



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“THE SHEPHERD’S PSALM”

John Galbreath
Bible Study Series

Text: Psalm 23:1
Date: August 10, 1969

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken from a sermon preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church on August 10, 1969. There is a note that it was also preached at Hiland Farms church on July 30, 1995. You will see the two versions of his outlines in this week's study packet.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (Psalm 23:1).

Next, review the outlines of the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and how you would "fill in" the remainder of the messages from the chosen passage.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

The hymns in 1969 were: Praise God, Ye Servants of the Lord; Saviour, like a Shepherd Lead Us; and The Lord's My Shepherd.

There is a handwritten note in the bulletin: "We give thanks for shelter amidst the storm. We are mindful of the event, 24 years ago, when 73,000 died at the hand of one weapon. We are awed by the destructive power in our hands. Guide the actions of our nation that we may never again use such awesome power nor be ourselves its victims. Guide us in the way of peace. Be with McLaughlin and all who mourn." This prayer reflects on the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and on the death of a son of a member family.

There is a note in the bulletin: "A physical disability prevents one of our men from driving to work in Greentree. If you know of someone who drives to or through Greentree daily, it would be of great assistance to provide a ride. His car would be available should the driver so prefer. Please call the church office if you can help resolve this serious problem."

Also included in the packet was this offering prayer with notes that it may have been used in 1988, 1989 and 1991.

"Eternal God, you have given us so much for our own joy and fulfillment. We would set aside this money that others may know the joy of your grace."

Another prayer in the packet says:

“Eternal Father, we come, our hearts self-bound with concern. Renew our spirits that we may look about us through your eyes. Free us from preoccupation with little things – small anxieties, imagined hurts. Open our eyes, not alone to the beauty of the world about us, but to the beauty in the people about us, who touch our lives and are forgotten.

We are grateful for the many men and women who serve our needs – the police in night patrol on our streets, the woman at the check-out counter who is able to keep her sense of humor when people are pushing, the man who delivers our water and his pride in his work, the nurse whose healing spirit matches the skills of her hands and mind.

You have made us a privileged people and we do not know why. But we are grateful to you. We do not ask that we may be worthy of your blessings, but do ask that our lives reflect our gratitude to you by a spirit of grace to those with whom we walk.

We pray for our church as they enter General Assembly this week. Mark their deliberations with an openness to know and do the mind of Christ. Grant stamina in times of boredom and weariness, patience in times of frustration, and deep wisdom in time of decision. May your will be done through those who represent us that your name may be honored.”

The Lord is my shepherd. – Psalm 23:1

1969 Outline

I. Introduction

A. Only two Biblical passages which most of us could repeat by memory: Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23.

B. Profundity of Psalm, like that of Jesus' parables lies not in its obscurity, but in its simplicity and directness.

1. "Gosh, Mr. Lincoln, that ain't deep; it's just muddy."
2. Much that purports to be deep is only muddy.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

C. The message is found in the first half of the first verse. Sermon has three points:

1. The Lord is my shepherd.
2. The Lord is my shepherd.
3. The Lord is my shepherd.

D. Must have been a favorite of Jesus.

II. The Lord is My Shepherd

A. John 10:2-5: “He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”

1. Several flocks were placed for protection in the same sheep fold.
2. Rather than sorting out his own, the shepherd would merely call, and the sheep would recognize their own shepherd.
 - a) *Many shepherds would call, but there was just one voice to which they put their trust.*
 - b) *The Lord is my shepherd.*

B. Luke 18:18 Rich young ruler asked, “What must I do to have eternal life?”

1. Upright, philanthropic, astute
2. He withheld his ultimate commitment - and went away sorrowful when told to sell all that he had to help the poor.
 - a) *He preferred the voice of other shepherds.*

C. Is the Lord my shepherd?

III. The Lord is My Shepherd

A. The Shepherd image is widely used in the Old Testament.

1. Psalm 80: “Give ear, O shepherd of Israel.”

2. I Kings 22:17: Prophet Micaiah, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains as sheep that have no shepherd."

3. Isaiah 40: "He shall feed his flock as a shepherd."

B. In a land where the chief industry was shepherding, the metaphor was too obvious to be ignored.

1. In these, the emphasis is placed upon the flock, rather than the relationship to the sheep.

2. Israel's sense of immortality was corporate, rather than individual.

3. Biblical scholars are properly re-emphasizing the sense of community relationship to God.

C. In this passage, the individual is stressed.

1. Each line refers to the first person singular. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down."

2. Jesus parable of the lost sheep, where the shepherd left the 99 to find the one, emphasizes again God's concern for the believer.

3. The flock is the perfect metaphor to portray both our community relationship to God, and our individual identity with Him in whom we put our trust.

