

Lesson 5

“And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35)

Psalm 23:2b *He leads me beside the still waters...*

A few more facts about sheep from Phillip Keller:

- Although sheep live in dry, semi-arid country they still require water
- A sheep’s body is composed of about 70% water so they need water to stay healthy; if there is not enough they become weak and sickly
- If they are not led to pure, clean water they will often become restless, wander around, and then end up drinking from polluted pot holes where they pick up parasites and other diseases

Their water came from three main sources: dew on the grass, deep wells, or springs and streams. Sheep can actually go for months on end, especially if the weather is not too hot, without actually drinking. When there is a heavy dew on the grass each morning, sheep rise just before dawn and start to feed. If there is a bright moonlight, they will graze at night. The sheep can keep fit on amount of water they get from the dew. The good shepherd makes sure his sheep can be out and grazing when the dew is there - no matter the hour of the day. His quest to provide pure water will at other times find him bringing up water from a well, building a stone dam across moving water to provide a quiet pool, or locating the still waters of a stream. The sheep were rested and restored by their shepherd in the still waters.

Like sheep, without water we will die. Water is essential to life. Jesus, our Shepherd, offers us living water that gives eternal life. As he told the Samaritan woman at the well, *“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”* (John 4:13-14) Jesus doesn’t just lead us to still waters...He is the still water. When He leads us to still waters, He is leading us to Himself, the only one who can restore us in this crazy, sinful world.

People seek satisfaction in life - they want to find fulfillment and happiness but they are trying to quench this thirst by drinking from the wells of the world - the pot holes. They might not even be aware that they are searching for God but accepting substitutes instead. David expressed this thirst in Psalm 63:1, *“My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land, Where there is no water.”* Our country seems to become drier and more thirsty with every passing day. Without a shepherd to guide, people have always looked in the wrong places for contentment: money, success, power, relationships, “stuff”, and the list goes on. But now there is another layer of confusion that has been added - you can’t even trust all churches to lead you to the living water. Some have compromised the Word of God; others have invited the sinful world to feel right at home in their church. Only the Lord knows where the pure, clean, deep, still water is. God leads us by the Holy Spirit to the still waters of His Word where we can drink and be satisfied. *“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.”*

(Psalm 42:1) *“Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation.”* (Isaiah 12:3) The Holy Spirit is a fountain of living water, an unending supply.

Letting the Lord lead us to still waters is not a one-time event. He is always ready to lead us there, but we must choose whether or not to follow and drink. Just like sheep can be stubborn, wander away, and go for the pot holes - we have freedom to decide what we will do. We are prone to wander ourselves when we move away from the shepherd and walk a little too closely with the world. We can find ourselves in a precarious place, in great need of the Shepherd’s help. And what do we find? Our loving, gracious, and merciful Savior is waiting to lead us by the still waters and restore our soul, even in our failures.

We see in Peter someone who experienced failure and ran away from the Shepherd. Three times in the court of the high priest, he denied knowing Jesus. Not only that! He abandoned Jesus and hid during His time of greatest suffering. Right after His resurrection, Jesus found Peter to bring restoration. Jesus did not leave Peter in that horrible place of failure because He had a plan for Peter’s life. Jesus led him by the still waters of Galilee and restored his soul to prepare him for the future. He questioned Peter, “Do you truly love me more than these? Do you love me more than anything else? Do you love me with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength? Do you truly want a genuine relationship with me?” Peter answered that question three times, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Like Peter, if we want to drink of the deep waters that satisfy, we need to have a genuine relationship with Jesus.

Jesus then gave Peter a task to do: *“Feed my lambs...Take care of my sheep...Feed my sheep.”* Peter was restored by being entrusted with an important mission in life. He was to share what he had learned with others; he had a job to do. When Jesus restores, He gives us the purpose of serving others. Just like Peter, we are all called to find the lost sheep and lead them to the Good Shepherd who will restore their souls.

