

*Psalms 23:1-2 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

Although sheep thrive in dry, semi-arid country, they still require water. They are not like some of the African gazelles, which can survive fairly well on the modest amount of moisture found in natural forage. The key to where water can be obtained lies with the shepherd. He knows where the best drinking places are and it is to these spots that he leads the flock.

But before thinking about the water sources themselves, let's consider the role of water in the animal body and why it is so essential. I've read where the body of an animal is composed on an average of about 70 percent water. This fluid is used to maintain normal body metabolism; it is a portion of every cell, contributing to its normal life functions. Water determines the vitality and vigor of the sheep and is essential to its health and general well being.

If the supply of water for an animal drops off, dehydration of the tissues can result into serious damage and the animal becomes weak, impoverished and possibility die. Any animal is made aware of a lack of water by thirst, and it's this thirst that tells the body its water supply needs replenishing.

Now, just as the physical body has a capacity and need for water, so scripture points out that the human soul has a need to be replenished with spiritual water. When sheep are thirsty they become restless and set out in search of water to satisfy their thirst. If not led to good, clean, pure water, they will often end up drinking from the polluted pot holes where they pick up such internal parasites as nematodes, liver flukes or other diseases.

In precisely the same manner, Christ, our Good Shepherd, made it clear that thirsty souls of men and women can only be fully satisfied by the Good Shepherd. In *Matthew 5:6 He said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled* [satisfied]." On another occasion, Jesus declared, (*John 7:37 KJV*)...*"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."* "To drink" in spiritual terminology simply means "to take in" or "to accept." A person accepts and absorbs the very life in Christ to the point where it becomes a part of him. The difficulty in all of this is that men and women who are "thirsty" for God often are unsure what to really look for and they will try and satisfy their thirst by drinking from any dirty pool.

David, when he composed Psalm 23, knew the importance of thirst and water. Looking at life from the standpoint of a sheep he wrote, *"He [the Good Shepherd] leadeth me beside the still waters."* The good shepherd knows where the still, quiet, clean, pure water is to be found that can satisfy His sheep and keep them fit and strong. Generally speaking, water for the sheep came from three main sources **(1) dew on the grass, (2) deep wells, (3) springs and streams**

If the weather is not too hot, sheep can go for months without actually drinking if there is heavy dew on the grass each morning. Sheep, by habit, rise just before dawn and start to feed. Or if there is bright moonlight they will graze at night. The early hours are when the vegetation is drenched with dew, and sheep can keep fit on the amount of water taken in with their forage when they graze.

Of course, dew is a clear, clean, pure source of water. And there is no more graphic picture of still waters than the silver droplets of the dew hanging heavy on leaves and grass at break of day. The good and diligent manager makes sure that his sheep can be out and grazing on this dew drenched vegetation. If necessary, he himself will rise early to be out with his flock.

In the Christian life, it is noteworthy to observe that those who are often able to cope with life's complexities are those who rise early each day to feed on God's Word. It is in the quiet, early hours of the morning that they are led beside the quiet, still waters where they take in the very life of Christ for the day. The biographies of the great men and women of God repeatedly point out how the secret of the success in their spiritual life was attributed to the "quiet time" of each morning. There, alone, listening to the Master's voice, one is led gently to the place where his spiritual thirst is satisfied. One comes away from these times refreshed in mind and spirit. The thirst of soul and heart is quietly satisfied.

A shepherd once said, *"In my mind's eye, I can see the gentleness, stillness and softness of early mornings finding my sheep knee deep in dew drenched grass. There they fed heavily and contentedly. As the sun rose and its heat burned the dewdrops from the leaves, the flock would retire to find shade. There, fully satisfied and happily refreshed, they would lie down to rest and ruminate through the day. Nothing pleased me more."*

Now don't you think this is the way our Good Shepherd wants to see us? I suggest to you that He loves to see us contented, quiet, at rest and relaxed. He delights to know our soul and spirit have been refreshed and satisfied.

But the irony of life, and tragic truth for many Christians, is that this is not the way it is. It is often the case that they try to satisfy their thirst by pursuing other things. Often, to appease the craving of their souls, men and women have tried drinking deeply from the wells of the world only to turn away unsatisfied — unquenched in their soul's thirst.