D. In a day of statistics, it is hard to feel that the God of outer space could care about me.

1. A loved one is ill – just a statistic? Is God aware? Does he care?

IV. The Lord is My Shepherd

A. The shepherd provides for the sheep.

1. "I shall not want."

a) *"Want" should read "need" – for who can live the victim of the advertising media and have no "wants?"*

b) *Rest – food – drink: these are the real wants. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still water."*

(1) Water was source of life and death, as lamb were swept by the torrents tumbling down the precipitous hills after storm, but the source of life, as coming from parched limestone countryside, they found the still pools of Jordan.

B. The shepherd protects in danger.

1. The Psalmist was a realist – that all of life is not green pastures and still waters.
2. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” or “Valley of deep darkness”
 - a) *Cal muth – dark shadows. Cal maweth – shadow of death. Both had same consonants. Editors added the vowels.*
 - b) *Difference is more apparent than real, for the deep ravines that emptied into Jordan and the Dead Sea were the site of mountain lion and other predators.*
3. The good shepherd could not avoid the ravines – that’s the kind of world it is.
 - a) *But the good shepherd did not abandon the flock at the first howl of danger.*
4. God does not promise us all green pastures and still waters.
 - a) *Had the Psalm stopped there, we would properly say it is a lie.*
 - b) *Christians are not spared heartbreak*
 - c) *In the valley of the dark shadow, we sometimes find it hard to find the shepherd – he seems to have faded into the shadow.*
 - d) *There his shepherding is more meaningful.*

C. “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

1. Sanctuary as guest – God’s house

D. He will rescue and chastise. Two ends of the staff. “Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

1. The shepherd rescues. Soord's Lost Sheep [NOTE: An artist known for this work]
 - a) *The hook that can lift the lamb out of the ravine*
2. The other end of the staff
 - a) *It beat off the wolf and wild cat.*
 - b) *It also chastened the straying sheep.*
 - c) *“Oh how I love the law.”*
 - d) *The child whose family sets no limits is afraid – they need the sense of the shepherd's rod.*
 - e) *Religion that never says “no” does not speak for the Good Shepherd.*
3. The response of the follower.
 - a) *If the Lord is truly my shepherd, then I must ask, “Is it truly His voice to which I respond?”*
 - b) *If the Lord is truly my shepherd, am I willing to follow, even through the valley of dark shadow?*
 - c) *If the Lord is truly my shepherd, am I prepared to receive his chastening, and to follow the way of Him who took even the cross?*

V. Conclusion

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

“Follow me” – as we look back, we will discover the goodness of God.

“House of the Lord” -- not live in church, but to be where God lives.

1995 Outline

I. Introduction

A. Probably only two passages of the Bible that about all of us could recite - the Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23.

Psalm 23 In Unison

B. At Pack Place, there will be an exhibit this week of photos and paintings from World War II by or about men and women from this area.

1. My contribution is a photo, "Tell me Green Pastures."
2. On Red Beach, we were preparing wounded Marines for evacuation to a hospital ship.
3. A patient was brought on a gurney, his face charred black from flash burn.
4. As I kneeled over him, he saw the cross, painted black on my lapel, and his mouth moved. "Tell me...green pastures."
 - a) *I could think of no place more opposite to the still waters of Jordan than the black ash and artillery thunder of Iwo's shore.*
 - b) *If he were like most American boys, he had never seen a shepherd.*
 - c) *But the message of this Psalm touches such a basic chord in each of us, that in the tragedy of those moments, he reached out to the Shepherd's Psalm.*

Recitation of Psalm 23 In Unison

C. It is almost embarrassing to preach from it, for we have heard it and read it so often.

D. Are there still truths to be mined, still fresh inspiration to be drawn from this passage?

II. "The LORD is my shepherd."

A. There is no absence of shepherds – or persons who want to shepherd us.

1. How often we receive mail from those who want to tell us how to invest our money, what we should really be eating, or wearing...where we should travel and how...what car is really safe – all for a modest fee.

B. In Jesus' day, they had no TV, magazines or even mail – but false shepherds were exploiting in that day.

1. "He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear His voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out...and the sheep follow him for they know His voice." John 10:2-5

III. The Lord is MY shepherd.

A. Much of Jewish worship was based upon the community of Israel. "He who keepeth Israel"

1. Israel saw salvation not in individual terms, but in terms of the people of Israel.

2. So much of the Old Testament is addressed to the community. "He shall feed his flock."

B. There is a real danger that religion can be seen as just a "Me and God" relationship – that it be self centered.

1. Heaven and hell are the carrot and the stick of one's religious commitment.

2. But the Psalmist does not hesitate to use the first person singular. "My shepherd. Though I walk through the Valley...I will fear no evil."

