

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

The Lord is my Shepherd

Presented by Graeme Best

Good morning. I'm not sure about you but I don't know very much about sheep. Not really. I was born and spent the early part of my life in a coal town in the Hunter Valley. Since then I have lived in the suburbs of Sydney and my family didn't have sheep. And although I have spent time on sheep farms and wrestled a few to the ground over the years, been to the Big Merino,.. I am certainly no expert on sheep.

The truth is of course, most of us know very little about sheep ... but .. I think many of you would know something about the sheep psalm .. because the 23rd Psalm is one of the most familiar and loved pieces of literature in all of history. How often has it been sung or read in church, read at funerals or weddings .. learnt by children in Sunday School ..

The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not be in want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures .. he restores my soul. Such familiar words. Such simple words. And yet .. so amazingly profound. This morning I want to reflect on the first few words of that well known Psalm

Song

The first thing I want to suggest concerning this statement, the Lord is My Shepherd, is that to say such a thing, to mean such words, is actually an **admission that you are a sheep**. I mean, if the Lord is our shepherd then we must be sheep.

Now the Bible draws this analogy .. makes this comparison many times. Psalm 44 .. *we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered*. Psalm 78 .. *he led them like sheep through the desert*. .. Psalm 100 .. *we are his people, the sheep of his pasture* .. Isaiah 53 *we all, like sheep, have gone astray* ..

In the New Testament .. Matthew 9 .. *they were like sheep without a shepherd* ..

Jesus said .. *I am the gate for the sheep* .. *I know my sheep* .. *Take care of my sheep, feed my sheep*.

But sheep are geeky animals. They don't run like other animals. Their legs don't bend. They aren't strong animals. They get sick so easily .. They die so easily. And they follow each other around and get themselves into all sorts of trouble .. They will even follow others over a cliff and all of them get killed. They are pretty stupid animals.

It is not such a good comparison to be likened to a sheep. In fact most people would reject that comparison outright because we like to think of ourselves as being strong and intelligent, independent, almost indestructible .. but the truth is .. God is right .. we are just like sheep.

For we do go astray .. we do get sick easily .. we do die ever so easily .. and we too follow each other around. How many people will only wear clothes or shoes with a big tick on them like Tiger Woods does. And much

of the time we too can be stupid .. and make dumb decisions and get ourselves into trouble and so on .. we are just like sheep

.. and so to say 'The Lord is my shepherd' is an admission of such. Is being honest. The fact that we are just like sheep. Have you done that? Made such an admission?

But to say the 'Lord is my Shepherd', is not only an admission that we are like sheep but also declaration .. not of independence, but dependence on our shepherd.

Sheep are among the most dependent of all livestock. They are highly dependent on people looking after them. They need to be fenced off so that they don't stray and get injured.

They need to be protected from predators like wild dogs and foxes. They need to be treated all the time so they don't get various diseases. I'll never forget helping to put a mob through a sheep dip.

Sheep need to have so many things done for them. They need to be shawn. They are in many ways, totally dependent on farmers or shepherds.

And so when we say that somebody else is our shepherd we are declaring that we are dependent on that person. When we say, the 'Lord is my Shepherd', we are saying that we are dependent on God, just as sheep are dependent on their shepherd.

Song

An expression of dependence on God does not sit well with many people because again, we like to think of ourselves as be independent.

We like independence in almost every area of our lives. We like to be financially independent. We enjoy the independence to move about as we please. That's one of the reasons so many drive their own cars to work. We like the independence to live as we please. That is why we like our own place and our own space. We like our independence.

I visited an older lady in hospital .. she lives on her own .. walks everywhere .. mows the lawn and so on .. very independent lady. She had chest pains for six weeks but never did anything about it .. Why? Her words .. because I was too stubborn to admit that I needed help.

'I like my independence' she said. She didn't want to be dependent on anyone else. She would sit on somebody's front fence with pains in her chest and people would ask her if she was OK and she'd say .. Yes .. I'm fine.

We like to be independent. And yet, the funny thing is, in spite of our desire to be independent, if we really think about it, there are many, many times in our lives when we desperately need help. When we are just like sheep who need the help of a kind and loving shepherd.

