

“The Good Shepherd”

Psalm 23

Series: “The Thread: Finding Jesus in the Old Testament”

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Well, this is Thanksgiving week and I hope all of you have a wonderful time with your family and friends. For those traveling, hope you have safe travels. I can tell you that Debbie and I – our family will be giving thanks for you our faith family as we gather around our table this week.

I love this time of the year and I love the traditions associated with Thanksgiving. From what we eat to watching football together to massive naps that will be taken on Thursday afternoon after the Dallas Cowboys lose – it will be wonderful!

Of course, what can be a highlight depending on the topics that are discussed is the conversation that takes place around the Thanksgiving table...and if you don't know where to start with this, I pulled a list of topics of possible discussion over the thanksgiving meal– just trying to be a help to you.

This is written by a college student from Miami to other college students so consider the source! To be fair, he is a humor editor and here is his list of topics he suggests to bring up in order to have the most entertaining conversation and most memorable Thanksgiving ever.

#1 – Politics – “Instead of discussing what you are thankful for with your family, you should discuss hot button issues and politics. When your liberal, gender studies major cousin and conservative, gun wielding, uncle start debating if the Jan. 6 attack on the Capital was a protest or a siege...Tensions will be flaring but the entertainment will be rivaling that of Alabama losing a football game. Sit back, make some popcorn and let the show begin.”

#2 – Marriage – “Be sure to tell Great-Grandma Shirley that your 24-year-old cousin, Dany, still isn't married. Back in her day, she had a husband serving in WWI by 17, six kids by 18 all while working in the factory while the kids were at school. So the fact that your cousin is not married yet is actually preposterous.”

#3 - Real jobs – “Even though your cousin, James, just graduated from college and has a job picking up balls at the golf range, that is not a “real job.” According to the rest of the family, he should have his life completely figured out by now. When they were his age, they had 9-5 jobs at the bank or the office with a 401K and a health care plan set up. Make sure everyone knows he does not have a real job yet.”

#4 – Tattoos – “Talk about getting a tattoo, the desire for multiple tattoos or a new piercing. Your great-grandpa may ask what gang you're in, your grandma could pass out, your mom might get angry and your Dad may stop paying for college but hey, it will definitely get the conversation going.”

#5 – Religion - Okay, don't do ANY of this! A little pastoral wisdom here: Shoot for the least entertaining Thanksgiving ever!

Talking about conversation...one conversation that has always intrigued me in the Bible and one that I would have LOVED to have been a part of is found in Luke's gospel. Do you remember the story of the resurrected Jesus walking down the road to Emmaus with a couple of his followers?

Luke 24:13-27 – “That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸

Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ¹⁹ And he said to them,

“What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” ²⁵ And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

What a conversation to have been a part of! Jesus takes these two men on a Bible study if you will...and using the Old Testament – he shows them exactly what we are talking about in this series. He points out to them beginning with Moses and the Prophets, himself...HIS STORY.

Jesus is the “Thread” that runs throughout all of the Old Testament scripture. And just like in our series, I'm sure he started in Gen. 3 with the first announcement of the gospel. No doubt he pointed out to these men the story of Abraham and Isaac showing that he was the substitutionary, sacrificial lamb to come. And just like we did last week, I'm sure Jesus spent a lot of time talking about the Passover and highlighting ALL of the ways this event is actually revealed in him!

What a conversation this must have been! Like these men, I'm sure if we were there, it would have been said of us as it was about them:

Luke 24:32 – “They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

Later, he would have this same type of conversation with his disciples. He appears to them and in:

Luke 24:44-45 – “Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...”

ALL of Old Testament points to Jesus. In pictures...and in people...in symbols and in scenarios if we will just look AND God by his grace will open our mind, we will find Jesus. And today we are going to see him in the Psalms AS – and this is the title of the message today: **The Good Shepherd**

Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved and probably the most well-known psalm ever penned. This is a psalm that has been:

- Preached in pulpits...
- Read at funerals...
- Recited on battlefields...

If there was ever a text to read together this is it! So, would you stand with me across the room and let's read this aloud and in unison.

