

“The Lord is my Shepherd” – A In-depth Study of Psalm 23

Teacher: Nick Watts * Verse 2

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

In This Session, We Will Learn:

1. About four conditions that must be met in order for sheep to “lie down in green pastures.”
2. That all “water” is not pure & healthy, but only “water” provided by the Shepherd.



Introduction

- For a brief introduction to the Psalms, Psalm 23, Christ’s presence in the Psalms, and of Christian author/shepherd, W. Phillip Keller, please see “Session One.”

Psalm 23:2

- **“He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still/quiet waters.”**

A. “He makes me lie down in green pastures”

A. W. Phillip Keller; A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23 – For a flock of sheep, “lying down” represents peace/contentment/satisfaction/security. The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very makeup it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met:

- A freedom from fear.
- A freedom from friction/tension with other sheep.
- A freedom from pests/aggravations.
- A freedom from hunger.

B. Freedom from Fear

1) Earthly Observations

- i. Keller – Sheep have little or no self-defense. Timid and helpless, their only resource is to run. Even a jackrabbit suddenly bounding from behind a bush can spook an entire flock. The sheep run in blind fear. However, they know that the danger is real. Two wild dogs have been known to kill as many as 292 sheep in a single night.

- ii. Keller – I came to realize that nothing so quieted and reassured the sheep as to see me in the field – **to be aware of my presence**. The presence of their master, owner & protector put them at ease as nothing else could.

2) Biblical Implications Based on Earthly Observations

- i. Keller – We live in an uncertain life. **Any hour** can bring disaster, danger, and distress from unexpected quarters. No one can tell what a day will produce in way of trouble. We live either in a sense of anxiety, fear, and foreboding, or in a sense of quiet rest. **It's our daily choice**.
- ii. Catherine Marshall; *Adventures in Prayer* – We know that fear is like a screen erected between us and God so that His power cannot get through to us....At such times every emotion, every passion, is tied up in the dread of what may happen.
- iii. In Psalm 4, David wrote, - "In peace I will both **lie down** and sleep; for **you alone, O LORD**, make me dwell in safety." (vs 8)
- iv. What gave David the peace to "lie down?" Answer: His awareness of the presence and power of the Shepherd.
 - a) God told Jacob – "Behold, **I am with you** and will keep you wherever you go..." (Genesis 28:15)
 - b) Through Isaiah, God told Israel – "Fear not, **I am with you**; be not dismayed, for I am your God." (41:10)
 - c) The prophet, Haggai, spoke to the people with the Lord's message: "**I am with you**," declares the Lord. (1:13)
 - d) Christ's very name represents His presence: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel." (which means "**God With Us**.") (Matthew 1:21)
 - e) The resurrected Jesus said, "**I am with you always**, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)
 - f) Acts 18:9-10 – And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for **I am with you**, and no one will attack you to harm you."
- v. Keller – There is nothing like the awareness of Christ's presence to dispel fear, panic & terror.

C. **Freedom from Friction/Tension With Other Sheep**

1) Earthly Observations

- vi. Keller – In every animal society there is an established order of dominance (a pecking order). The continuous **conflict** and **jealousy** within the flock can be most detrimental. The sheep become edgy, tense, discontented, and restless.

2) Biblical Implications Based on Earthly Observations

- vii. When it comes to "friction," we can't control the actions of "other sheep", **just our own**. That said, the Bible is crystal-clear as to the foundations of how we are to treat one another: **Love**.

- a) Galatians 5:14 (Amp) “For the whole Law [concerning human relationships] is complied with in the one precept, **You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself.**”
- b) Romans 12:10 (Message) “Love from the center of who you are; **don’t fake it.**”
- c) Colossians 3:14 – “**And above all these put on love**, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (Cue the 60’s Coke ad.) 😊
- viii. Pride is a gateway to division and all kinds of damaging attitudes within the Body of Christ. Describing arrogant teachers who’d become blinded by pride, Paul writes, [They have] “**an unhealthy craving for controversy...** which produces envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and **constant friction....**” (1 Timothy 6:4-5)
- ix. What greatly helps keep “harmony in the flock” is our “keeping guard” over what **daily influences we allow to fill our mind**. Will it be social media/tv/internet, etc? Or, the Word of God?
 - a) “For to set the mind on the flesh is **death...** Now the works of the flesh are evident: **enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,...**” (Romans 8:6a; Galatians 5:19-20)
 - b) “But to set the mind on the Spirit is **life and peace**”...” the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control...**” (Romans 8:6b; Galatians 5:22-23)
 - c) What we “set our mind on” (focus on) is of great importance.
 - C.S. Lewis – “Aim at (focus on) heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at (focus on) earth and you get neither.”
 - Hebrew 12:1-2 puts it this way: “... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus,...**” (niv)
- x. Psalm 133:1 – “**How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity.**”

D. Freedom from Pests/Aggravations

1) Earthly Observations

- i. Keller – Especially in summer, sheep can be driven to absolute distraction by nasal flies, bot flies, and ticks. When tormented by these pests it is literally impossible for them to lie down and rest.

