

Psalm 23:1

“¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

Introduction

- Jesus is pictured in the Bible as both a Lamb and a Shepherd.
Jn.1:29 “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”
Jn.10:11 “I am the Good Shepherd;”
- In Psalm 23 we read of the Shepherd who is identified as YHWH. As we begin our verse-by-verse examination of Psalm 23 we learn important truths about our Lord’s ministry as a Shepherd.

What must we see if we are to experience the benefits of the Shepherd’s care?

A. If we are to see YHWH as our shepherd we must see how He is different from Islam’s ALLAH.

1. One of the distinctive marks of Biblical revelation is the “oneness of God.” This sets Biblical religion apart from all pagan forms of polytheism and pantheism. It also addresses one of the chief criticisms of Christianity by Islam. Christianity offends the Islamic faith in two ways.
 - a. It seems to deny the “oneness of God”,
 - b. It suggests that God could become a man with whom we have a personal relationship.
2. Are **Allah** and **YHWH** the same God? The origin of the Arabic word for god (Allah) is debated and not nearly as important as the Islamic concept of God.

Allah	YHWH
Allah is the word for god used in the Koran. (It is simply the Arabic word for god.)	One of the names of God used in the Bible
Allah is one, sovereign (man has no free will), and incapable of relating to human creatures in a personal way because he is wholly other. He knows all about us but we cannot touch him or know him.	YHWH is also one, and sovereign. But He is also personal, intimate, and eager to relate to His people in very personal ways.
Allah demands one thing only – not understanding, or intimate communion but unquestioned obedience.	YHWH seeks covenant relationship and love expressed in devotion and personal communion.
The idea of Allah becoming a man is unthinkable and blasphemous. Man is not made in God’s image.	The fact that YHWH became a man in Jesus is consistent with His nature. Man is made in God’s image.
Allah loves (is merciful to) only those who obey his will and because they	YHWH loves the whole world and seeks to win people’s love and

obey his will.	obedience with His grace.
Allah's relationship with man is best described as Master and slave. Muslim means "one who submits." Islam means "submission."	YHWH's relationship with man is best pictured in the images of Shepherd, Redeemer, Father.

- Christians do not worship three God's. They worship one God in three persons. The nature of the trinity has been a hotly debated subject from the early church to the present. ([See apptoteach.org theology file #305 for more details.](http://apptoteach.org))
- I feel more comfortable talking about God the Father, the Son of God, and the Spirit of God than I do about the Trinity simply because this is the way Scripture speaks of the three persons.
- Jesus is identified as the YHWH of Israel.

References to Jehovah	NT References to Jesus
Ps. 45:6	Heb. 1:8 "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever."
Isa. 40:3	Matt. 3:3 "Make ready the way of the Lord."
Joel 2:32	Acts 2:21 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."
Isa. 8:13-14	1 Pet. 2:6-8; Rom. 9:33 "The Lord of hosts is "a rock to stumble over"
Isa. 44:6, 48:12	Rev. 1:17-18, 22:12-13 "the first and the last"
Ps. 97:9	Jn. 3:31 "He is above all"
Ps. 24:7, 29:3	Jas. 2:1; I Cor. 2:8 "Lord of glory"
Isa. 8:13	1 Pet. 3:15 The Lord of hosts is sacred.
Deut. 10:17	1 Tim. 6:15-16 "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings ..."
Isa. 45:22-23	Phil. 2:10-11 "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow."
2 Chron. 7:14	Mk. 2:5-7 forgiving sins as only God can.
Isa. 49:26	Jn. 4:24 Jehovah is Savior and Redeemer
Isa. 45:18	Rev. 4:11; Jn. 1:3 Creator
Isa. 45:22; Ps. 83:18	Heb. 10:7; Jn. 5:39 "In the roll of the Book it is written of Me"

B. If we are to see Jesus as our Shepherd we must see ourselves as sheep, who are prone to follow false shepherds.

- Our first challenge is to see ourselves as God sees us. **The value of the Shepherd is directly proportional to the vulnerability of the sheep.**
- American culture encourages us to shepherd ourselves or seek shepherding from "hirelings" who cannot protect or feed the sheep.
- The shepherd's heart for the sheep is seen in **John 10**

“⁷ Jesus therefore said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly. ¹¹ **I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.** ¹² He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

4. Sheep can be best described with one word – vulnerable.
5. A shepherd is to protect the sheep from predators. The thief is like the wolf and does not protect but preys on the sheep. The hireling is not effective against the predator.

- **Isaiah 40:11**

“**Like a shepherd** He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.”

- **Hebrews 13:20-21**

“Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead **the great Shepherd of the sheep** through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord. Equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

- **1 Peter 5:1-5**

“¹ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*”**What does a shepherd do?**

- a. They provide food for the sheep.
- b. They protect the sheep from enemies.
- c. They guide the sheep and give them security for their future.
- d. They give identity to the sheep.
- e. They know the sheep.
- f. The sheep respond to their voice.

6. Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd in that he is willing to lay down his life for the sheep and he knows them by name.
7. In Jesus' day the hireling was the establishment of Israel's religious system that had lost its way in worshipping the Letter of the Law while losing sight of the Law giver.

- **John 10**

“⁸All who came before Me are **thieves and robbers**, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly. ¹¹I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ¹²He who is a **hireling**, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. ¹³He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep.”

8. When we look for parallels in our present world we see:
 - Our own religious traditions and systems. “We have always done it this way!”
 - Our culture with its values and conventions. “Well this is just the way it is or should be!”
 - Our American vision of life. “This is the American way!”
 - Popular science. “The experts tell us that . . .”
 - Friends and family often have a shepherd's authority.
 - Vocational and career goals can act as a shepherd.
9. A question that all of us must ask is this – **To whom do we look for the shepherding of our lives?** The first commandment speaks of the exclusive claim that God makes of our worship. It is all too easy to look to people, institutions, socioeconomic systems, and ourselves in our need for support, security, significance, and serenity.
 - a. False shepherds will abandon us at the worst possible time.
 - b. False shepherds may promise but they will not deliver.
 - c. False shepherds give shepherding a bad name.
10. A typical experience might follow this pattern.
 - a. We choose to look to a shepherd figure (a mate, parent, church, job, etc.) to care for our soul's deepest needs.
 - b. We load unrealistic expectations on this shepherd figure that they cannot meet.
 - c. We try to manipulate them to meet the needs of our soul with little long-term success.
 - d. We become bitter, resentful, and discouraged because we have not been cared for as we expected.
 - e. Rather than recognizing the error of our ways we simply find another (false) shepherd figure and repeat the experience.

- f. Eventually we conclude that God does not care for us even though we have never really looked to Christ as our shepherd. We have just expected him to work through our idols.

11. What can I do to repent of idolatry?

Confess - Realize that I have a need to repent.

Petition - Ask God in prayer for the faith to turn from (whatever) to Him.

Commit - View my daily decisions as a test of my faith in Christ. Remember that turning from an idol must also involve turning to Christ.

Act – Become accountable to others if need be.

C. If we are to appreciate our Shepherd we must reassess our root needs and resources.

1. It does not say that I will have everything that I long for or desire. When the Lord is my shepherd I will lack for nothing though my longings may persist.
2. What does David have in mind?
 - a. We can look at verse 6 for a hint – “goodness and loving kindness” suggest that David expected to see the goodness of God in the circumstances of his life along with an awareness of God’s love.

1 Timothy 6:6

“But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment.”

2 Peter 1:3

“seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”

- b. We live in a culture that is economically driven by “want” for superficial things.
 1. The challenge is to be content with and thankful for what we have (materially) but assertive in our faith with what we should experience (spiritually).
 2. We tend to do just the opposite. We are too content with our spiritual formation and too preoccupied with altering our material circumstances. For example, most of our prayer requests are for material change in our lives.
- c. We have a tendency, like Adam and Eve, to try to care for ourselves apart from God.
 1. Eve’s great temptation was to find her life apart from God. (Gen.3:1-7)
 2. Israel’s great temptation was to find her life apart from God.
 3. Paul’s great temptation was to find his life apart from God. (Rom.7:7-8)
 4. Jesus’ great temptation was to find his life apart from his Father. (Matt.4:1-11)
 5. Why would our great temptation be any different?
3. My anxiety in life is inversely related to my association with the Shepherd.

Matthew 6

“25 For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life’s span? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. 30 But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? 31 Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ 32 For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.””

4. How can we challenge this idolatry in our own lives?

- **Confess** - We can recognize it as a problem.
- **Check** - We can be sensitive to checking our attitudes, decisions, and actions by asking – What does this tell me about my true hope?
- **Correct** - We can change direction. For example, the way we pray might need to change. “Lord remove this thorn from me, or give me insight from it and show me how to respond to it.”

2 Cor.12:7-10

“7 And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

My paraphrase of Psalm 23:1

“In Christ I no longer find life intimidating.”

Questions to ponder

1. Can you believe that you have all that you need to follow Christ, live a full life, and experience the best that God has for you? Someone has said, “I simply want to know my role and play it, to know my place and keep it, and know my resource and use it.”
1. Where do you feel most vulnerable, anxious, abandoned, unprotected? How would you expect Jesus to minister to you in these areas? How has He ministered to you?

2. When we set our sights on the Kingdom and not on the agenda of this world, it is easier to see that Christ is sufficient.

"Lord, as I grow older, I think I would rather be known as...

...thoughtful rather than gifted,

...loving versus quick or bright,

...gentle over being powerful,

...a listener more than a great communicator,

...available rather than busy or a hard worker,

...sacrificial instead of successful,

...reliable, not famous,

...content more than driven,

...self-controlled rather than exciting,

...generous instead of rich,

...and compassionate more than competent."