

# The Good Shepherd

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – a psalm in which David praises God as his shepherd in peace, protection, and presence
2. aim – to cause us to see Jesus as our good shepherd and find our assurance through faith in him
3. text – Psalm 23

### b. outline

1. The Nature of Psalm 23
2. The Assurance from Psalm 23
3. The Gospel in Psalm 23

### c. overview

1. a “smile on my face and a song in my heart”
  - a. a testimony to the upbeat and positive nature of Hazel Barnes, even in the midst of great suffering
  - b. a song reminiscent of **Psalm 23**
    1. the Psalm that she insisted be read at her graveside
    2. the Psalm that Gary read at her bedside just after she had passed from this life into eternity
  - c. a Psalm which contains the *substance* of the positive nature of the song in her heart, which left her with a smile on her face
2. if you will indulge me, I would like to *reflect* upon this Psalm as it applies to the positive outlook of Miss Hazel, especially in terms of its *real meaning to her life (and ours)*

## I. The Nature of Psalm 23

### Content

#### a. the popularity of the psalm

*“the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”*

1. Psalm 23 is one of the most popular and well-known pieces of poetry in history
  - a. it’s been cross-stitched and hung on countless walls throughout the world – I found this Psalm on more than 1,900 items available on Etsy.com
  - b. if fact, many who would not accept *anything else* the Bible has to say would recognize this opening stanza, some even going so far as to having it read at their sickbed or at their funeral
  - c. a 3000-year-old poem filled with *imagery* evoking a strong sense of both comfort and assurance

#### b. the genesis of the psalm

1. David, the 2<sup>nd</sup>-M.BC king of Israel wrote this song during a particularly difficult time (c. 1000BC)
  - a. **e.g.** maybe when he was running from Saul, who was trying to kill him; or when faced with a particularly difficult enemy of Israel, like the Philistines; or at a more *personal* moment of crisis, like when his son Absalom tried to usurp his throne or when his firstborn son died
  - b. King David writes this song as an *assurance* that, regardless of his circumstances, he has *hope* because God has lead him and guided him through it all

#### c. the opening of the psalm

*“the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”*

1. the opening sentence is *seriously under-valued* by most who read it
2. the opening sentence has three (3) key words, each of which sets the *tone* for the rest of the Psalm
  - a. *“the Lord”* (Hebrew *Adonai*) – a *euphemism* for the actual name of God, *YHWH* (or *Jehovah* in Latin) – a *substitute* word designed to prevent an ancient Israelite writer from violating the Third Commandment of taking the name of the Lord in vain
    1. however, clearly the One True and Living God – the self-existent, self-sufficient, and self-determining Creator; not created, not needing anything, not answering to anyone
    2. the One who announced his name to Moses at the Burning Bush as “I am that I am” – the One is beyond our imaginations in his majesty, and who’s glory fills the whole universe
    3. **no matter where you are, I am – no matter when you are, I am!**
    4. this word is **contrasted** with the next to make the point of the Psalm ...
  - b. *“shepherd”* = a keeper of sheep at the lowest strata of society
    1. a poor, dirty, smelly, hardworking man who would not be invited to fancy dinner parties or be sought out for financial advice or be selected as an important political or judicial leader

2. a commoner, doing an amazingly difficult job with unbelievably difficult animals
  3. yet ... this God *stoops* to doing the work of a shepherd – the *highest of the high* taking on the work of the *lowest of the low* – the One True God actually condescending to care about David
    - a. **remember:** David empathized with this analogy for it reflected his *actual life as a shepherd*
  4. **the point of the Psalm is that the Creator, the Living God, had led David like a shepherd leads his sheep**
- c. “I shall not want” = **not:** I will get everything I *desire*; **rather:** I shall not *lack* for anything
1. a word referencing David’s *needs*, not the selfish *desires* of his flesh
  2. **the shepherding work of God had led him so that all of his *true needs* were met, and this had produced great assurance and comfort in his life**
3. **note:** time does not permit us to exegete the entire Psalm, so I will reflect on just three (3) ...

