

12 THE FAITHFUL PROVISION OF THE LORD PART 2

23 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

*² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.*

*³ He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.*

*⁴ Yea, 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.*

*⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. ⁶ Surely*

goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever. (NKJV).

As I said Sunday, this psalm is probably the most recognized passage in the Bible. It is heard by all believers with deep delight and a clear understanding of how the Lord is a personal loving God who takes care of our every need. Even unbelievers have heard it. I have used this psalm often in my personal ministry. I spoke Sunday of an incident with my mother in the last 90 days of her life. She was under heavy sedation during a procedure and my sister saw her lips moving. Even being totally out of her mind she was whispering the precious words of comfort to her soul..."The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me besides still waters. He restoreth my soul." The Word of God had penetrated deep into my mother's psyche. The Word of God had been hidden in her heart. God was present with His Word in the days and weeks of my mother's greatest need.

As mentioned Sunday, the Psalm speaks of the life that is wholly dependent on a loving Shepherd. I mentioned that living life on our own is TOTALLY OPPOSITE of the living a life according to the 23rd Psalm. When we live in submission to the Lord; we we make Him our Lord, He is our Shepherd and we are his sheep. In the security of that relationship a person can truly say that the Lord, HE, is MY Shepherd, and I have EVERYTHING that I need.

The psalm seems to begin in a pasture and ends in a banqueting hall. David is meditating on the important ways that the LORD provides for our spiritual and physical well-being. It concludes with a statement of what could be David's characterization of the "abundant life"

promised by Jesus (John 10:10); "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6b).

When He is our own personal Shepherd, He takes care of our every need. Jesus said:

⁹ I am the gate. Those who come in by me will be saved; they will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness. ¹¹ "I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep. ¹² When the hired man, who is not a shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away; so the wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them. ¹³ The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵ I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me. And I am willing to die for them. (John 10:9-15, GNT).

We now move to a triplet of sorts concerning God's provision of our needs. We will look at this Wednesday night and then complete it with Sunday's message. The "triplet" I'm talking about is as follows:

- 1 He makes me to lie down in green pastures
- 2 He leads me beside still waters
- 3 He restoreth my soul

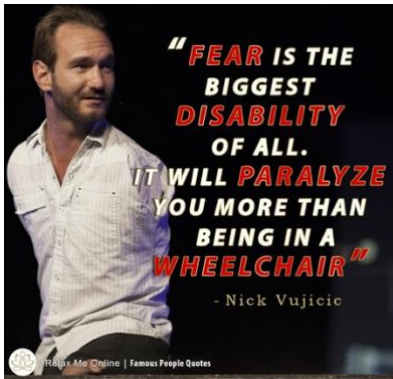
He makes me lie down in green pastures.



Because of their nature, sheep can only eat when they are in a certain state. They must be:

- 1) Free of all fear
- 2) Free from friction
- 3) Free from pests and parasites
- 4) Free from hunger

The unique aspect is that only the shepherd can provide these provisions/freedoms. It is the owner and his management that make the conditions possible in which a sheep can lie down to rest in green pastures.



Freedom from Fear

A stray jack rabbit can stampede a whole flock. I've never seen this with sheep, but I have seen a horse frightened enough to run because of a feed bag that blows across my home pasture, or a surprise appearance of a dog or some other small animal. There are accounts of dogs terrorizing sheep and killing as many as 292 sheep in one night. If sheep have the slightest fear of a dog, a coyote etc. they cannot and will not "lie down". A good shepherd moves among his or her sheep. Many a night Cassandra will jump up to walk through her goats' pens to chase off foxes or other predators. That is what a good rancher does. The owner is among the livestock. It is the same way with us. Fear is a great disabler.

