**Title**: “Psalm 23 🡪 Christ our Shepherd”

**Text**: Psalm 23:1-6 (focus is verse #1)

**Date**: May 15, 2022 at FBCW

**INTRO**. Psalm 23 is timeless. Very few of us in the 21st century have much experience in the dirt…in the fields…under the hot sun…or nighttime stars…directly handling livestock.

* Compared to the ancient world of the Bible: we are a bunch of city folks!
* We’ve grown up on concrete…paved roads…indoor A/C…school…tablets/technology.

Phillip Keller, *But the Bible is a collection of books written by men of humble origin. Much of its terminology and teaching is couched in rural language, dealing with outdoor subjects and lessons from the fields*. *The Bible was addressed to simple, nomadic folks familiar with nature and the outdoor life of the countryside about them*.

Yet God’s Power & God’s Spirit is especially strong in Psalm 23 🡪 I’ve never been a shepherd of livestock…but there’s something about this Psalm that speaks to my own soul.

* These words touch something deep within me…
* I may not live in the fields, but these words address my needs and my fears!

When I say they are timeless, here’s what I mean:

* Psalm 23 is one of the first psalms we learned as children (memorized in kindergarten).
	+ When a little lamb is born…our notes include Psalm 23.
* Psalm 23 is one of the last quoted at funerals (gravesides).
	+ When the Good Shepherd carries my soul home to heaven.

Let’s read this Scripture together today…

**Background**. Before King David – the greatest leader of Israel’s kingdom – was the war hero, poet, musician, and famous leader…do you realize what the Bible says he was?

* David was a little shepherd boy.

God told the prophet Samuel 🡪 Israel’s next king will be from the small city, Bethlehem.

Samuel traveled to Bethlehem and looked for a sheepherder named Jesse.

* God said: *one of Jesse’s sons will be the next king*!

Jesse (David’s father) had seven older sons. He paraded them out in front of Samuel…who was sincerely looking for the one anointed by God.

* All seven boys passed by Samuel…
* Eliab…Abinadab…Shammah…

1 Sam 16:10, “*But the Lord has not chosen any of these…are these all of your sons*?”

1 Sam 16:7, “*Do not look on his appearance, or the height of his stature…for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*.”

1 Sam 16:11 🡪 and Jesse said 🡪 “*There remains yet the youngest boy, but behold, he is tending the sheep*.”

**From the story, where God calls the greatest king in Israel’s history** –

* There is a dignity, simplicity, sweetness – about shepherds and sheep.
* 1 Sam 17:15 – during the 40 days when Goliath/Philistines mocked Israel…*David would go back and forth between checking on his brothers/army…and tending his sheep*.
* 1 Sam 17:34-37 – when Saul said David was unprepared to go fight Goliath – David said, "*Your servant kept sheep for his father, and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it from his mouth*…”

David – the man after God’s own heart – the giant slayer – the greatest king in Israel – the man who had it all…was glad to be able to say: “*The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want*.”

**First, what is a Shepherd**? A shepherd is a person who tends to, and rears, sheep.

* The shepherd = guides and protects his sheep (his flock).
* Guards them against predators.
* Leads them to drink fresh water…and to graze upon green grass.
* He helps them because they are so easily trapped.

Again – in our modern U.S. culture, there are very few “farming shepherds” 🡪 but in the world of the Bible…the agricultural metaphor was clear.

**Second, what is a Sheep**? A sheep is a domesticated animal with a thick, wooly coat.

* A “lamb” is the term for a young sheep.
* Sheep are kept in groups called flocks/herds.
* Sheep are useful for wool, meat, and their skin can be used as leather.

Words to describe sheep: beautiful…useful…harmless…simple.

In some cultures, it is slang/insulting to call someone a “sheep” – because it can mean: *meek, stupid, weak, submissive, stupid…easily led astray…can’t think for yourself.*

**Third, why does the Bible use Shepherd & Sheep as a Metaphor for Christ and the Church**?

Think about it: why does God call his people “sheep?”

* We are not called: lions…horses…zebras…jaguars…leopards…
* We are not called: panthers…giraffes…eagles…bears…hawks…

Over 200+ times 🡪 the Bible references God’s people 🡪 as His “sheep”

**FACT**. **Sheep aren’t necessarily intelligent animals**.

Three specific dangers: 1) they are prone to wander. 2) easily follow the crowd and then lastly, 3) don’t realize imminent danger

Does this sound like you and me as human beings?

* Compared to the wisdom of God – human intelligence can’t compare!
* People constantly wander away from God’s truth!
* We can know God’s righteousness/holiness – and we still mess up!

**Sheep always need direction**.

* Sheep only see what is directly in front of them.
* No sense of direction…complete lack of awareness of surroundings.
* When lost, sheep never make their way back unless the shepherd pursues them.

