

NEWS AND VIEWS
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*“Southern Baptists with the Full
Gospel for the Whole World”*

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Happy New Year! At least that's what our calendars declare. But is it a new year according to your heart? Consider with me this familiar passage from the Word of the Lord:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. (Psalms 23:1-2)

When I learned the 23rd Psalm as a child, I didn't have a very deep understanding of "green pastures" and "quiet waters". I don't know that I have the total understanding of it yet. But I've recited and thought about this passage often. So when I went to Israel years ago and saw shepherds and sheep in real time and real life, it was a powerful living illustration. One thing that stood out in my mind about these two phrases is how rare green pastures and quiet waters actually are in the Land of Promise. The psalmist was a shepherd who needed a Shepherd to show him green pastures and quiet waters. He needed the Lord. So do we.

We read in the gospels that when Jesus saw the people, He had compassion on them because they were like "sheep without a shepherd." Living life without Jesus is something I can tell you about. Without God's direction for years, I lived an wandering, aimless life. In the depth of my sin, I was going nowhere and getting there fast. Like a lost sheep, I was alone in a barren desert without green pastures or quiet waters. It's a terrible time living alone in the wilderness. Without a shepherd we can wander alone, distracted, distressed, discouraged, defeated and endangered. Like sheep we can be lost before we know how lost we really are. Good shepherds will search for sheep that are lost. The ones who constantly wander away are no less important to him than the one who never strays. In Christ, we have a Shepherd who excels all shepherds.

I. THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD. The Shepherd is a personal shepherd. His sheep hear His voice. I not only belong to the shepherd. He belongs to me. And He is available to help me. There is joy that surges through me because I'm able to say the Lord is "my" shepherd!

II. THE LORD IS A GOOD SHEPHERD. In John 10 Jesus said, *I am the Good Shepherd*. In that passage Jesus tells us about the difference between a good shepherd and a hired hand. The hired hand is not interested in the lives of the sheep but his own self-interest. The Good Shepherd is God's Shepherd. And He is accountable to keep God's sheep safe and secure.

III. THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVES GOOD THINGS BECAUSE THEY ARE GOD'S THINGS.
...I shall not want... Not everything a sheep wants is good for the sheep. Prone to wander, they can feed on what becomes poisonous to them. They may think that greener grass or cooler water exists beyond the ability of the Shepherd to provide or the boundaries He has set. But we make a mistake to think that God will withhold any good thing from us.

IV. THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVES GRACE ALONG WITH THE GRASS.

...He makes me lie down in green pastures... Grace is what the wandering sheep receive. The truth is that we often have to be made to lie down. God sometimes sends a trial that forces us to stop our migration away from His sheepfold. Even in the trials, He sends us His grace.

V. THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVES US WATER AT REFLECTIVE POOLS.

...He leads me beside quiet waters... Quiet waters are still waters and still waters run deep. They are waters where our image may be reflected. Places of meditation and settings for a time of serious self-examination. Remembering where the Lord found us it should give us pause to praise.

Have you lost your way lately? Could you use a Good Shepherd? He's been looking for you before you knew you were lost! That good news is worthy to go tell on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Enter this year following the Shepherd... He'll get us to where He is going.

Blessings to you,
Pastor Sam