By saying 'the Lord is my shepherd', we are saying that we need help. We are recognising that we live in a world full of trouble as Jesus said .. and at times we are just like weak, geeky sheep who need a shepherd to guide us, to protect us .. to help us through tough times. We are saying that we need a shepherd.

But not just any shepherd. We need a shepherd that is trustworthy .. one that can be depended on. Thank goodness, God is absolutely trustworthy. We can depend on him. He's never lost a single sheep. If one of his

sheep goes astray he will search .. he will bring that lost sheep back .. In fact, he is willing to put his life on the line for one single lamb. For he is the good shepherd. Jesus said .. I am the good shepherd.

You see, good shepherds make sure their sheep lie down in green pastures. That they have plenty of still water to drink. Good shepherds make sure their sheep are well cared for .. well protected .. well fed .. God is our good shepherd. He loves us. He is committed to us.

We can take great confidence in making an expression of dependence on the Lord because the Lord is entirely dependable. He will help us in this life ..

Because of him we will not be in want .. He will guide us in paths of righteousness .. He restores our soul .. and will protect us from the evil one .. and he will make sure that we have greenest pastures imaginable in the next life.

And so to say 'the Lord is my Shepherd', is not only an admission that we are sheep but also a declaration of dependence on the Lord, who is the good shepherd. I would urge you to make that declaration if you never have before.

Song

Thirdly, to say the Lord is my Shepherd is also to make a statement about **ownership**. Why do sheep exist? Do shepherds exist for the benefit of sheep or do sheep exist for the benefit of shepherds?

We get it the wrong way around sometimes around don't we? We think that God exists for our pleasure .. but no .. we exist for his. Sheep exist for the benefit of the shepherd. And so we belong to God .. we are his sheep. He made us for his pleasure and for his purposes.

He made every person born on this earth. All of us as Isaiah says, have gone astray .. but those of us who have come back to God through faith in Jesus .. we as Christians are sheep belonging to his flock .. we belong to God. Jesus even calls us, his friends.

In the days of Jesus, a shepherd owned his sheep and marked them with a distinctive notch cut in their ears. And shepherds could recognise their sheep easily .. even from a distance .. because of this distinctive marking. Today of course, sheep have ear tags .. plastic tags that are attached to the ears of the sheep .. and the plastic tags bear the name of the property. Of the owner.

You know, it is like this for us as Christians. It was like God marked us before we were even born, indicating his rightful ownership .. but we were like that lamb who deliberately turns and walks away. But our shepherd didn't give up on us. He kept searching and searching until one time it was like he found us for sale at a sheep auction.

God comes over and says to the auctioneer .. that sheep is mine .. I recognise my mark. But of course .. he had to pay for the sheep. And our shepherd paid an outrageous price .. far above market value in order to get his lambs back. He had to die on a cruel cross in order that he could redeem us back again. And now he has a double right to own us .. he owned us at birth and owned us by redemption.

And as Christians, we now bear a mark for everyone to see. The mark of the Holy Spirit who is at work in our lives.

But lastly, there is more than dependence and ownership involved in this statement, ‘the Lord is my shepherd.’ It also **indicates a relationship**. A personal relationship. The Lord is MY shepherd.

In Bible times, shepherds knew their sheep. Knew them by name. Knew their personalities. And vice versa.

John 10 verse 3 says that Jesus, the good shepherd, calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. In verse 10 Jesus says .. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

We have a shepherd who loves us .. who has a personal interest in and a relationship with us his sheep. A relationship that began on the cross. And he has given us his Spirit to be within our very being. You cannot get any closer than that.

Song

The Lord is my shepherd. It is an admission that we are sheep who have gone astray. That we are dependent on the good shepherd, our Lord Jesus. An admission that we belong to God. We are in his flock. Sheep of his pasture. And we are privileged to have a wonderful relationship with him for all eternity.

But the relationship should work both ways. John 10 verse 4 says .. he goes ahead of his sheep and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

This tells us that those sheep who are in right relationship with the shepherd .. they follow him ..

As Christians, even though we can never lose our salvation, we can be out of relationship with our shepherd .. if we don’t follow him. If we walk the way we want to walk and not follow his leading .. his word ..

This morning I would urge you to follow the good shepherd. For knows what is best for us. And only he can lead us to the point where we can dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Thanks for listening this morning. May God bless you.