Isa 53:6, *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*.

**Sheep are needy**. Are they valuable? Yes! – Are they needy? Also, yes!

* Sheep require water/food that they can’t locate on their own.
* Sheep must be led…they are “high maintenance.”
	+ Like walking Velcro strips.
	+ Everything sticks to them.
	+ They cannot clean/groom themselves.
* Sheep must be sheered and nurtured.
	+ They don’t like it…often try to squirm away.
	+ Arduous, hard work for both the Shepherd/Sheep.
	+ But sheering (Pruning) is valuable for health!
* Sheep can fall on their back (like a turtle) (helpless).
	+ Unable to roll over and stand up…
	+ Water…heavy wool…mud/muck…no claws…
	+ Shepherd must go and rescue them.
* Sheep maintenance: hunger/insects make them restless immediately/often.
	+ Shepherds must put olive oil (salve) on sheep’s eyes and heads.
	+ Bugs will land around their eyes and nest…disgusting! Painful! Blindness!
	+ Bugs are often unseen, but their larvae can create havoc.

FACT: Satan has stalked/blinded our eyes (2 Cor 4:4).

**Sheep are purchased by a shepherd**. All sheep belong to one Shepherd (leader) (family).

* Shepherds must pay a personal price (financially) to purchase their own flock.
* Rite of passage for Middle East (African) boys: to get their own flock! So proud!

All sheep might seem ordinary/common compared to the other sheep.

* But personally valuable to the shepherd that bought them.
* Shepherds study them…inspect them…know their tendencies…
* Shepherds brand their “distinctive earmark” on their sheep.
	+ Brand them…cut into them…mark of ownership/identity.
	+ You become my sheep for life! (permanently!)

1 Cor 6:19-20, *Do you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit*? *You are not your own, you have been bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.*

Eph 1:7, Through Christ, we have redemption (purchase payment) through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins…in accordance with the riches of his grace.

**Sheep forever need their shepherd**. Sheep never outgrow their need of the Shepherd/flock.

* Sheep are virtually unable to defend themselves.
* Sheep have no self-defense skills:
	+ No claws, speed, strength, teeth, swimming, flying.
	+ No camouflage, no climbing trees, etc.

A sheep has only one defense!

* To stay close to the Shepherd.
* To stay close to the Herd/Flock.

Sheep learn the voice of their Shepherd. Sheep respond to the Shepherd’s voice based on:

* Familiarity…trust…habit.
* Sheep follow the voice they know.

**Fourth, who is the Lord, our Shepherd**? (Psalm 23:1)

“The Lord” = my Author…Creator…Powerful One.

* So Big that the universe is contained within his reach (stars, sun, etc).
* So Personal that he knows the number of hairs on my head!

“Is my” – David is no longer speaking as the King/Shepherd…but as a Sheep.

* First person possessive
* As I am responsible for so much (for this \_\_\_\_) – God is responsible for me!

**FACT**. We cannot have it both ways: either we belong to Christ, or we don’t.

“Shepherd” = Dr. Tim Laniak writes, the three primary roles of the Shepherd:

* Provide – whatever you need…God has it…God will give it.
* Protect – whoever comes against you…God can guard…God is trustworthy.
* Guide – God knows your need…God has a good plan.

What has Christ been willing to do for you?

* Lay down his life for us on the cross…
* Put His Spirit inside of us…
* Prepare a place in heaven for us…
* Intercede before the throne/Father for us…
* Promise to abide with us, to never leave us.

**Fifth, what does it mean, “I shall not want”**?

* It means – there will be no lack.
* It means – I will have what I need…because my Shepherd is with me.

It is NOT the Prosperity Gospel…it is not a promise/guarantee of material blessing.

* God does not promise “more” of the things that corrupt/hurt me.
* God does promise “care” for the things I need to fulfill His will for my life.

“*I shall not want*” means 🡪 I am completely satisfied with, and I completely trust 🡪 God’s trustworthy management of my life!

We trust that the Christ who saved our soul for eternity…will also give us daily bread.

**CONCL**. William Bradbury – the same guy who wrote the music for beloved songs like *Joy to the World* and *Jesus Loves Me*, *This I Know* – also wrote the music for this song:

Savior, Like a Shepherd lead us…Much we need Thy tender care;

In Thy Pleasant pastures feed us…For our use Thy folds prepare.

Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, Thou hast bought us, Thine we are (2x)

Ira Sankey ended a DL Moody crusade by singing this song as the hymn of invitation. When Ira Sankey walked off the stage, a man stopped him to talk. “Were you in the Union army?” Yes – “Did you have guard duty?” – Yes I did, at such and such a place… and the man proceeded to say, one night I was sniper who was going to kill you…I heard you…my mother used to sing it.