

"The Lord is my Shepherd"

Two weeks ago, we looked at the life of David. And now I will be introducing one of his psalms, one of the most famous psalms. It can be found hung in hospital rooms, in movies, as tattoos, and as engravings on tombstones. I have read this psalm many times at the bedside of those being called to heaven.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley,[a] I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

We discussed how David was born as the eighth son of Jesse, conceived in his mother's sin. He was likely never cared for much by his parents or siblings, and grew up tending for the sheep out in the field. David spent more time interacting with sheep than people in his unchanging, monotonous days. You could spend 10 years not thinking about anything. But David sought out a relationship with God, and left them in words. God's messages from heaven are namely abundant in the scenes of our daily life, however what is necessary to us is the spiritual sensitivity to accept them.

Psalms 23 starts with the words, "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." Most of you here probably know this verse enough to have memorized it. But being accustomed to something has its danger. Once you have memorized something, you begin to notice less. Some may think, what is so important about this passage? But what is written here can change our lives completely. This is what it means. Here it is written, "The Lord is my shepherd." So I ask you simply, "Is the Lord truly your shepherd?"

Is the Lord surely our shepherd? We may recite that "The Lord is my shepherd" but in reality be living and believing that "there is no way anyone other than myself is my shepherd." Let's think about David. He as a young boy was a shepherd devoted to his sheep. Every day, his attention was turned to them,

thinking about how best to care for and protect them. And he knew what he must do. As we spoke of before, David beat Goliath with a sling and stone. This was a skill he had learned from protecting his defenseless sheep.

The reason why David knew "what he must do for his sheep" was because he "knew his sheep well." If I dare say, sheep cannot live on their own. And so they have been protected by humans as livestock. Sheep are near sighted, and cannot seek out a pasture for themselves. They cannot outrun a predator nor do they have the claws or teeth to protect themselves. They grow lustrous wool, yet they are unable to take care of it themselves, always covered in mud. If they are not properly cared for, they will eventually be unable to walk with the weight of their own wool. The tasks set before David as a shepherd was to protect and care for these sheep. And in his spiritual sense, he saw "humans" as the "sheep", and "God" as the "shepherd".

Later, there was a time before he became king, when David was pursued by his enemies. In such desperate situation, he pretended to be crazy to flee for his life. During this time he wrote, **"The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing."** (Psalms 34:10)

Youth is precious in its self. In youth our bodies overflow with strength. The strength in youth can at times accomplish what may seem to be impossible. But David says that even such young lion can grow weak and hungry.

Even after David was anointed as king of Israel, he was aware of one thing. It is written in 2 Samuel 3:39, **"And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds!"** Even as king, he fully understood that there are things beyond his power, that he can do nothing himself, and confesses that he is weak.

The great prophet Isaiah saw and wrote about the condition of us humans that, **"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."** (Isaiah 53:6) Human's, reflected in Isaiah's eyes, were lost sheep each going their own way. 750 years after, it is written that when Jesus, **"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep**

without a shepherd." (Mathew 9:36) David, Isaiah, and Jesus knew how sheep without a shepherd are lost, weak, and cannot survive. This was a familiar scene to them. And so the sight of humans and sheep resembled one another in their eyes.

This is the sight of humans as written in the bible. I am not trying to pressure such views on to you. But though working as a pastor, I cannot deny that the more I interact with people, the more I am certain of what is written in the bible.

Through human history, if we look at the "numerical amount of knowledge humans have today", we could say that we I've a much more intellectual life than those of the past. Appearance wise, life today may be appealing, and abundant. But within our hearts, there has been no progress.

We all live feeling the weight of a weakness or limit of some kind. Jesus is able to see what lies deep down in our hearts, and he sees the sight of weakened sheep without a shepherd, collapsing one by one.

Is this not where the first step in seeking God starts? No one wishes for someone they love to fall into destitute. So we live trying to be our own shepherd, confident and strong. And so we work very hard. We try to live in devotion. And the more gentle and responsible one is, the more they break themselves trying, and trying, and trying.

Looking at reality, when we look at ourselves, have we been able to become the shepherd that we envision? Are we overflowing with confidence and standing as leaders? Lets ask ourselves these next 5 questions.

Have you, and are you able to control your own feelings?

It is a difficult task to control your own feelings. We have experienced times when changes in our own emotions swayed our actions, leading to disruption or even broken relationships. And who are we to yell at a small child still unable to tell right from wrong? In the morning: pleasant, but by the afternoon: sullen and disgruntled, tormenting the people around us. Without inner stability, sheep are unable to entrust themselves to the shepherd.

Can you at all times be on good terms with everyone?

Who we face in our lives are humans. Our relationships are both our joys and our struggles. The closest person to us is ourselves. Are you on good terms with yourself? How about your partner or your children? How is your relationship with your coworkers and friends? We know that it is difficult to say whether things will continue as they are with "that one person" you get along with so well. A shepherd must resolve the issues that arise between the sheep. Can we carry out such task?

Do you have a firm foundation to stand on?

A shepherd must know exactly where they stand in order to lead his sheep to a green pasture. When they are faced with a situation needing immediate response, they are able to make the right decision because they stand on a firm foundation. Do we ourselves have that foundation in which we can say to others "Come here and stand." How unreliable we are if where we stand today is different from where we may stand tomorrow.

Do you have fear? Do you have worries?