There is no room for fear in the heart of the believer. Fears will consume us and they will haunt our past, rob our present, and annihilate our future. The Apostle Paul wrote the young pastor Timothy who must have been filled with doubts and fears, " *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*" (2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV)

There is nothing like Christ's presence to calm us down. Life is full of hazards, troubles, and difficulties. Christ removes the terror of the unknown. We learned last week that we are promised trouble in life here on earth. Jesus told us that He will be with us in the midst of that trouble. When trouble comes our way, we can react with anxiety and fear or we can respond with a sense of quiet rest, knowing and believing that our Good Shepherd has the situation under control. He's got the whole world in His hands and He's got you and me in His hands. A mind that is sound is at peace. It is not harrassed by the fears of life. The Holy Spirit comes quietly and assures us that Jesus is present. He is there in the storm. He is on guard. He is on watch. He is driving out the one who comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

Freedom of Tension



In every animal society, there is a pecking order. With cattle it is called the "horning order". With sheep it is a "butting order". The strong ewe butts and thrusts others she wants to intimidate. We see a nice illustration of this in Ezekiel.

Ez 34:15-16 ¹⁵ *I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,* says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ *"I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment."*..... ²¹ ***Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad,*** ²² ***therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.***

When there's friction in the flock, the health of the flock suffers. If a young weaker sheep tries to come in and if it is run off by the old ewes, the sheep loses weight and becomes poor. Whenever the shepherd is present, the sheep forget their rivalries and they get along. They are on guard when the master is present. This is a picture of the human competitions that arise in any kind of human organization (including the struggle for status in churches) People sometimes butt and quarrel to get ahead and people get hurt. Discontent can grow to the point where people suffer and have to push their way through to just survive.



Christianity calls for godliness with contentment. The unrest caused by the person trying to be top dog is overwhelming. The presence of the shepherd stops all that. I've had to discipline people who have come into our church. These were people that came with an agenda other than Christ-Likeness. They pushed and they politicked. They desired to dominate. When we become acutely aware of being in the presence of Christ all of that nonsense stops. It puts the flock at rest. When we all keep our eyes are on Jesus, we are not focused on all those around us.

Freedom from pests and parasites.



When tormented by pests, sheep cannot and will not settle down and rest. Only the owner who keeps a lookout for insects will free sheep from these pests. He will apply insecticides, time, and labor to rid the flock of pests. The shepherd that is in and among his flock will keep his flock quiet and at peace.

These pests to us are the details of life. We are "bugged" by people and all kinds of problems. A gracious Holy Spirit brings healing comfort and relief. He brings serenity, quietness, and relief to the disagreeable circumstances that are beyond our control.

The Holy Spirit applies the antidote to our frustrations. He comes and brings relief in ways we never even imagined. He applies His presence to our problems. The assurance that He is active on my behalf allows me to lie down in peace.



Photograph: Thomas Mukoya/Reuters

Freedom from the Fear of Hunger

Lastly, many great sheep growing countries are dry. They are free from parasites, but it is neither natural or common to find green pastures in those places. Israel is a dry place. Green pastures were the result of a whole lot of work. It required plowing, fertilizer, etc. This represents time and effort by the master. Green

pastures are essential. The ewes need heavy green grass for good milk flow. It gives the livestock all the nutrients they need. We who have been ranchers learn pretty quickly that we are really "grass farmers" as much as we're ranchers. Without good grass livestock become sickly and they are more susceptible to parasites the more malnourished they become. When livestock are put out on green lush grass, they fill up quickly and ruminate gaining weight. They are at rest and they prosper. Sheep on dry fields are struggling to get what they need.

God wanted Israel to get to a land flowing with milk and honey. Instead, the Israelites chose to wander in the desert. We are promised an abundant life when we leave the rubble pile of sin behind. God wants to desperately move us onto green verdant productive refreshing green pastures. God wants our lives to be green and productive, satisfied and well-fed. He is a loving shepherd who provides all we need to lie down from from fear, tension, pests, and hunger. We are free to choose the scarcity of sin or the abundance of all of the good that our shepherd desires for each of us.

Choose to be owned by the GOOD SHEPHERD! Rest and be filled!

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.