

The Good Shepherd: Embracing the Heart of Christ

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Dear friends in Christ, today we come together to explore one of the most profound and comforting themes in the Scriptures: The Good Shepherd. This powerful metaphor, wonderfully expressed by our Lord Jesus in the Gospel of John, reveals His divine nature and invites us into a deep, enriching relationship with Him. As we examine this theme today, we will consider what it means to be known, cared for, and guided by the Good Shepherd, and how accepting this truth can profoundly transform our lives.

At the outset let us try to understand the metaphor of the shepherd in the light of the passage read to us from John. In the ancient Near East, the image of a shepherd was widely recognised and held in great significance. Shepherds were responsible for the safety and guidance of their flocks. This role required immense dedication, intimacy, and sacrifice. The Psalmist beautifully expresses this in Psalm 23:1 when he writes, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want,” establishing God as the ultimate caretaker of our souls.

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, embodies this role in its truest form. His essence is filled with compassion and commitment. He does not simply oversee us; He knows us deeply and personally. In John 10:14, He proclaims, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” This statement invites us not only to acknowledge His leadership but also to recognise the profound and mutual relationship He yearns to have with each of us.

The Good Shepherd’s care is evident in His actions. He guides us through life’s trials, comforts us in times of distress, and provides for our needs. He is aware of our struggles and delights in tending to our spirits. Revelation 7:17 assures us, “For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” This promise reinforces that the Good Shepherd provides not only physical nourishment but also spiritual sustenance.

What then should be our response to the offer of Jesus to be our Good Shepherd? Understanding our role in this relationship is paramount. As His sheep, we are called to respond to His voice and follow His guidance. This requires trust and surrender, knowing that He leads us to green pastures and still waters, as expressed in Psalm 23. Trusting the Good Shepherd means allowing Him to lead us, even when the path is uncertain.

At this stage, let us examine Psalm 23 in some detail.

This Psalm is likely the most well-known passage in the Old Testament. It serves as a testimony by David to the Lord’s faithfulness throughout his life. As a hymn of confidence, it portrays the Lord as a Shepherd, King, and Host to His disciples. By using familiar images from the ancient Near East, David reveals his personal relationship with the Lord in three distinct steps: he declares, “The LORD is my shepherd”; he expresses his assurance of security by stating, “I shall not want” and “I will fear no evil”; and finally, he shares his joy, saying, “my cup runneth over.”

During times of great prosperity, David did not become like many worldly individuals who, when fortune smiles upon them, forget God and indulge excessively in their own pleasures. Instead, he found joy in God, the source of all his blessings. He recognised that the peace he experienced and his deliverance from troubles were due to God’s goodness. Furthermore, David trusted that through God’s providence, he would continue to experience happiness throughout his life. His intention was to dedicate himself to the pure worship of God. Friends, many of us may find ourselves in similar situations, but the important question is: Are we in constant communication with Jesus, acknowledging Him, trusting in Him, and being grateful for all His grace?

A good shepherd cherishes his sheep, caring for them when they are sick or weak. David illustrates this by stating that he was treated with such care by God. Being in God’s presence refreshes our souls. The term “restoring of the soul,” as it is often translated, signifies a renewal or recovery. A diligent shepherd leads his sheep to lush pastures, guides them to peaceful waters, provides refreshment when they are weary, and steers them away from dangerous paths, directing them instead to safe and straightforward routes.

Even in times of danger—such as when David was fleeing from Saul, knowing he was being hunted—he continued to trust in the Lord. This can be likened to a tunnel experience, where we cannot see what lies at the other end or whether we will emerge safely. Yet, in our most challenging situations, we can find hope in the knowledge that God’s presence

awaits us and is always with us.

David concludes with the declaration, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD.” This statement makes it clear that he does not limit his aspirations to earthly comforts or pleasures. Instead, his ultimate focus is on the Kingdom of God, which is the goal he seeks in all that he does. It is as if he is saying that he does not live merely to exist but to serve God and grow in His ways. David distinguishes himself from ungodly individuals who seek pleasure only in material indulgences. He indicates that living for God is of such great importance that he values earthly comforts only as tools to help him live for God. Ultimately, he believes that all the blessings bestowed upon him will lead to his dwelling in the house of the Lord.

We learn from this that going through repetitive rituals and prayers during times of trouble does not represent genuine worship of God. Instead, it is important for us to maintain a strong trust and confidence in our Lord and His benevolent nature. We should be thankful for the blessings He showers upon us, and His protective care should not be forgotten during good times. Our focus should remain on the ultimate goal: to dwell in the house of our Lord for eternity.

In conclusion, as we reflect on the Good Shepherd, let us embrace the warmth and security of being in His care. We are known, loved, and guided by Jesus, who desires a close relationship with each of us. May this understanding transform our lives, leading us to a deeper faith and a more profound sense of peace in our daily journey. Let us follow the Good Shepherd with trust and gratitude, knowing that He walks with us always.