

## *From my desk....*

The shepherd opened the gate thus giving him access to the river bank where he had been grazing his flock of sheep these past few days, but now the grass was spent and it was time to move them to new fresh pasture. He was a modern-day shepherd therefore rather than travelling by foot he was sitting astride his farm bike, his working dogs were not quite so fortunate, but they were not complaining only too happy to be doing the job they were bred for. Both man and dogs travelled the length of the river bank, the man happy to rely on his all too willing dogs to round up the flock and point them in the direction of the gate. And so we have an idyllic scene of the shepherd, in front leading the way on his farm bike, followed by the sheep happily trotting behind with the anticipation of sweet fresh grass, flanked to the sides and behind by the dogs whose very presence alone brought order.

Barely causing a ripple in this serene picture one sheep suddenly steps out of the mob, unnoticed by the dogs she deposits herself behind a nearby bush. Hidden from view she stamps her back leg smartly on the tightly packed earth. The man totally unaware of anything untoward continues his way towards the gate, neither do the dogs pick up the subtle sound, only the sheep prick up their ears in response to the unseen signal, as one of their own woos them to break rank, leave the pack and join it behind the bush.

Any shepherd will tell you that rebellion and waywardness in a lamb must be curbed whilst it is still young, for once the troublemaker is old and set in its ways, and therefore no longer teachable, it is destined for the cooking pot. Such is the interaction between shepherd and sheep, and not for nothing does Yeshua name Himself The Good Shepherd and we the sheep of His pasture.

David, long before he became king, minded his father's sheep. This became his classroom, the place where he discovered the relationship between man and his Creator. From this viewpoint David wrote Psalm 23.

**Psalm 23: as seen through the eyes of the sheep.**

**The Lord is MY shepherd, and He is the best shepherd that any sheep could ever wish for. Is His character not full of understanding and concern for each member of His flock, with selfless devotion daily He walks the land searching out sweet and juicy herbs for us to feast upon. He knows each one of us by name, tenderly calling us to His side if we wander too far away. Protecting us fearlessly from any outside attack, we are totally safe by His side.**

**I shall not want for anything. Of course we are not called 'stupid' for nothing because at times each one of us are apt to seek out our own source of food, or to wander too far away from His side. But when commonsense prevails we follow safely by His side wherever He leads, and there by his side we are not only protected but we feed well..**

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

With well satiated bellies we lie down in the shade as the sun reaches full strength. But do not imagine that this is without its problems, for there are a number of things that can eventuate to rob us of our serenity. To name just a few things which can disturb the peace flies constantly seek to torment us, filthy insects intent on laying their vile eggs deep beneath our wool. Those eggs if left undetected hatch and burrow into our flesh, eating their way as they make a bee line for our juicy life giving organs. Death ensues but for our Good Shepherd, for He is ever on watch, and nothing escapes His attention to detail, therefore we rest at peace, chewing rhythmically as we ruminate upon life as we know it, by the side of our Good Shepherd.

He leads me beside the still waters, I know of course that He purposefully chooses the places where the water is flowing untroubled, for as a Good Shepherd He understands that sheep easily become skittish and nervous, even refusing to drink, where the water is flowing swiftly and disturbed. Providing I walk closely behind Him, placing my feet where His have already gone, then I can safely traverse any water course. Does He not say "if anyone thirsts let him come unto Me". But there is so much more to having my thirst quenched for it is a known fact that when sheep take their fill on the grass whilst the early morning dew still weighs it down, then sheep can go for months without actually drinking deeply from the water brooks.

He restores my soul , in Psalm 42:11 it is written 'why are you cast down oh my soul'. A 'cast' sheep is an old English term for a sheep on its back, making it a prime target for any predators. The largest, fattest and even the healthiest sheep can be more prone to becoming 'cast', especially during lambing as they seek to lie comfortably in a hollow in the ground, then as the sheep stretches out to relax so the center of gravity takes over causing the pregnant sheep to roll over onto its back, for sheep have flat backs. Too much wool also or even wool that has become matted with manure and mud again can cause a sheep to lose its center of gravity. Sheep that are too fat also are in danger, for overweight sheep are not the healthiest or the most productive, and again The Good Shepherd has to come along to gently roll the 'cast' sheep back on its feet once again, even taking time to rub limbs to restore circulation. Why it is said that sheep rearing takes the ultimate in intensive care from a good shepherd.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His names sake. Sheep are creatures of habit where we follow same trails until these same paths become mere ruts even causing erosion. Of course sheep going over same ground, back and forth day and night pollutes the ground causing sheep to become re-infected from worm larvae. Not only that, sheep will gnaw grass down to the ground including the roots unless moved on to fresh food. But our Good Shepherd understands this problem, He understands pasture and knows where the grass is poor, keeping us on the move ever searching for fresh food.

Yea tho I walk through the valley of the shadow of death You are with me I will fear no evil for You are with me. In order to reach higher ground where the summer feed is lush, sheep must walk, climbing ever higher. Some of the gullies are in shadow, the sun never reaching deep within those chasms. But our Shepherd moves us gently ever upward, grazing as we go. We know that we will meet storms as we climb, even fresh snow, but it's still the way up to where the summer feed awaits, therefore it is a path that we must take.

Your rod and staff they comfort me. My Good Shepherd carries two things constantly with him, a rod and a staff. The staff he carries in his right hand leaning his body into its sturdiness as he traverses the land, why it appears to be an extension of his very hand. With this same staff he draws we sheep towards him, more especially if we have become entangled in a briar thicket or at the worst fallen into a ravine. A tap from that staff just brings us back closely by his side. At night around the campfire our good shepherd takes his staff and parts the wool on our backs as he looks for parasites (Ps. 139:23,24) and as we pass through the doorway into an enclosure he taps up on the rump with his staff as he counts us off one by one. (Ezekiel 20:37)

The rod hangs from his belt ready at hand for any emergency, such as when one of us wanders too closely to danger, suddenly the rod hurtles through the air to strike the errant sheep, halting it in its tracks. The same when a wild animal stalks the flock searching for prey, that beast can be halted even killed by our shepherd's rod. Very occasionally the rod needs to be used upon a young lamb, one who is constantly turning astray bring itself into danger. Then I have seen our shepherd take the lamb in one hand and the rod in the other, bringing the rod down upon one of the lamb's legs purposefully intending to break a bone in the errant lamb's leg. Gently speaking and caressing the lamb the shepherd binds up the damaged leg, then placing the wounded lamb around his neck and across his shoulders he carries the sorry lamb wherever he goes. By the time the leg is mended and the lamb returned whole, free to walk and run once again, this same lamb prefers to stay close beside his good shepherd, for it has heard the shepherd's heart beat and the gentle timbre of his voice.

You prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies, yes it may be on a mountain top or in a valley, even beside a river, even in the midst of enemy territory, but if our good shepherd has prepared it then all is well and bountiful.

You anoint my head with oil my cup runs over. Yes, especially at the first sign of flies hanging around the sheep, our good shepherd will take oil and smear it over the nose and head of each sheep. This will protect from the flies laying their larvae in the nasal passage which will then crawl up and penetrate the brain.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

How encouraging the sentiments of this Psalm should be to each one of us, for we Christians resemble sheep in all of their docility and yes, stupidity, for the Psalm is both comforting and yet instructive. We truly could have no greater Shepherd for He wants to do us good. All we have to do is respond to Him fully and yield to His ways. If we will walk in His ways then Satan our enemy cannot inflict his filthy plans for death upon us.

*Ruth Patterson*