There are those who, to quench this thirst in their parched lives; have attempted to find refreshment in all sorts of physical pursuits and activities. Some try travel, or they participate feverishly in sports. They attempt adventures of all sorts, or indulge in social activities. They take up hobbies or engage in community efforts. But when all is said and everything has been done they find themselves facing the same haunting, hollow, empty, unfilled thirst within.

The ancient prophet Jeremiah put it very bluntly when he declared, "*My people . . . they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water*" (*Jeremiah 2:13*). It is a picture that accurately portrays broken lives — shattered hopes — barren souls that are dried up and parched and full of the dust of despair.

Among young people, the recourse to drugs, to alcohol, to sexual adventure is a mad desire to alleviate their thirst but such is no substitute for the Word of the living God. These people are broken cisterns; their lives are miserable; their faces show the desperation within.

And amid all this chaos of a confused, sick society, Christ comes quietly as of old, and invites us to come to Him. He invites us to follow Him and to put our confidence in Him.

**NO. 2.** Deep wells were another source of water. Now, strange as it may appear on the surface, the deep wells of God from which we may drink are not always the delightful experiences we may imagine them to be. *The story is told about a man standing under the blazing sun of Africa and watching the native herds of sheep being led to their owner's water wells. Some of these wells were enormous, hand-hewn caverns cut from the sandstone formation. They were like great rooms chiselled out of the rocks with ramps running down to the water trough at the bottom. The herds and flocks were led down into these deep cisterns where cool, clear, clean water awaited them. But down in the well was the owner bailing water to satisfy the flock. It was hard, heavy, hot work. Perspiration poured off the body of the bailer whose skin glistened under the strain and heat of his labor. Standing there and watching the animals quench their thirst at the still waters the observer was immensely impressed by the fact that everything hinged and depended upon the diligence of the owner, the shepherd. Only through the shepherd's energy, efforts, his sweat, and his strength could the sheep be satisfied.*

In the Christian life exactly the same applies. Many of the places we may be led into will appear to us as dark, deep, dangerous and somewhat disagreeable. But it simply must be remembered that the Good Shepherd is there with us. He is very much at work in the situation. It is His energy, effort and strength expended on my behalf that even in this deep, dark place is bound to produce a benefit for me. (*Heb 13:5*) *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

(*1 Pet 5:7*) *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.* It is when I discover only the Good Shepherd can really satisfy me that life starts to have significance. When I discover I am the object of His special care and attention that dignity and

direction come into focus, and I view my life as useful. This is refreshing because my thirst for reality in life is satisfied and quenched by my Master.

**No. 3.** The shepherd seeks water from streams and rivers. *A shepherd tells about a bunch of sheep being led down to a magnificent mountain stream. The snow-fed waters were flowing pure and clear and crystal clean between lovely banks of trees. But on the way several stubborn ewes and their lambs stopped, instead, to drink from small, dirty muddy pools beside the trail. The water was filthy with the churned up mud from the passing sheep and previous flocks that had passed that way. Still these stubborn sheep drank from the unfit water that could eventually riddle them with internal parasites and disease.*

Of course there are always a percentage of people who will refuse to allow God to lead them. They insist on running their own lives and following the dictates of their own wills. They insist they can be masters of their own destinies even if ultimately such destinies are destructive. They don't want to be directed by the Spirit of God; they don't want to be led by Him; they want to walk in their own ways and drink from any old source they fancy might satisfy their whims.

People often try this or that with the casual comment, *"So, what? I can't see that it's going to do any harm!"* Little do they appreciate that often there is a delayed reaction and that considerable time may elapse before the full impact of their misjudgment strikes home. Then suddenly they are in deep trouble and wonder why.

To offset these dangers and guard against them, God invites us to allow ourselves to be led and guided by His own inspired word. Much of the emphasis and teaching of the Paul's Epistles in the New Testament is show the child of God how to live. Jesus' own teaching to His twelve just before His death, begins in John 14 by saying ***(John 14:1) Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*** He then continues by giving to us in John 14 - 17, how that the Holy Spirit was to be given to lead us into truth. He would come as a guide and counselor. Always He would lead us into the things of Christ and he does that through the word. As Tom Wacaster said in his commentary on Psalm, *"The still waters suggest the peace that is ours when we follow the lead of the Savior. When we follow our Lord we are promised **peace that passeth all understanding (Phil 4:17).**"*

Invitation Are you at peace