**The Good Shepherd**

*by Stan Cox*

In the gospel of John, Jesus identified himself as the “good shepherd” (John 10:11). The work of the shepherd in New Testament times was challenging. He would train the sheep or goats to obey his commands, feed and water them, and protect them from harm. The young David is an good example, as he saved his sheep from both a lion and a bear (cf. 1 Samuel 17:34). Obviously, if the sheep belonged to the shepherd himself, the investment was a precious one. This explains Jesus’ words, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (11). In contrast, “The hireling flees [when he sees the wolf] because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep” (13). Jesus used this imagery to describe His sin sacrifice, “As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (15).

The 23rd Psalm is a beautiful passage that uses this metaphor to describe the care and protection given to us (the sheep) by the Lord (the shepherd).  “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (1).

As we noted, a shepherd supplied food and drink. In the text of Psalm 23, the psalmist, King David, revealed the Lord’s provision for him, “I shall not want” (1). “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters” (2).  “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (5).

The Lord also provided direction through His revealed will.  “He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (3). Just as the sheep obeys the shepherd’s commands, David knew that the way of righteousness was found in the commandments of God.

This protection and direction was available to David always, even and especially when his path was a desperate one. The most encouraging aspect of this Psalm is the promise of protection in the midst of danger.  “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” (4). David’s faith in God was evident, and expressed in this song with beautiful words.  “You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over” (5).  “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (6).

The same imagery can be used to describe what Jesus Christ does for His own. They are His sheep, He is their good Shepherd.

**Jesus sustains us spiritually.** He told a group that sought Him out so that He would give them physical bread, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him” (John 6:27). Later in that conversation He said of Himself, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (6:35).

**Jesus directs our paths to heaven.** In fact, He **is** the path to heaven! He promised His disciples that He was going to prepare mansions for them, and would come again to get them. He said, “And where I go you know, and the way you know” (John 14:4). Notice the reaction of Thomas, and the Lord’s rejoinder, “Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Fatherexcept through Me.’” (14:5-6). Of course, we must follow that way, believing in Him, and obeying His commands.  “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (John 12:48-50).

**We are not guaranteed physical safety as we live for Jesus.**  “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). But, we are promised that if we continue in His will through the trials and difficulties of life, those Scriptures are able to “make you wisefor salvationthrough faith which is in Christ Jesus” (3:15). This wonderful protection is supplied because of God’s love for His children, “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 25:29-31).

**Jesus is our shepherd.** He supplies us with every need we might have. If we believe in Him, we will never want. We will have the “bread of life” (John 6:35) – we will have the “living water” (John 4:10). As Paul wrote, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

**Jesus is the good shepherd.** He lays down His life for the sheep. He does this willingly (cf. John 10:18). It is because of this willingness to die for us that we have the remission of sins. It is because He has the power “to take it [His life] again” (ibid.), that we have the hope of life eternal. In the end, our victory is complete!

**Opinion-Driven Morality**

*by Joe R. Price*

An anti-biblical “morality” has gained momentum in our country over the past two decades. The following is but one example of this not-so-new immorality. A May 2017 Gallup poll asked, “Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?” It found 61% said they “should be valid,” and 37% said they “should not be valid.” In 2005, “separate polls found 68-28 and 56-39 against legalizing homosexual ‘marriage,’” a complete flip in public attitude (“Gay ‘marriage’ receives highest approval rating ever in Gallup poll,” Peter LaBarbera, from lifesitenews.com). The same study showed “60 percent of Americans responded that ‘gay or lesbian relations’ are ‘morally acceptable,’ and 37 percent said they are ‘morally wrong.’”

The aforementioned article continued to say: “Gallup records 2012 as the first year showing more Americans in favor of homosexuality-based ‘marriage’ than against it. That is also the year that then-President Barack Obama famously switched his stance to support ‘gay marriage,’ months before his re-election later that year. Whatever factors are behind the massive and rapid public opinion shift, it cannot reasonably be challenged that Americans have strayed far from the historic, Judeo-Christian (biblical) understanding of homosexuality as a sinful behavior.”

God defines morality, not popular opinion and legal mandate. The Bible says, “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil” (Ex. 23:2). People tend to go with the flow rather than stand against the advancements of sinful error and evil conduct. The gospel calls on Christians to have moral courage in the face of opposition to truth and moral purity (2 Pet. 1:5). While we must continue to love sinners and try to save them, we must also abhor sin (read 1 Cor. 16:13-14; Eph. 5:11; Rom. 12:9; 1 Pet. 3:13-17; Jude 20-23). The battle against the host of wickedness continues. Put on God’s armor, stand in Him, and prevail (Eph. 6:10-17).