

“Following The Shepherd”
Psalm 23:3

Reality Carp
 8/15/10

- A song is an expression of a person. When I hear a song, a good song, I’m always fascinated by how the artist used words, progression. This song is no different. It is an expression of his heart, his life. There is debate as to when David, the author of this song wrote this. I tend to agree with those that say he wrote it near the end of his life, reflecting back. Either way it doesn’t matter.
- As David looks back over his life, his mind is drawn to the metaphor of a shepherd. He does so for a couple of reasons. First, and most obvious, it was his occupation. As a young man, he himself was a shepherd. David takes the imagery and uses it as a metaphor for God leading him through his journey of life. Secondly, it was a revelation. Jesus used this language in John 10, when speaking of himself, claiming himself to be the very fulfillment of this psalm.
- Using the metaphor of a Shepherd to a sheep, David says, He restores my soul-He rescues it, bring it back, he gives my soul rest. How can we find rest for our souls? How can we have our souls restored?

I. THE PROBLEM OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

A) RIGHTEOUSNESS:

The fact that David would say, “He restores my soul,” reveals that our souls do need to be restored, and that as verse 3 says, if this shepherd is not leading us on a path of righteousness, we will pursue some other path or person to make ourselves righteous-or right. This is the problem.

- 1) There is no place in the bible where salvation by faith is brought up without this word righteousness. You could make a case that the theme of the Bible is the righteousness of God.
- 2) Defining Righteousness: Even the word holiness has better connotations than righteousness. If you asked someone to define it they may define it by saying something like, “righteousness is moral purity.” That’s not it.
 - a) In the Bible the word righteousness is a relational word. It’s a word that really means to be right with somebody.

- b) It means to be received, it means to find favor, to be welcomed, and the opposite of righteousness is not immorality, the opposite of righteousness is rejection.

B) TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

- 1) The Bible repeatedly says that God is righteous in everything he does, and that there is no righteous God but him alone (Ps. 11:7; Dan. 9:14; Isa. 45:21).
 - a) When relating to God, scripture uses the word “righteous” to mean that God is straight, right, sinless, just, holy, perfect, and good.
 - b) As his image-bearers, human beings were also made righteous, or what Genesis 1:31 calls “very good” and Ecclesiastes 7:29 calls “upright.”
- 2) However, through the sin of our father Adam in Genesis 3, all of humanity now has his sin imputed or reckoned to them.
 - a) Romans 5:12–21 teaches that this is because Adam was both our father and our representative.
 - i) He voted for sin in our place, similar to a president who chooses to go to war and thus in a very real sense includes all of the citizens of his nation in that war since they are directly implicated.
 - b) Subsequently, we are now conceived with a sin nature, and everyone sins by both nature and choice (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:10).
 - c) The result, as Romans 3:10 teaches, is that “None is righteous, no, not one.” “Not righteous” or “unrighteous” means that we are the opposite of God—crooked, wrong, sinful, unjust, and lawbreakers.
 - i) Because we were created as God’s image-bearers made for righteousness, we continue to yearn for righteousness.
 - ii) Like our first father Adam and his wife Eve, we continue to yearn for righteousness, but attempt to cover up our sin and unrighteousness by external means.

B) PATHCHING UP OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

- 1) Yet, because we are sinners, we pursue it through self-righteousness. Romans 10:3 says that religious people,

“being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.”

–Romans 10:3

- 2) Paul sets down such Biblical teachings so that we can know, without a doubt, the difference between Christian righteousness and all other kinds of righteousness.
- 3) Paul says, that every person goes about to establish a personal righteousness. Everybody has a standard of righteousness.
- a) B/c there are people who are constantly passing verdicts on you. What happens is over the years, thousands of these verdicts are coming in and they accumulate and as time goes on, you develop your own standards of what you believe makes you acceptable.
 - b) Righteousness is a sense of being acceptable. At some point you have put things together.
 - c) It’s not a very conscious process at all. On t.v. you will see the marketing campaign that says, ‘if you are cool, you will look like me.’
 - i) You can shrug that off, but after about a thousand of them it begins to sink in.
 - ii) It starts to come on and it becomes the standard of righteousness (baggy jeans to skinny jeans).
 - iii) You can shrug off a lot of things what people say, but over the years, what **your parents have said**, what those **people who rejected you** said, **what the celebrity said**, what the person who rejected you said, what **the job interview said**, what **the mirror has said**, even what **demonic influence** has whispered, cause you to come up with your own standards.
 - iv) Paul says everybody goes about and to establish their own righteousness.
- 4) **This is what sin is.** Sin is ‘we will go and establish our own righteousness.

- a) We say, “if I can do that, have that, be that, then I know that I exist. Then I know that I’m doing it, that I’m acceptable in the sight of others and in some way, in the sight of God.
 - b) Everybody does that. Everybody goes about seeking to establish their own righteousness.
 - c) Our attempts at self-righteousness are as repugnant to our holy and righteous God as giving a bloody tampon to someone as a birthday present (Isa. 64:6).
- 5) There are things in your life that are your righteousness. What are the results of it? The Bible tells us that the result are either guilt and anxiety.
- a) **Guilt** is what happens to each of us who have aimed at some standard that we need to achieve and have aimed and missed them.
 - i) Mid-life crisis is when you look and say, “I’m not on my way, I’ve reached the top. You’ve been succeeding, and you are now saying, I’m not who I want to be, where I want to go.
 - b) **Anxiety**: So you don’t feel guilt maybe, **but you feel anxiety** because you ask, “How long can I keep this up?” **Novel called ‘the trial’ by Franz Kofka**. He starts to look his life over and see all kinds of holes that he had covered over for years; pad answers and stupid clichés that you use as well to cover your flaws.
 - c) No matter how successful you’ve been in patching up your own righteousness, at some point you wake up and realize, “I’m not making it.”
- 6) Martin Luther was delivered from self-righteousness. M.L was a very devout catholic priest, working so hard to be good, and we are told that one day after reading Romans 1:16-17 **Luther** came to see that the guilt that consumed him could not be lifted by more religion, and the God he dreaded so much was not the God that Christ has revealed.
- a) Shooting forth from the book of Romans (1:17), this thunderbolt crossed his path:

"Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by his faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which, through grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith. **Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn** and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the 'justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven . . ."

