

The Shepherd's Provision



The Sheepfold (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue with our theme for this week, "The Sheepfold." I trust you've been finding it helpful.

In my previous talks this week I've identified the main elements in this parable. The shepherd is Jesus; the sheep are the true disciples, the real Christians; the sheepfold is the gathering place or the church, but the church on earth, not in heaven (it's a place of separation and security); the doorkeeper or the gatekeeper or the watchman is the Holy Spirit (He alone gives admission to the sheepfold); and the owner of all, the lord of the manor, is God the Father.

I've also dealt with the apparent paradox, which is a deliberate paradox, that Jesus says in this parable He is both the door and the shepherd. How can He be both door and shepherd? Well, I explained that in my talk yesterday.

Crucified for our sins, He is the door; resurrected from the dead, He becomes the shepherd of all who enter through the door of His death. But He is the shepherd only of those who've come the legitimate way, acknowledging their sins, acknowledging their need of a sacrifice for their sins, and accepting by faith the sacrifice of Jesus on their behalf, believing that they're forgiven and that they're justified, they're reckoned righteous not with their own righteousness but with the righteousness of Jesus. That's how He is both the door and the shepherd.

Now in my talk today I want to share about something very wonderful, very glorious. The shepherd's provision. I could sum this up in one tremendous phrase: total security. This is something the whole world craves and seeks but it is found only in Jesus. Let me say that phrase again: total security. I'm going to turn now to the famous Shepherd's Psalm, Psalm 23 a psalm of David, and I'm going to run briefly through the statements that David makes in that psalm about the Lord as his shepherd. And I want you to understand that if you come through the gate of the death of Jesus on your behalf, then He too is your shepherd and He can be to you everything He was to David.

The first verse is the great, all-inclusive statement: "The Lord is my shepherd." (And I'm reading from the Amplified Bible, which puts in certain phrases to kind of bring out the full

meaning.)

> "The Lord is my shepherd [and then the amplified phrase, (to feed, guide and shield me) so whenever you think about the Lord as your shepherd, that He feeds you, He guides you, He shields or protects you. And then this tremendous closing phrase:] I shall not lack." (AMP)

In the Hebrew language, it's so remarkable that that first verse of Psalm 23 is just four words. If you don't know Hebrew I can't explain that to you. But think of all that's said in those four words: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack." If David had added anything, he would have spoiled it. If he had said, "I shall not lack money, or food, or friends, or clothing, or whatever," he would have spoiled it. But just saying, "I shall not lack," he means there's going to be no need in my life which will not be supplied. On the basis of what? On the basis of a relationship. A direct, personal relationship to the Lord as his shepherd.

"The Lord is my shepherd." Notice two things about that: it's present tense, it's not past, it's not future, it's here and now; and notice also it's very personal. "The Lord is my shepherd." It's a direct, person-to-person relationship between the Lord and each one of His sheep. And He guarantees us total provision. But bear in mind one important limiting factor: our provision is in proportion to our commitment. Every area of my life that is totally committed to Jesus as my shepherd is an area of total security. But there are areas that are not fully committed, it might be my finance, it might be my health, it might be my family, then I don't have total security in those areas. Remember that, Jesus offers us total security but it's in proportion to our commitment. That which is committed we can be absolutely secure about.

Now we're going on to the second verse:

> "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters." (NAS)

That's beautiful language. Let me try and put it in simple phrases. He promises us pure fresh nourishment. Everything we need for health, spiritual and physical. That nourishment is contained primarily in God's Word, but bear in mind that Jesus must lead us. We cannot interpret the Bible for ourselves. We'll get all sorts of false impressions. We'll get into confusion unless we let Jesus lead us by the Holy Spirit. He knows what passages in the Bible you need at this moment, what I need at this moment. Maybe my needs are not exactly the same as yours. But if we're each being led by the Holy Spirit, He'll lead us to those passages of Scripture which meet our present need.

Then we go on to verse 3:

> "He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." (NAS)

I describe that as follows: First of all, refreshment, restoration. I wonder whether at this particular moment you're feeling somewhat jaded, worn, discouraged, disheartened? Remember the Lord will restore your soul. If you'll just build that relationship with Him. He'll take you to the green pastures and the still waters and there He will restore your soul through the revelation of His Word and of Himself.

And then that third verse speaks also about continual direction in righteous living. "He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Take hold of that last phrase: "For His name's sake." You see, what the Lord does for us depends on His faithfulness to His own name. When we come in through the gate, we become His sheep. He accepts responsibility for us and He, for His own name's sake, will make sure that that which happens to us is what should happen. Don't rely on your own merits. Don't rely on your own ability or cleverness but rely on the Lord's faithfulness to His own name.