Psalm 23 – “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Now, David wrote this psalm and he knew more than a little about shepherding. In fact, his entire life and calling revolved around that of being a shepherd. There are three main responsibilities of a shepherd as I see it here in this passage.

- A good shepherd will take care of the sheep by providing for their needs – that's provision.
- A good shepherd will take responsibility for guiding their sheep safely and gently – that's direction.
- And finally, a good shepherd will work to keep their sheep from any kind of danger – that's protection.

And so, very quickly, let's look at these in the scripture and we'll see as we talk how this perfectly describes the shepherding heart of Jesus. Let's look first at: **The Good Shepherd's Provision**

Psalm 23:1 – “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

As the shepherd, it is God's responsibility to provide for the needs of the sheep. Note the tender, personal care...the personal pronouns - The LORD is “MY” shepherd. And because the shepherd has ownership, he takes responsibility for the welfare of the sheep. The sheep will lack nothing...notice in (v. 2-3) how/what he provides for the sheep.

Ps. 23:2-3a– “He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul...”

Green pastures represent rest and comfort, and the Bible says here that God makes me or “causes me to lie down” in those pastures – this is something we'd never do on our own. Sheep would lie down in thorns in thistles if left to themselves...they'd make their beds in a wolf's den left on their own.

Illus. Sheep – I've recently seen two videos out on social media that point to the not so wise state of sheep! One is in China, there is a group of sheep that have been walking in a circle for twelve days straight! No one can explain it (**SHOW CLIP**).

And then second is this sheep that is rescued from a ditch and just watch what happens? (**SHOW CLIP**).

Proof that sheep need a shepherd! And they need a shepherd that will provide for them. Green pastures represent rest...still waters represent security and refreshment. He restores my soul...literally the word means “turning back”.

Isn't it true that in life sometimes we get turned around spiritually...stuck in a ditch like that sheep in the video? “All we like sheep” the Bible says have “turned away” and it's God our shepherd that turns us back...restores us back to himself!

Jesus would tell a parable in Luke 15 about a shepherd that leaves the 99 sheep and goes after the one that is lost. Why would a shepherd do that? Because of ownership! It's his sheep and as the shepherd he takes personal responsibility...to provide for the sheep...but not just to provide, but to guide as well.

Notice: **The Good Shepherd's Direction**

Ps. 23:3b-4b – “...He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...”

As shepherd, God takes his responsibility seriously and guides us – here the Bible says along paths of righteousness (he leads us in a right way) and sometimes the path he leads us along will be dark and troubling – it’s the valley of the shadow!

Just as David led and guided his sheep through some valleys in order to get them to better water sources or to higher feeding ground – so too does God lead and guide us through the valleys of life. David knew this! Think about the valleys he walked through:

- Saul tried to hunt him down and kill him...
- There is the episode of his life where he ran from God and the valley of despair he went through because of his sin with Bathsheba...
- He lost a son at birth...
- Later in life another of his sons, Absalom turned on him and tried to chase him off his throne...

Valleys are places of dramatic darkness and extreme danger and the point that David is trying to get across is this: “I’ve been there! And what I’ve learned is that I’ve NEVER been alone. The Shepherd was ALWAYS there with me!”

This is our God! When you don’t know which way is up and when it’s so dark spiritually speaking and you can’t see your hand in front of my face, God our Shepherd will be there to guide us through!

Listen some of you need to hear this today...let it bring comfort to your heart.

Illus. This week – some close family friends – met in our young singles ministry and just been wonderful friends. The mom 46 years old been fighting cancer for the last seven years. Went up to see her on Wednesday (she passed away that morning) – Thanksgiving is going to be tough for this family this year...may be tough for your family – person sitting in that chair will no longer be with you physically.

It will be a first – how do you get through this? Well that’s the key...you don’t get over, you get through...and this takes time. And you get through the valley of the shadow by just keeping your eyes on the good shepherd...letting his voice guide you and his presence comfort you.

