

# The shepherd's Heart

## Introduction

It is a clear and precious truth that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Shepherd of His people. This is something that has delighted Christians through the ages and has strengthened them as they make the hard and rough journey to glory.

## Jesus, the authentic shepherd

Such a truth is evident from the lips of Jesus Himself. In John 10v11, He states, *"I am the good shepherd"*, and much of the chapter is taken up with this theme. However, the shepherd idea didn't just materialise in John 10, but it is founded on the Old Testament Scriptures, which speak of the coming one being a shepherd. One notable example is found in Ezekiel 34. In this passage the Lord condemns the leaders of Israel for being false shepherds, by failing to care for and lead the people of Israel rightly. Therefore, He says that He Himself will be the shepherd, who will seek and deliver the sheep that were lost and scattered, as we read in Ezekiel 34v11, *"Indeed I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out."* Jesus fulfils this passage beautifully in His earthly ministry. Prior to the feeding of the 5000, we read in Mark 6v34 that, *"Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd."* After His encounter with the tax collector, Zacchaeus, Jesus also declared that, *"The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost."* Jesus is the authentic shepherd of His people.

## The work of the shepherd

What work does this shepherd do? In our minds eye, we can easily get a sanitised view of a shepherd. We may think of a man on a hillside on a bright sunny day, whistling commands to his sheepdogs, and just soaking in the scenery. Everyday life as a shepherd is totally different. Particularly, in Jesus' day, it would have been a tough, physical and dangerous job. There would have been much to do for the welfare of the sheep. Indeed, this is at the heart of a shepherd's job, the welfare of the sheep. This is at the heart of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, the hard work of caring for His dear people. This means that every true believer is under the shepherd care of Jesus.

What is involved in the ministry of Jesus towards His people? Perhaps there is no better place to go to than what is probably many believers' favourite Psalm:

Psalm 23

*<sup>1</sup>The Lord is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.*

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

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

*<sup>4</sup>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.*

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

*<sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
All the days of my life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
Forever.*

Of course, many books have been written on this Psalm, which dig into the depths of meaning we find here. However, a summary will suffice for our purposes. What does Jesus, the Shepherd, do for His people?

- Provides all that we need (v2)
- Satisfies our spiritual thirst and hunger (v3)
- Revives our soul (3)
- Leads us in the right way, so that we do not go astray (v3)
- Protects us from all evil (v4)
- Brings us comfort (v4)
- Grants victory over our enemies (v5)
- Ensures that we know His goodness and mercy each day (v6)
- Places before us an unshakeable hope of being with Him forever (v6)

That is quite a work. This is truly an astonishing, and a precious work. Let us praise God that Jesus is this shepherd.

## **The quality of the Shepherd**

How can we know that Jesus will accomplish all this for us? It is quite a list and quite a task. There may be many things we could focus upon, but surely a significant part of the answer would be the quality of the shepherd's heart. Imagine a hireling whose heart is careless, selfish, unkind, arrogant, lazy, etc. This is the type of person that Jesus refers to in John 10:12-13, *"But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care for the sheep."* Here is a man who doesn't care. He is fearful of danger, lacks commitment to the sheep, and is just in the job for what he can get out of it. What sort of care are the sheep going to get? At the end of the day, it will be pretty poor. We could imagine that the sheep would be: scattered all over the hillside; many with cuts, bruises and diseases; many looking unkempt; many hungry and thirsty; and perhaps there will be a number of carcasses scattered on the landscape. It would be a sorry sight if their shepherd's or hireling's heart was a poor one. However, if the opposite is the case, and the heart of the shepherd is right, the flock would be in an altogether different state.

The heart of our shepherd, Jesus, is absolutely perfect. He has a pure and beautiful heart, which is completely suited to being our shepherd. It is because of the quality of His heart, that we can be assured that all Psalm 23 states, will be accomplished by Him. By His heart-driven work, we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Therefore, in the following articles, it is my intention to examine this heart of Jesus, for our spiritual profit. Let us peer into the precious nature of the heart of Jesus, so that we can be all the more assured of His shepherd care. We must look to THE shepherd in this manner, so that we may be encouraged all the more, by faith, to put our welfare into His hands.