2) Biblical Implications Based on Earthly Observations

- i. Keller – In the Christian life, there are many small irritations. There are the annoyances of **petty frustrations**, and ever-recurring, disagreeable experiences (those things that tend to get on our nerves.) In contemporary terms, we call this type of annoyance “being bugged.”
- ii. 1 Peter 5:6-7 (amp) “Therefore humble yourselves [demote, lower yourselves in your own estimation] under the mighty hand of God, that in due time He may exalt you, Casting **the whole of your care [all your**

- anxieties, all your worries, all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares for you affectionately and cares about you watchfully.”**
- iii. Casting “the whole of your care on Him” implies a “**letting go of.**” This can be difficult. We must ask for the Shepherd’s help (through **prayer**):
 - a) Pastor/author, Chuck Smith – I suggest to you that of all the weapons at your disposal (listed in Ephesians 6:10-18), **prayer is the most vital.** It must be, for Satan tries everything he can to keep us from **inviting God into the battle.** He would like to keep it just between the two of you.
 - iv. Chuck Smith; *Prayer: Our Glorious Privilege* – If God created the universe and controls all things within it, it’s not hard for him to take care of even the smallest annoyances of your life....**The greater our concept of God (the Shepherd), the smaller our problems seem.**
 - v. Isaiah 26:3 (amp) “**You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind is stayed [fixed] on You...**”

E. Freedom from Hunger

1) Earthly Observations

- i. Keller – It is not generally recognized that many of the great sheep countries of the world are dry, semi-arid areas. Most breeds of sheep flourish best in this sort of terrain since there are very few health hazards or parasites because of the dry climate. BUT, in those regions it is neither natural nor common to find green pastures. For example, Palestine, where David wrote this Psalm and kept his father’s flocks, especially near Bethlehem, is a dry, brown, sun-burnt wasteland.
- ii. Keller – When I was shepherding, green pastures did not “just happen.” Green pastures were the product of **tremendous labor**, and skill in land-use. It involved the clearing of rough, rocky land, tearing out brush and stumps, deep plowing and careful soil preparation, and of seeding and planting of special grains.

2) Biblical Implications Based on Earthly Observations

- i. Our Shepherd is constantly working in our lives, providing for our every need.
- ii. John records a story about the Jewish religious leaders criticizing Jesus because Jesus was healing on the Sabbath. Jesus’ response makes it clear that **He doesn’t “take time off.”**
 - a) John 5:17 (amp) But Jesus answered them, “My Father has worked [even] until now, [**He has never ceased working;** He is still working] and I, too, must be at [divine] work.”
- iii. Keller – Our Shepherd is always working in our lives (1) clearing our life of rocks of stubborn unbelief, (2) tearing out roots of bitterness, (3) breaking up the top soil of our hard hearts set like sun-dried clay. Then, He sows the seed of His own precious Word which, if given the chance to grow, will produce rich “crops” of contentment and peace.

2. "He leads me beside still/quiet waters"

- A. The lesson/warning inherent in this phrase is more like the title of the 80's country-western song, "Looking for Love" (in all the wrong places.)
- B. Earthly Observations
- i. Keller – Remember, we're in a dry, semi-arid climate. Water is vital for, both, human and animal survival. Once again, everything depends on the shepherd. He knows where the best drinking places are. In fact, very often he is the one who, with much effort and industry, has provided the watering places.
 - ii. Keller – When sheep are thirsty they become restless and set out in search of water. If not led to the good water supplies of clean, pure water they will often end up drinking from the **polluted pot holes** where they can pick up internal parasites like nematodes, liver flukes, or other disease germs.
- C. Biblical Implications Based on Earthly Observations
- I. Keller – To "drink", in spiritual terms, simply means "to take in," "to accept," or "to believe." It implies that person **accepts and assimilates** the very life of God in Christ to the point where it becomes a part of him/her.
 - II. Augustine right said that the only "water" in life that will ever fully satisfy the human soul is the "living water" of Christ.
 - a) "O God! You have made us for Yourself, and our souls are restless, searching, until they find their rest in You."
 - III. Keller – The tragic truth is that most people (including Christians) will drink from any "polluted pool" in order to try and satisfy their thirst for fulfillment in life. For some, it's sports, or their career, or music. For others, it's empty love, social media, alcohol/drugs, or even "busy-ness."
 - IV. Sadly, we **sheep are prone to create our own counterfeit water supplies.**
Here's what God has to say about this mistake:
 - a) Jeremiah 2:13 (nlt) "For my people have done two evil things: They have **abandoned me**—the fountain of **living water**. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!"
 - V. Contrary to the "polluted/never-satisfying water holes" the enemy makes abundantly available to us, Christ proclaims:
 - a) "If anyone thirsts, let him **come to Me and drink**. Whoever believes in Me,...'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37-38)
- D. Keller – In contrast to our precarious, hurried, "ever thirsty for contentment & meaning" society, Christ comes beside us quietly, **inviting us to come to Him** and He will give us "living water." (cf. John 4:10-14)

**Whatever our state
- fear, annoyance, tension, confusion, hunger, thirst –
The Great Shepherd whispers to us,
"I. Am. Here. I've got this. Lie down. You're Safe."**