We are easily controlled by our fear. If there is fear in our heart, it will come out in our words and actions. And in our hearts are constant worries. Fear and worry eats away our peace of mind. It takes away our pleasure. The fear and worry in a shepherd will spread to his sheep.

Can you see what lies in the future?

Do we know what awaits us beyond the decisions we make? Do we know what will come tomorrow because of a decision made today? We do not know what will happen to ourselves or our family half a year from today. There are no shepherds here that can anticipate the issues of the future to resolve them before they ever happen.

If you can confidently answer "yes" to all of these questions,(I have yet to meet anyone who possibly could...) you can continue on in life as you have been, as your own shepherd. But if you feel you "fall short of being a shepherd" or feel you

"must think a little more deeply about this issue", how about taking David's endorsement as "The Lord is my shepherd" and leading a new life with God as your new shepherd.

People may say, "this is to admit(approve) your own weakness", but that is incorrect. In that moment you are made to realize "the truth of how we, humans, really are". If we see who we truly are, we see that we need God, and nothing else can take his place. That is the moment our life as "the Lord is my shepherd" begins. David's Psalm 23 starts with the words "The Lord is my shepherd" but if this was actually

"I am my own shepherd" how would the rest of the psalm go? I am my own shepherd. I work hard yet do not satisfy. I obtain this and that, and go to great counselors, but have yet to discover what truly fills my spirit. I fear the coming of the day, my family and I must walk through the valley of death, with many sleepless nights. I fear everything from the ingredients of processed foods to sudden illnesses. Try to be prepared before anything happens but of course I am powerless. At office meetings I am surrounded by enemies. When I return home, despite my struggles, I am still unable to unload my heavy burdens to rest. I take several supplements daily, and my Jack Daniels runneth over. Surely misery and misfortune will follow me, and I will live in self-doubt for the rest of my life.

David knew a sheep could never be its own shepherd. That for them to satisfy, they must be lead and protected by a shepherd, and this is just the same with humans. He knew that we ourselves cannot be our own shepherd, and the only one who can is God. It is only when this relationship is established, that we can satisfy and be restored.

So what does "I lack nothing" really mean? What is the boundary line between "lacking" and "lacking nothing"? Max Lucado, a Christian writer as written something interesting. Many people are in prison. Yes, it is overflowing with people. Once in a while there are some who escape, but come right back. Most have been sentenced life in prison, and live out their life there. You and I may even be in this prison in this very moment.

On the prison gate is the name of the prison. Its name is "Want". It's prisoners are They want something. They want something bigger. Something nicer. Something

Newer, more valuable. They want a new job. A new car. A new partner. And when they have that one thing they want, they will be happy, and they will leave the prison. But soon they will find another thing to want. Just one more, if I could get that one thing. A promotion, an award, if I could change my self image. And they repeat this process of leaving and entering.

If our happiness comes from using, driving, drinking, digesting something, then we must face the fact that we are in prison. "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." The "lack nothing" written here does not mean that we are constantly receiving everything we want. Our shepherd, of course, knows this. He knows that we are not to be in such prison. Our shepherd does not think even for a second that giving us what we want will free us from our "lack".

If any of you are residence of this prison, or have repeatedly been in this prison, I have good news. I would like for you to know this good news. It is that the "Lord" we have been talking about today is here to see you, as he has everyday. We are called by name to the visitation room. He waits there and says, "Today, I have something special to tell you".

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." If we accept the Lord as our shepherd, we lack nothing. That does not mean that we will become millionaires. The "lack" we think of and the "lack" our shepherd knows is completely different. The Lord our shepherd knows that the more we get, the more we want. And we will never satisfy. That is, until we meet our shepherd.

Jesus said, "**I am the good shepherd**" (John 10:11) and that "**I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**" (John 10:10) It is recorded in the book of John, that these words of Jesus filled and restored the life of certain woman. Her name is not written, but we know her as the "Samaritan woman". Her spirit had once thirst. She was very familiar with the prison of want. She married 5 times and divorced 5 times. When she met Jesus, she had a man who was not her husband.

Such a women met Jesus. She had lived all her life never questioning herself as her own shepherd. She did not know that there was another way to live. No one had told her of another way. Yet Jesus Christ met her. Before she had even

spoken, Jesus knew that she had a thirst that nothing could satisfy, and spoke to her.

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

To live as "The Lord is my shepherd". Therefore "lacking in nothing" means, the Lord who has said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full", will make us into a spring, a spring of life. Then we will no longer have to live with the mistaken standard which has controlled our life. Only when we live with the Lord as our shepherd, and a spring of life wells up from within us, we can truly say, I lack nothing. Max Lucado once wrote about a conversation between a Christian and a minister.

A man once went to a minister for counseling. "I've lost everything" he bemoaned. "Oh," the preacher responded, "I'm so sorry to hear you've lost your faith." "No," the man corrected him, "I haven't lost my faith." "Well then," replied the preacher, "I'm sad to hear you've lost your character." "I didn't say that," the man corrected. "I still have my character." "Then I'm so sorry to hear you've lost your salvation." "That's not what I said!" the man objected, beginning to lose patience. The minister explained, "Well, you have your faith, your character, and your salvation. Seems to me, you have lost none of the things that really matter."

Within us is the spring of life that Christ has given us , and as long as the spring of eternal life is welling up within us, we lack nothing. The single phrase, "the Lord is my shepherd", dramatically changes our life. Today I pray from the bottom of my heart that you have decided to reaffirm this relationship. Lets pray.

reference document: Max Lucado "Traveling Light"

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