

## THE SHEPHERD'S PASTURE

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want, He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake." Psalm 23:1-3.

Are you feeling like a little lost lamb or perhaps a sheep with no shepherd? Does it seem as though you have been wandering in the desert or in the barren rocky areas of life? In these lonely places you may feel unprotected and without direction for your life, or perhaps are waiting to hear the sound of the lead bell or voice of the shepherd saying "this is the way. Come walk in it."

John chapter 10 tells us of the safe place, the place of refuge where there is protection and direction, a green pasture. Jesus says in v14 "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own." V 3 & 4 says, "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." Jesus is the watchman/doorkeeper and great shepherd. Jesus says, I am the door of the sheep (v7) and again, I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. (v9). Jesus says again, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. (v11).

We live in a time when you may feel that the wolf is attacking you as one of the sheep. Deception is all around. Jesus warned us of the wolves of the world who come even to God's people. He says that (v12 & 13) he who is a hireling and not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep." In the natural, wolves travel in packs and make a lot of noise. The wolf's plan is to isolate the victim sheep by causing the sheep to flee the flock because of all "voices" that bring fear, confusion, and lack of trust. The sheep is then vulnerable and feels unprotected. Perhaps you can identify.

Jesus is the single voice we need to be able to hear. He guarantees your 100% safety, life provision, shelter, love, peace of mind. He leads to the good pasture to graze on and the clear, still waters to drink from. Jesus and the Father in heaven work together to carry out the lifetime guarantee. He says that "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."

As a good border collie is to the shepherd and sheep in the natural, so the Holy Spirit is to the Father, Jesus and the sheep flock in the spiritual. He is listening to and obeying the voice and hand command of the Great Shepherd in directing the sheep to return to the fold or to go to the safe pasture rather than run around in fear and confusion. The Three work together in perfect harmony to direct, guide and offer what is best for the sheep of the pasture and even for those who have strayed away. 1st Peter 2:25 says, "For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Jesus says, "For the Son of Man

has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” (Matt.18:11-14). In the natural, a sheep or lamb can be a very stubborn animal and not inclined to obedience. We human sheep are not much different. If we would but submit our hearts, souls, minds and flesh to Jesus, the Great Shepherd the grass in the pasture would be greener and the water would be more clear and pure. His voice would be singled out above all others. We would each find our pasture to graze in. We read in Matt:9:36 that “...when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.”

The Father’s heart for the people/sheep of His pasture is one of love, forgiveness and acceptance to protect, heal and set them free from themselves and the “wolves” of this world. Isaiah 40:11 says, “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.” “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Hebrews 13:20,21). There is hope for seeming hopelessness, there is grace for mistakes made, there is direction in the midst of confusion, there is peace to still the troubled waters.

The Lord has those in place amongst the 88 churches in Abbotsford who serve as shepherds. In 1st Peter 5:1-4 it reads, “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed; shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” Amongst our 88 churches in town there are 88 varieties of good grasses and still waters to feed and drink from. Ultimately, all are one large pasture, one sanctuary in Jesus. Jesus will build His Church. It will be built on the solid rock of Jesus and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Jesus instructed Peter regarding the church to “feed My lambs”, to “tend My sheep”, to “feed My sheep”. These ones belong to Jesus not Peter or the individual churches.

Jesus was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matt.15:24). By the amazing grace of God we as believers have been grafted into the root as it is written, “for if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.....(Rom.11:16-19). Jesus, the Great Shepherd is that root and the One who laid down His life for the sheep and the lost sheep of Israel. Jerusalem and the land of Israel with all the promises of God has long been a pasture for God’s people. The Lord told Abraham that He would bless those who blessed him and his descendents and He would curse those who cursed him and his descendents. We have a spirit connection with God’s people Israel and we bless

the Lord's plan for all His people under the one Shepherd.

The Lord has appointed good shepherds in the 88 churches and as one of the many shepherds we stand together with our brothers and sisters as we offer places of pasture for the lambs and the sheep under the one Shepherd. If you are one of these sheep who need a place to graze and be nurtured and fed, we encourage you to stop wandering and to dare to trust the Lord for the pasture He places you in. If you are currently in a local pasture so to speak, pray for your shepherd rather than complain and bite him/her and grow where you are planted. He loves you very much and has only your best interest at heart. Listen to His voice.

Written by: Pastors Ray and Leslie Johnson.