**Thy Rod and Thy Staff**

**INTRODUCTION:** Again notice these incredible words found in Psalm 23:1-4:

“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. (3) He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. (4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

When God created sheep, he must have had in mind the use He would make of them in teaching spiritual truth. The words, “sheep,” “lambs,” “eue,” “shepherds,” “sheepfold,” occur over 600 times in the Bible.

God is saying to us, do you want to know what the Christian life is like, watch my SLEEP. If you want to know what the Shepherd is like, watch ME.

Living as we are in perilous times, it makes all that more important finding comfort in the presence of the Shepherd. Thus as we move deeper into the 23rd Psalm, we move closer and closer to the Shepherd.

The Bible says in Psalm 23:4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." The psalmist is no longer speaking about the Shepherd; he is speaking to the Shepherd. He is no longer saying about the Shepherd,

He "is my shepherd... He maketh me to lie down in green pastures... He leadeth me beside the still waters... He restoreth my soul... He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness..."

He is no longer speaking from a distance. He is now in communion with Him. Verse four says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." Here David is speaking to the Lord.

**Our Shepherd is personal.** We are not to view Him from a distance; we are to commune with Him. We love reading, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." We love that, "He leadeth me." We love talking about, "He restoreth my soul." It is all beautiful. But can you see the progression here of getting deeper and deeper into the heart of God?

**Our Shepherd is personal.** He is not a god somewhere on a pole or displayed somewhere for us to see. He is the God who lives in us.

**Our Shepherd is personal.** "Thou art with me!" David is not talking about Him, but talking to Him. May God move upon our hearts to bring us into this kind of communion with Christ!

What will it take for us to cleave to Him, to lean on Him, to walk with Him, to commune with Him, to know Him, and to fellowship with Him?

God wants that kind of relationship with His children. He does not want a distant glance from us; He wants a close, personal relationship with us. **Our Shepherd is**
personal.

He cannot be simply a fact that we quote. Oh, we know He said He will never leave us or forsake us, but He must be a reality in our daily lives. We must have faith in God and know “thou art with me.”

Now for the 3rd time we come to verse 4 where our focus will be on the last phrase, “thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

In II Corinthians 1:3 we read about the “God of all comfort.”
In Acts 9:31 we read about the “Comfort of the Holy Spirit.”
In Romans 15:4 we read, “…that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

In Psalm 23:4, the shepherd uses simple things - a rod and a staff. The rod was a weapon. It was a club-like stick used to guard the sheep. The staff was a long stick with a curved end. The staff was used in particular to guide the sheep or to retrieve the sheep.

If a lamb wandered away, the shepherd could reach out with the staff and with the crooked end to bring the sheep back.
If a lamb fell into the water and was in danger, the shepherd would reach with that staff and hook it around the body of the little lamb and bring him up out of the water.
If a lamb was entangled somewhere in the briars or was caught in a thicket and could not get out, the staff could be used to tear loose the things that had gotten tangled in his wool and free him.

When the sheep observed that the shepherd had the rod to guard and the staff to guide, he was comforted. The sheep realized that the shepherd had all the power he needed and said, “…thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” This is how:

FIRST: The Shepherd’s ROD is protection against OUTSIDE enemies. The ROD was a large OAK CLUB about 2 feet long. The shepherd carried this in his hand to defend the sheep against wild beasts. The head of the ROD was shaped like a ball with sharp objects pounded into it and protruding from it. It was a lethal instrument in the hands of a shepherd.

This ROD, a weapon of power, authority and defense, was a continuous comfort to the sheep. The Rod speaks of the Word of God. It carries with it the convicting power and irrefutable impact of “Thus saith the Lord.”

I understand a skilled shepherd could not only use this instrument to club a wild beast but he could also throw it like a missile above the head of the sheep and have it strike the wild beast.

There is COMFORT in knowing the shepherd carries a ROD, “…thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” I Corinthians 15:57 put it this way for us, “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

If we are the SHEEP and He is the SHEPHERD we ought to take great comfort as we recognize that any enemy that comes after us, has to first of all get through or past our Good Shepherd.

Sometimes we get the impression that we are in this life on our own. But we need to realize that “The battle is the Lord’s.” Every once in a while I will hear some cocky Christian say you need to stand up and fight like a man against the Devil.
You know what, the Bible says, “Resist the Devil and He will flee from you.”

Do you realize that you and I are not in a contest with the Devil, our Shepherd is! And when the enemy is around, and we are walking under the leadership of the Shepherd, that ROD is our COMFORT and defense.

Even though Isaiah 43 was written to the Jewish nation, it is filled with promise for us today. In verses 1-3 we read,

“But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. (2) When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (3) For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour:”

This passage speaks of power of the one who CREATED thee; REDEEMED thee and CALLED thee. And though we may seem insignificant and just one of the sheep, we are known to the Shepherd.

Whenever the enemy of our souls comes against us the Good Shepherd knows what to do. And in this passage of scripture we are taught that we are the Lord’s by ownership. As someone said to write over this passage, “God takes care of his property.”

If we are His SHEEP and He is our SHEPHERD we ought to expect that HE will take care of us, His property.

The reason the shepherd carried the ROD was to keep anyone else from getting the sheep that belongs to him.

The reason the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, carries the ROD is to deal with the enemy from without who wants to steal the sheep from under His care.

If you want to see the power of the Good Shepherd, as it falls into the context of helping His own, please notice Psalm 147:1-5 where we read,

“Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely. (2) The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. (3) He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. (4) He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. (5) Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.”

Do you realize that the God who knows the names of each shining star is the same God who heals my broken heart? The infinite powerful God who brought into being this vast universe is the same God who heals the broken hearts of His people. The ROD of His omnipotent is able to drive the enemy of sorrow away.