We're continuing with the shepherd's provision for each of His sheep as outlined by David in Psalm 23. We'll look now at the fourth verse:

> "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." (NAS)

What does that mean? I believe it means that we are guaranteed the personal presence of the Lord even in the lonely, dark hours. And let me say to you, frankly, there are very few of us that will not pass, at some time or another, through those lonely, dark hours. I do not believe that the Valley of the Shadow of Death is simply the moment we come to die physically. I could quote many Scriptures to show you that it refers to any time of great darkness and oppression and loneliness. And there are such valleys in the life of almost every one of us. Let's be realistic. Life is NOT just a bed of roses. There's a lot more to it than that. And God does not promise us that we will not go through that valley. In fact, David assumes in a certain sense that he will go through the valley. But he says, "When I go through the valley, I'm going to count on Your presence. You will not leave me nor forsake me." There are valleys in our experience that no one

else can see us through, valleys of loneliness, bereavement, maybe times of sickness when we're maybe even in a coma. Nobody else can communicate but the Lord is there beside our bed, right with us.

And then David says in that verse: "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." We need to give heed to those words. The rod typifies discipline; the staff typifies comfort or support. And notice, the rod comes first. The meaning of that is if we submit to the Lord's discipline in our life, we can count on His comfort and support. But we cannot reject His discipline and simply claim His comfort. That's not the way that the Lord has ordained things to be.

We go on now to the fifth verse:

> "Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou has anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows." (NAS)

Three beautiful provisions of the shepherd there in that one verse. First of all, a table prepared before us, a banquet. Even in the very presence of our enemies. It's important to see that. So many times I'm inclined to say, "Well, if the situation wasn't so difficult... if I didn't have so much opposition... if there weren't so many enemies, I know the Lord could provide." That's not the way we should face it. We should say, "Just because of my enemies, I know the Lord is going to set a banquet for me." You see, the Lord delights to show His enemies and our enemies that He's supreme. No matter what they do, and no matter how they threaten, and how they seek to intimidate us. He's going to spread that banquet for us and He's going to make sure we eat it and enjoy it and all the enemies will be able to do will be to look on and they'll not be able to touch us nor harm us. Because it's the Lord's banquet for His people.

And then David says, "Thou hast anointed my head with oil." The anointed head speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit flowing down freely in our lives. It speaks of joy and peace and righteousness. It speaks of a kind of covering over us, the Lord's special protection. You know, I've come to see in my life there's nothing the anointing cannot do. The most difficult situation can be resolved by that anointing.

And finally David says, "My cup overflows." One thing I want to tell you about God is He's not stingy. He doesn't just give you half a cupful, but He fills your cup and when you drain it, He fills it up again.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. Tomorrow I'll be dealing with the other side of this relationship, the sheep. I'll be describing the characteristic marks of the sheep.

Radio Program

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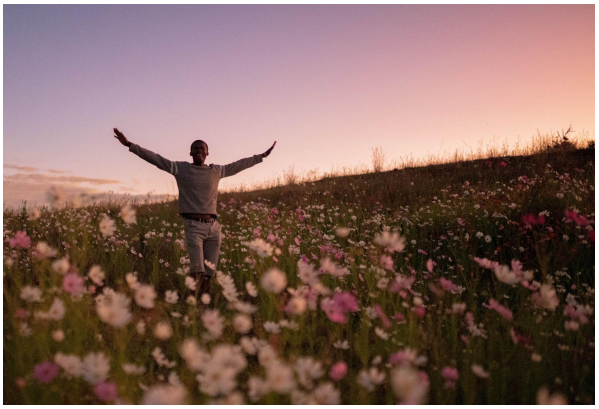

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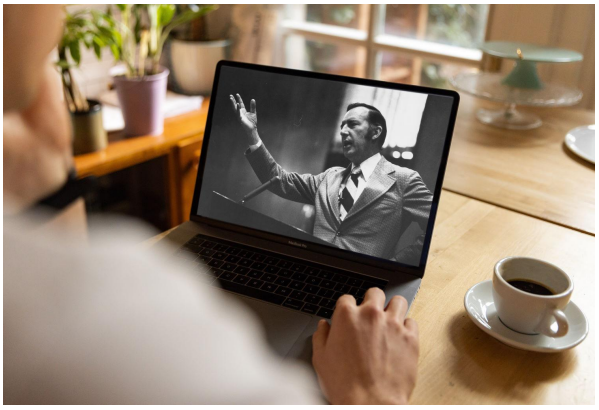

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