This is the reason David give for not fearing in you’re in the valley. Because God, the good shepherd is present with you EVEN if you don’t feel it and he will direct you every step of the way.

The Bible says he is watching out for us! This is: **The Good Shepherd’s Protection**

Psalm 23:4c-6 – “...**your rod** (it was a clublike instrument meant to protect the sheep from animals that preyed upon them) **and your staff** (you’ve seen a shepherd’s staff with a crook on

the end to pull sheep back into the fold – there is protection from without and protection from ourselves), **they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**”

This speaks of celebration. Honor. When you see this table here, think “party”. We are the honored guests at the table of God.

Think Thanksgiving! God puts a spread together and invites not to just sit at his table, but right by his side. See, our enemies our trying to take from us...the wolf is trying to steal, kill and destroy, while at the very same time the Shepherd is taking care of us...celebrating us...cherishing us...satisfying us fully and completely with good.

Anointing our head with oil. Shepherds would often anoint his sheep with oil because it kept the flies away...it healed their wounds...it allowed them to be comfortable and rest. THIS is how the good shepherd protects the sheep.

Our safety...our security...our well-being is a priority to him! This is elaborated upon in **Ps. 23:6a – “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”**

H.A. Ironside (theologian and former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago) said: **“goodness and mercy are the two sheepdogs that help keep the sheep where they belong.”**

Spurgeon called them “twin guardian angels – always at my back and beck.” Listen don’t miss that word “all” here! God, our good shepherd pursues us with goodness and mercy “ALL” the days of our lives:

- when we are not pursuing him...when we are!
- good days and bad days!
- birthdays and doomsdays!
- In times of famine and in times of feasting!

As sheep, God is not out to get us...he’s out to provide, direct and protect us! He tried to show his people, Israel this over and over in the New Testament, but they rejected his leadership in their life.

Again, sheep do dumb things...AND those that God sent or put in leadership that were supposed to represent him– kings and priests and prophets – instead of helping provide, direct and protect the people - MOST were not faithful shepherds at all. And the rebuke of God is stern toward them.

Ezekiel 34:1-10a - “The word of the Lord came to me: ²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost

you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ⁶ they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. ⁷ “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ⁸ As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds...”

Strong, stern words toward shepherds who were/are only looking out for themselves...taking advantage of the sheep they are supposed to be loving and leading...preying upon the sheep...not taking their responsibility seriously concerning the sheep entrusted to their care!

Now, in this context the prophet is speaking of Judah...Israel has failed in this and as a result the sheep (the people) have been scattered. And in the midst of this, God makes a promise – it’s a messianic promise – Again, all of the Bible points to Jesus!

And as I read this, just think of the person and ministry of Jesus.

Ez. 34:11-16 – “For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. (sound anything like Psalm 23?) ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.”

This action of God culminates in: **Ez. 34:23-24 – “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken.”**

Here God promises there is a Davidic shepherd coming? One like David...descending from the line of David that will properly shepherd his people.

So, this text speaks of God himself shepherding his people and then mentions setting up a shepherd from the line of David – a divine/human shepherd to look after and genuinely care for his people – who has ever heard of such?

And we know exactly who that shepherd is – it's Jesus! So clear to anyone who desires to see it.

In John's gospel, we're given an account of Jesus speaking to a group of people. And he takes Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34 – and this imagery and picture of a shepherd and essentially says put two and two together - "THIS IS ME!"

John 10:11-18 – “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

And this is EXACTLY what the good shepherd did. He laid down his life for the sheep. It's why this meal, the Lord's Supper has such a deep meaning to those of us that follow Jesus.

I wish we had time to read Psalm 22 – it's a psalm of the cross. It's holy ground because in it we read of the spiritual, emotional and physical suffering of Jesus 1,000 years before the crucifixion would ever take place...before it was even invented!

When we come to this supper, the Lord's Supper – we remember the suffering of Christ – his body broken...his blood poured out...his life laid down – the Shepherd dies so that that the sheep can live.

Would you bow your head in prayer with me?

(Invitation and Lord's Supper set up – proclaim his death until he comes – Psalm 24).