C. In the parish at stewardship time, I heard the trustees speak of "giving units" in the church, and it made me angry. We had only persons.

1. In a day of computers, even religion becomes very impersonal.

D. The parable of the lost sheep underlines what Jesus is saying.

1. It was in this consoling spirit that our Marine asked, "Tell me...green pastures."

IV. The Lord is my SHEPHERD.

A. The shepherd provides all needs.

1. "I shall not want" is a mis-translation.

- a) *We are endemic wanters.*
- b) *I shall not need is the real meaning.*
- c) *The good shepherd sees that fresh fields are found, that security is assured.*

B. "Still waters." Water was life and death in Palestine.

1. The white waters of Jordan claimed many a lamb if the shepherd did not care.
2. But the still pools were life and joy.

C. But it does not end there. If it did, it would be a lie, for this was a hard-scrabble living.

1. "Valley of the shadow of death" - where the mountain lion was in the shadow, or the thief.
2. "Through the valley" - no bypass.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the rest of my days. Each chapter of life assures us anew of the all-sufficiency of God, in whom we put our trust.

Study Questions -- Part I

Bible Reading: Psalm 23:1

Psalm 23:1 says: ¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

- Why do you think Dr. Galbreath chose to use only the first verse as the reading for this sermon?
- In what moments in your life do you experience the sentiment of this verse?
- In today's world, it might have been tempting to say "I shall not be in need." What is the difference in God seeing not just to your needs but to your wants?

Study Questions -- Part II

Sermon :

Why do you think there are two versions of sermon for this single verse?

In 1969, what kinds of “wants” might people be turning to God to have fulfilled? What about in 1995? What about today?

1969 Outline

I.B. What do you do when you come across passages in the Bible that you find to be muddy?

I.B. Psalm – Why do you think this psalm above all others is one that children often memorize? Is there anything in the psalm you find to be muddy?

I.C. Repetition is often used in literature to reinforce a concept. Why do you think Dr. Galbreath chose to use this repetition to focus on this psalm? In what ways would you describe God as being the shepherd in your own life?

I.D. Do you ever think about which passages of the Bible might be favorites of Jesus? What other passages might you put in the list?

II.A. How do you know when you are hearing God's voice inside of you? How do you weed out what might seem like His call?

II.B. Are there times when you are like the rich young ruler and disappointed in what your shepherd's voice says? How do you deal with those times?

II.C. Is the Lord your shepherd? In what ways does that impact your daily life?

III.B.3. To what degree do you see the community relationship to God in today's world? What can we do to increase it as individuals? As a congregation?

III.D.1. What do you do when you wonder if God really cares about the problems of those in your life?

IV.A.1.a. Dr. Galbreath touches on the differences between want and need. What would you put on each list in your life? How do you get yourself to live within your needs?

IV.B.2.a. What dark shadows have you passed through in your life? How did you deal with them? How did you use your faith in that process?

IV.B.3. Why is it important for us to know how to deal with the kind of world it is?

IV.B.4.c. What do you do when you find it hard to find your shepherd?

IV.D. Why do you think the psalmist noted both the rod *and* the staff? When have you needed to think about the rod?

IV.D.2.e. When have you felt God saying no to your prayers? How have you dealt with that feeling? After some time had passed, did you sense why that might have been His answer?

IV.D.3. How do you answer these three questions?

V. Where do you see the House of the Lord?

1995 Outline

I.A. Why do you think Dr. Galbreath had the congregation recite Psalm 23 in Unison? What would that experience feel like to you as you listened to a sermon today?

I.B.1. In a separate sermon, Dr. Galbreath spoke about his time as a chaplain on Iwo Jima and the dying young man who asked him to “tell me Green Pastures.” Why do you think that young man requested that particular passage? What passage might you request in similar circumstances?

I.B.4.c. Why do you think Dr. Galbreath had the congregation recite the Psalm again after hearing about the young soldier? How do you think they felt about the words after hearing about that young man?

II.A. Who tries to shepherd you in various areas of your life? How do you cut out the noise of those voices to listen for the truth?

III.B. How do you keep your faith from becoming all about just you and God? How do you work to include the world?

III.C. Are there times when you are tempted to think only about raw numbers and not about individuals? How can you bring your focus back to individuals as you seek to do God's work?

III.C.1. What aspects of today's society have the ability to make life impersonal? How can we fight against that as individuals? As a congregation?

IV.C. This is a beloved Psalm in spite of the fact that it speaks of the shadow of death. Why do you think the Psalmist spoke of both extremes – the shadow of death and the still waters?

IV.C.2. Where do you see assurance of the all-sufficiency of God?