

Who is Your Shepherd? (#5)

Joe Slater

Shepherds in ancient Palestine didn't drive their sheep, they led them. The sheep followed their shepherd because they knew and trusted him. Jesus said, "*When he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers*" (John 10:4-5).

The Lord was David's shepherd. David knew and trusted the Lord. "*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*" (Psalm 23:4).

David envisioned the dangers he faced, whether the threats of his enemies or the temptations of Satan, as walking through a dark, perilous valley. Sheep would normally be afraid in such an environment, but their shepherd's presence and their trust in him would calm their fears. Just so, the Lord's presence and David's trust in Him made him unafraid even in the most dark and dreadful circumstances.

Two of his Shepherd's tools comforted David, the rod and the staff. One was used to ward off predators, the other to lead and guide the sheep. When David faced enemies in war (predators), he knew that "*the battle is the Lord's*" (1 Samuel 17:47).

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, leads, guides, and protects His sheep from the apex predator, Satan the devil, and the wolves in sheep's clothing who serve him. "*The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep*" (John 10:11). Qualified elders of local churches serve as under-shepherds, leading and protecting His sheep by means of the Holy Scriptures (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2).

(More next week!)

One Step at a Time

One of the most vivid images in the Bible is in Psalm 119:105: "*Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.*" This presents a powerful picture, especially in the context of those who lived in biblical times.

In the times of the Psalmist there were no powerful flashlights. The traveler carried a small oil lamp whose flax wick gave off only a little light. There was enough to see, but not enough to see very far down the path. There was basically just enough to take the next step or two without stumbling or falling.

What an appropriate reminder for us! The Word of God is a lamp to our path. It doesn't illuminate far into our personal future, but it does shine in our present. God's Word gives us the light to take our next step in life – and that's all we need to keep from stumbling.

If we fill our minds, hearts, and lives with God's Word, we will always have the light we need to know what we must do next.

-- Edd Sterchi (Campbellsville, KY)

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THE RESTORATION PLEA

Simply stated, the Restoration Plea is an appeal for all believers in Christ to abandon all denominational divisions, to unite upon Scripture, and to restore the early church. Churches of Christ seek to identify themselves not with any of these historical movements, but only with that New Testament church. Like so many who have gone before, churches of Christ humbly seek to be non-denominational, non-sectarian Christians, and to find their origin on that Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2, when the Lord began His church

--Cory Collins (*Where Fresh Waters Flow*, p. 6)

WHAT CAN WASH AWAY MY SINS?

A casual stroll down the appropriate supermarket aisle reveals that we have at our disposal a wide variety of detergents from which we may choose as the need arises. Which product will we use to cleanse our soiled garments? Despite claims to the contrary, one detergent may be just as good as the next. But, when it comes to purging the soul, it makes a great difference which cleansing agent we select. There is only one cleansing agent for the soul and that is the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

The Hebrews writer said that "*all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" (Hebrews 9:22). However, not just any blood will do the job for "*it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*" (Hebrews 10:4). The blood of Jesus alone cleanses our souls from sin (1 John 1:7). In the book of Revelation, when John envisioned souls before the throne of God and asked, "*Who are these?*", He was told they were those who had "*washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*" (Revelation 7:14). Only in a spiritual sense can blood be a cleansing agent. We would not think of washing our linen in blood to make it white. But, in the spiritual realm, it is only the blood of Jesus which can so cleanse our spiritual garments as to make them white as snow (Isaiah 1:18).

How can we obtain the benefit of Christ's blood? The answer is found in Romans chapter five, where we learn that we are "*justified by faith...*" (v. 1). Later in verse nine, we are told that we are "*justified by His blood...*" Putting these two verses together, we conclude that we are justified through our faith in the power of Christ's blood. Our faith, then, leads us to become united with Christ through baptism into His death and raised up with Him to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-5). Let us never forget that it is Christ's blood which answers our most urgent need, namely, our need for spiritual cleansing.

--Glen Elliott (Greenbriar, AR)