One other thought on restoration. A house restoration is a never-ending project. There is always something going wrong in an old house. Similarly, our lives need constant restoration. We can never rest in this life thinking we are finished. We must expect the unexpected and the need for spiritual repairs to be made. Our bodies age and there is nothing we can do to change that. But when we sometimes get discouraged, we must remember that this life is not perfect but one will be coming! We must be “renewed in the spirit of our minds” and remember that God has prepared *“a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”* (I Corinthians 5:1) The good news - our new resurrection body will be already perfect, no restoration ever needed!

Psalm 23:5a *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;*

The sheep are approaching the high mountain country where the summer ranges are found. These areas provided the best grass and water but also posed the greatest dangers. Phillip Keller mentions that the highest plateau of sheep ranges were referred to as “mesas” - the Spanish word for “tables.” These mesas may have been remote and hard to reach but the good shepherd put in the hard work, both time and effort, to get them ready for the sheep. Early in the season, before the snow was even melted, he would make preliminary trips to scout out the best

place for his sheep. As the time grew nearer, he would make another trip to prepare the tableland for them. He took salt and minerals that would benefit the sheep in the summer. His sharp eye would locate and remove poisonous weeds; he identified the places predators could use to their advantage. Lastly, in preparing the tableland, he had to clear out the water holes, springs, and drinking places for the sheep. He removed the accumulated debris of twigs, leaves, and stones that had fallen into the water source over the fall and winter. He may have to repair some of earth dams he had made to hold water and clear openings to the springs that had become overgrown with brush and weeds. Even with all of this preparation by the shepherd, the sheep would still find themselves facing predators and difficulty. However, as long as they stayed near the shepherd and under his protection, they grazed peacefully.

In Psalm 23:5, David changes the focus of God as a shepherd to God as the host at a special banquet: *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”* The Hebrew word *sulhan* (table) could refer to an animal hide spread on the ground like a picnic blanket. Or it could also refer to a piece of furniture like the tables we have today. In either case, the *sulhan* represented an intimate table fellowship, just as a dinner table does today. To be invited to a person’s table was an honor. To be invited to the King’s table was a great honor. But to be invited to God’s table would be the ultimate honor. As a gracious host, the Lord attended to David’s every need, showering him with personal care, abundant goodness, protection from his enemies, and eternal blessings. David had many adversaries, but in the presence of the Lord, seated at His table, they posed no threat because David was a guest of the Lord. To eat at the King’s table in the presence of your enemies would show your enemies that the king holds you in high regard, and would demonstrate their powerlessness to hurt you. All they could do was watch. David lacked nothing because God was always with him. His assertion *“You prepare a table before me”* is like Paul’s declaration *“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*

When we are invited to someone’s home for dinner, we don’t barge into the kitchen, open up the fridge, and start pulling out things to eat. We depend on the host to place dinner on the table for us and we wait to be offered what was prepared. David depended on God to prepare all of the provisions and help he would need in any situation. The word “prepare” means to arrange, to set in order, to set in place. God is setting the table before David, putting everything in its right place, down to the smallest detail. The dishes are perfectly positioned, the drink is poured, and the meal is cooked and served. Nothing David could possibly want has been overlooked or left out.

This is how David views the Lord’s care for him. God is feeding him the meat of His word. He is pouring the truth into David’s soul to bring him joy and peace. David is totally satisfied in the Lord. This same “service” is available to all believers. We have been given a place in the royal banquet hall and treated like a guest of the King. Throughout the feast, the Lord’s eye is on us, anticipating our every need. In His perfect timing, He brings to our table precisely what we need, when we need it.

In the day-to-day blessing of the Lord, He not only gets us through, but gives us blessings in the presence of our enemies. In the midst of trials and troubles, He gives us peace, comfort, and even contentment. The world watches and can’t understand. There is no other explanation

for it other than the supernatural power of God. As Paul puts it in Philippians 4:7, “*and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*” No circumstances in your life can keep the Lord from blessing you exceedingly and abundantly when you stay close to the Shepherd and keep your eyes on Him.

And God is able to make all grace [every favor and earthly blessing] come in abundance to you, so that you may always [under all circumstances, regardless of the need] have complete sufficiency in everything [being completely self-sufficient in Him], and have an abundance for every good work and act of charity. (II Corinthians 9:8 AMP)