## II. The Assurance from Psalm 23

### Content

#### a. the assurance of *peace* (v. 2)

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

1. **note:** sheep will only lie down when they are a) fully fed and watered, b) confident that no predators are lurking, and c) physically well (without insects, disease, wounds, etc.)
2. David paints a picture of a shepherd leading his sheep into a lush meadow, with excellent grazing and a safe watering pond or stream – a luxurious place, a place of serenity, and place of comfort
3. God has led David to a place of **peace** – in spite of all of his difficulties and sufferings, David can say that *Yahweh* has led him to a place of serenity and fulfillment

#### b. the assurance of *protection* (v. 4)

*“Even 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”*

1. David (here) paints a picture of a shepherd leading his sheep to a new grazing land, passing through a valley where the high hills around them hide various predators waiting to pounce
  - a. yet, the sheep pass through *knowing* that the shepherd will use his “rod and staff” to protect them
2. God has led David with his great hand of **protection** – in spite of all of the enemies around him, threatening to destroy him, David can say that *Yahweh* has gone before him with great power

#### c. the assurance of *presence with God* (vv. 5-6)

*“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever”*

1. David (now) turns from his “shepherding” metaphor to a great leader (king?) welcoming him to a great banquet, where even his enemies have been invited, having been anointed with oil
  - a. it is a great feast in the “house of the Lord” – the abode of God himself
2. God has led David into his very **presence** – through all of the struggles against his enemies, David can say that *Yahweh* has invited him *home*, with home being into the very presence of God himself

#### d. the assurance for *us*

1. **question:** so, can these assurances apply to *us*, 3,000 years removed from the life and circumstances of David – or, can *just anyone* (in our emotionally-laden, mystically-inclined, religiously-numb culture) pick up this song and find comfort *in reading the words*?
  - a. or, more specifically, *how can we* find these same assurances and comforts in our lives – why was this Psalm so comforting to Miss Hazel in the midst of all of her struggles and pain?

## III. The Gospel in Psalm 23

### Content

#### a. the nature of the Good Shepherd

1. **the answer:** in the *claims* of Jesus, specifically, in his claim “*I am the good shepherd*” (**John 10:11**)
  - a. the Fourth Gospel focuses on the *nature* of this Jesus, the *claims* that he made using specific “*I am*” statements (“*living water*”, “*bread from heaven*”, “*way, truth, life*”, etc.)
  - b. in each case, Jesus *connects* himself to a work of God in the O.T. *by claiming to be Yahweh and claiming that work for himself* – in this case, claiming to be the “*Lord*” of David (**i.e.** “*I am*”) and the “*shepherd*” who had led this David in the fashion outlined in the Psalm
  - c. **IOW:** Jesus makes the claim that he had led David to peace, protection, and the presence of God, and ... **he claims to do the same for all who belong to him, for his sheep (John 10:14)**

## b. the leading of the Good Shepherd

1. the Good Shepherd leads his people to *peace*
  - a. **not:** peace with neighbor or nation; **rather:** peace with God – the human race, in its natural, fallen state, stands in rebellion against its Creator; humanity hates God, and his wrath comes  
*"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God, all have turned aside" (Romans 3:10ff)*
  - b. it is this Jesus that goes to the cross of Calvary to make atonement for a people before God, to satisfy the law of God on their behalf, to take his wrath and punishment for them so that they might be at peace with God – that God might put down his weapons against them  
*"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)*
  - c. **the Good Shepherd leads his people to a place of real and genuine peace – the comfort and assurance that they are now fully acceptable to God because of his sacrifice**
2. the good shepherd leads his people to *protection*
  - a. **note:** the greatest enemy of humanity is death – all of us have to face this enemy, just as Miss Hazel has – **it is the predator that stalks us all**; death is the *just* result of our rebellion
  - b. but, it is this Jesus who walked out of a tomb *alive*; it was he who conquered the enemies of sin, death, judgment, condemnation and hell on behalf of *all who are raised up like him*  
*"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55)*
  - c. **the Good Shepherd leads his people through the valley of the shadow of death – his sheep are comforted in knowing that death has been defeated in resurrection**
3. the Good Shepherd leads his people to the *presence* of God
  - a. the first step is to peace, the second to protection, but the *final step* of this leading by the Good Shepherd is into the very presence of God – life eternal in the presence of God, seated at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and being filled to overflowing with his goodness (**Rev. 19:6-9**)
  - b. importantly, it is this Jesus, *God himself in human flesh*, that does this leading
  - c. **the Good Shepherd leads people into the eternal presence of God – his sheep are led by him into his own eternal presence as the Son of God made flesh**
4. so, the comforts and assurances of **Psalm 23 apply only to those who belong to this Jesus** – he is the Good Shepherd leading a people, and only the people he leads find these things to be true

## c. the sheep of the Good Shepherd

1. **question:** so, how does anyone become a member of the flock of this Jesus – how did Miss Hazel become a sheep in the flock of this Christ to be led to have such a song of joy in her heart?
2. **answer:** to open your hand to the sinful things of this world (repent), and turn with an empty hand of belief and trust to this Christ (faith)
  - a. to confess this Jesus as **"Lord"** (Yahweh) and to believe with great confidence that he has **risen** from the dead (**Romans 10:9**), thus, is able to lead you to peace with God, to protection from the enemy of death, and into the very presence of the Creator himself