That’s the kind of Shepherd we have in the Lord Jesus. During a night of sorrows or circumstances of life, He can show us His protecting hand.

SECOND: The Shepherd’s STAFF is protection against INSIDE enemies. The STAFF, a long pole with a curved end, was used by the shepherd for several purposes.

NUMBER 1: The Shepherd used the Staff to COUNT the sheep. In the terminology of the Old Testament from Ezekiel 20:37 this was referred to as passing “under the rod.” At the end of the day the sheep pass under the rod or
staff and be numbered or counted and looked over with great care to make sure all was well with it.

The picture is a very powerful one. As each animal comes through the gate, it is stopped by the outstretched rod. The shepherd opens the fleece with the rod; he runs his skillful hands over the body; he feels for any sign of trouble; he examines the sheep with care to see that all is well. This is a most searching process entailing every intimate detail. This scrutiny is a comfort to the sheep, for only in this way can the hidden problems be laid bare before the shepherd. This is what was meant in Psalm 139:23, 24 when the psalmist wrote,

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

The Bible also says in Matthew 10:29-31,

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. (30) But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Before you were born God knew you.
When you were born God knew you
When you became one of His own by faith in Christ, God knows you.

Yes, He knows every one of His sheep. Not one of us can go astray but that the Good Shepherd knows. Here are the first two stanza of the hymn “The Ninety and Nine”

There were ninty and nine that safely lay –
In the shelter of the fold,
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold.
Away on the mountain wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd’s care,
Away from the tender Shepherd’s care.

Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine:
Are they not enough for Thee?
But the shepherd made answer:
This of mine has wandered away from me,
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find my sheep,
I go to the desert to find my sheep.

Every evening the shepherd would put them under the rod or the staff and He would count them. If one was missing, He would go find it.

There is no substitute for the Scriptures in coping with the complexities of our difficult society.

We are part of a world of men and women whose code of conduct is contrary to all that Christ has advocated.

We are exposed to enormous temptations of all sorts.

However, in every situation and under every circumstance there is comfort in the knowledge that God's Word can meet and master the difficulty if we will rely on it.

In this day of multiplied 100’s and 1000’s of people, if we are not careful we can
begin to lose our individuality. Yet the Shepherd knows who you are and if you aren’t where you ought to be in the Christian life, He will come after you. (That’s why as your Pastor, your earthly shepherd – I call you.)

NUMBER 2: The Shepherd used the STAFF to CARE for the sheep. The little CROOK at the end of the staff was used by the Shepherd when the sheep got into trouble.

I have in past messages on Psalm 23 addressed the issue of the mentality of the sheep. We don’t have to search far to find the parallel of the Christian to the mentality of the sheep.

You know, as God’s people, we can fall into more proverbial holes in life than we can imagine. We are always getting away from the Good Shepherd, going off on our own – away from church, away from our prayer life, away from the Word of God, away from godly living. The Shepherd with His staff reaches down and pulls us out of messes we have gotten ourselves into. In Ezekiel 34:11-12 we read,

“For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. (12) As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.”

Not only is this a reference to Israel, but it is also a picture of the Shepherd searching out his sheep, us, on a dark and cloudy day until he finds us and reaches down and pulls us out of the sinful hole we have gotten ourselves into.

NUMBER 3: The Shepherd used the STAFF to CORRECT the sheep. In Hebrews 12:6-11 we read:

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: (6) For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (7) If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (8) But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (9) Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? (10) For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.”

In a previous message I told you about the shepherd breaking the sheep’s leg in order to keep it in line. Or at times when the sheep would wander off, the shepherd would take the staff and slap the sheep on the head.

As has been often said of the Word of God, “This Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book!”

It is the Word of God that comes swiftly to our hearts with surprising suddenness to correct and reprove us when we go astray.

It is the Spirit of the Living God, using the living Word that convicts our conscience of right conduct.

In this way we are kept under control by Christ who wants us to walk in paths of righteousness.
Question, has the Good Shepherd got your attention lately?

- Sometimes He allows you to get into a financial mess.
- Sometimes he will allow you to go through an unexpected illness you didn’t see coming.
- Sometimes He will allow you to get into some kind of a bind in order to get your attention.

Now let me encourage you here. If God has gotten your attention, that means you belong to the Shepherd. “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”

During my boyhood, a whipping was not fun. It was rather painful to say the least.

Hebrews 12:11 tells us, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

Even in discipline – God’s ways are perfect. Even in discipline God is interested in our welfare and He cares about us. Because of that:

- He takes the Rod and drives away our enemies.
- He takes the Staff and cares for us.
- He takes the Staff and keeps us in line.

Yes, as a believer, thank God, “Thy ROD and Thy Staff – they do comfort me.”

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If God has spoken to your heart, after reading the sermon “Thy Rod and Thy Staff” right now talk to God about what He has spoken to you.

Do you have the assurance that one day you will go to heaven? If you have no assurance that you know Jesus Christ, then I trust you will decide to accept Him as your personal Savior. The Bible tells us in

Acts 16:31, “...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...”
Romans 10:13, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This prayer is here for those who need to ask Jesus to be their personal Savior: “I do want to go to Heaven. I know I am a sinner, and I do believe Jesus Christ died for me. I realize I cannot buy this great salvation, nor can I earn it. Knowing Jesus died on the cross and arose from the grave to pay my sin debt and to purchase my salvation, I do now trust Him as my Savior, and from this moment on I am completely depending on Him for my salvation.”

If you made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, let me know. Please send an e-mail to pdmikBBM@aol.com and I will send you some literature that will help you in your Christian life.

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