)

## 2. PROTECTS YOU FROM EVIL (v.3 “He leads me in the paths of Righteousness”)

### HE PROTECTS FROM SIN

Scripture abounds with assurances of our Shepherd’s care for us. The Lord’s High Priestly prayer in John 17 reveals His will for us. It was not just a prayer for His immediate followers, but it was for you and me. Referring to His immediate followers He says, “I do not pray for these alone, but also FOR THOSE WHO WILL BELIEVE IN ME THROUGH THEIR WORD” (v.20). Hebrews 7.24-25 is rendered beautifully in the Amplified Version, “He holds His priesthood unchangeably, because He lives on forever. Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost (completely, perfectly, finally, and for all time and eternity) those who come to God through Him, since He is always living to make petition to God and intercede with Him and intervene for them”.

Some of the best news we could ever hear is in Romans 6. It says in verse 12, “do not let sin reign in your mortal body”, then in verse 14, “sin shall not have dominion over you”, and in verse 18, “having been SET FREE from sin, you became slaves of righteousness”. Do we believe, understand and live in the light of these truths? (all this, in accord with the truth that we have an “Advocate”, and God has a remedy, when we sin – 1 John 1.7 + 9 – 2.1, for we will never know sinless perfection this side the glory – 1 John 1.8).

We are “His WORKMANSHIP” (Ephesians 2.8-10) and He does all this “for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23.3). If you take to yourself the name of Christ (as a follower) you must bear His TRADEMARK (2 Timothy 2.19, “the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, the Lord knows them that are His. And let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity”) (King James Version).

### HE PROTECTS FROM EVIL PEOPLE

Proverbs gives warnings about the “evil WOMAN” (6.24 ) and the “evil MAN” (17.11). The Shepherd will protect you from both, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (v.5).

David knew what he was talking about. He had faced Goliath with confidence (1 Samuel 17.32-36 + 45-46).

Our Shepherd’s “rod” (v.4) (SHAIVET means CLUB, and sounds a bit like the Irish SHILLELAGH) – is a formidable weapon, used by a shepherd to ward off predators. His “staff” (MISHENETH means CROOK) is used to draw back the wanderer, chastise the rebellious and point the way forward.

## HE PROTECTS FROM EVIL EXPERIENCES

You will WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF DEATH ONLY ONCE (for “it is appointed unto man ONCE to die” – Hebrews 9.27) but you may walk through the valley of THE SHADOW OF DEATH many times. It can be a harrowing experience to suffer illness that THREATENS TO KILL YOU, but, as one of His sheep, He has promised to be “WITH” you so that you can “FEAR NO EVIL”. For the true child of God death has lost its “sting” (1 Corinthians 15.55-57).

Life can have many valleys of pain, discouragement, loss, loneliness, uncertainty, unfairness oppression, etc., but our Shepherd says, “Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money (including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions) and be satisfied with your present circumstances and with what you have; for God Himself has said, ‘I will not, I will not, I will not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake you nor let you down nor relax my hold on you! Assuredly not!’” (Hebrews 13.5 Amplified Version).

Our Shepherd provides:

- A Table – to satisfy your HUNGER
- AN OVERFLOWING CUP – to satisfy your THIRST, and,
- OIL – to treat your WOUNDS

What more can we ask for!

### 3. IT PREVAILS FOR ETERNITY (v.6 “I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever”)

This RELATIONSHIP starts HERE (“Goodness and mercy shall follow me ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE” v.6) and it continues forever (‘and I will dwell in the house of the Lord FOREVER”).

The STORY is told of a young child in Scotland who attended his local Primary School. I can only tell the story as I remember it being told to me, but I was assured it is true. His teacher, a true believer, had been teaching the children the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. As an aid to memory the teacher had taught them to use their hands as they said “THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD”. As they said each word they held, FIRST their THUMB, then with each of the words, A FINGER, working across their fingers until they came to the last word, SHEPHERD, when they would be holding their SMALLEST FINGER.

At the end of the day class was dismissed and the pupils left the classroom to make their way home.

The teacher did some tidying up in the classroom then left for home. The school was on a major highway and as she left the building she saw a crowd of people on the road, several hundred metres past the school. There had been an accident. As she made her way toward the crowd an ambulance

arrived. As she pushed her way through the crowd she saw people weeping. As she got to the centre, to her horror, she saw that the person who had been hit by a car was a boy from her class. He had survived the impact but he died shortly afterwards in the arms of the ambulance officer. As the distressed teacher talked to the ambulance officer he said, "As he died his lips were moving. He was saying something, and, strangely, he was holding his little finger." The teacher knew what that meant, and it meant a lot to her.

I have related this as I remember it. I was told the name of the town in which it happened, but I have since forgotten it. The story came to mind as I made these notes, but, whatever way death comes, it is vitally important to be able to say, as you face it, The Lord is MY SHEPHERD!