"What does it profit a man if he gains the world but loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"-Jesus

II. THE PERSON OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"He leads me in paths of righteousness..."

A) THE ANSWER? THE GOSPEL

"I am the good Shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep."

- 1) What's the answer? The gospel. The gospel is, you've got to stop stealing self-acceptance from every other place and you say, the real verdict by the only person whose verdict is in.
- 2) Jesus-the Good Shepherd leads you into righteousness.
 - a) All throughout scripture, beginning in Genesis 3, and ending in Revelation, we find shadows of a lamb that would be perfectly righteous, that would be sacrificed on behalf of sinful humanity so that by His sacrifice.
 - b) What is most amazing is that it is God himself, who sends his Son, The God man, The Good Shepherd to take your place by becoming a lamb on account of His love for you.
 - c) Because you could not do it, b/c you become sidetracked, you have failed, and as the prophet Isaiah declares "all we like sheep have gone astray," that the shepherd looked down the path of righteousness and said, I will go in front of you, and will lead the way so that your soul can be restored.
- 2) Jesus does not just go in front of us to lead the way as example (**Christus Exemplar**) He goes in front of us to take our place.

- a) The Shepherd became a lamb and was brutally sacrificed in your place so that you the sinful, tainted, lamb could become whole and could be restored.
- b) Because we have failed in keeping the law of God, that He the sinless man becomes our substitute, and is sacrificed in our place. It's because we have failed to love our neighbor, that the Shepherd loves perfectly, and restores us, so that now by faith in Him, and by the power of His Spirit within us, we can love others in light of his sacrifice.
- c) ***The determining factor is not my past or my present, but Christ's past and his present.***
 - It doesn't matter what kind of day you've had today. You can expect God to guide you.
 - It is given to us by God without our deserving it or working for it.

3) Yom Kippur-Scapegoat Imagery

- 4) In religion I obey in order to be accepted, but in the gospel I am accepted by God and therefore I obey.
 - a) If I believe in Jesus, then God accepts me. You say, My record is bad, that anxiety is right and true.
 - a) The gospel is, admit that you really are unacceptable as you are and then and only then, will you are able to receive the verdict, "this is my beloved child in whom I'm well pleased.
 - i) The gospels is this continually come back and tell yourself that over and over again. Most of the problems in your life are due to a failure to "**behold,**" what manner of love the father has given to us.
- 3) The person who understands to gospel says, yes there are things that are wrong in my life, worse that I can even see, but God knows all of them, and he's completely covered and accepted them through my faith in J.C.
 - a) There is none of the need to defend yourself when you understand the gospel.
 - i) Why? B/c on that day, you must appropriate who you are in Christ. You don't have to be controlled by this man's opinion.

- ii) You can set the record straight, but you don't become bitter, and sinfully angry b/c this persons opinion doesn't control you.
 - b) Your life is hidden with Christ. If they are right then you approach it the same way. You can respond saying, you are right, and there is so much more that you don't see, but God sees, and yet I'm accepted by him through faith in Christ.
- 5) Once you are in Christ, the law is the greatest guide for your life; it shows you how God wants you to live.
- a) But until you have Christian righteousness, all the law can do is to show you how sinful you are.
 - b) When you really see what it teaches, you will only be terrified, seeing that you could never satisfy it. It reveals your pride and self-centeredness and selfishness and lack of self-control.
- 6) When we receive the Jesus' righteousness, we consequently can live a life of obedience out of gratitude, in response to His love for us.
- a) For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision, nor un-circumcision counts for anything but faith working through love (Gal 6:6)
 - b) But if we first receive Christian righteousness, then we can use the law, not for our salvation, but for his honor and glory, and to lovingly show our gratitude.

So, have we nothing to do to obtain this righteousness? No, nothing at all! For Christian righteousness comes when we know and believe this only — that Christ is gone to the Father, and sits at his right hand, not as our judge, but that Christ has now become FOR us, our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, our salvation. God sees no sin in us, for in this heavenly righteousness sin has no place... So now we may certainly think: "Although I still sin, I don't despair, because Christ lives, who is both my righteousness and my eternal life." In that righteousness I have no sin, no fear, no guilty conscience, no fear of death. I am indeed a sinner in this life of mine and in my own righteousness, but I have another life, another righteousness above this life, which is in Christ, the Son of God, who knows no sin or death, but is eternal righteousness and eternal life. —Tim Keller

B) EXAMPLES: SOULS RESTORED BY EXTERNAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

- 1) David knew what it meant to be restored, on several levels.

- a) His failure with Bathsheba, His failure as a father, His failure as a friend, as a leader resulting in the death of many, all brought consequences.
- b) And yet, even his repentance was a gift, as God [Jesus] as a Good Shepherd would constantly pursue him.

2) Peter knew restoration even after his denial of Jesus.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” 33 Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” 34 Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” Luke 22:31-34

- a) There is a spiritual battle for Peter, and it has the ability to destroy him at the faith level.
- b) Satan demands to have access to Peter
- c) Jesus prays for Peter’s faith (long term versus short term victory)
- d) That his faith will not fail
- e) That he will return
- f) That upon return he will strengthen his brothers
- g) Peter does not acknowledge his weakness, rather pledges beyond his strength
- h) Jesus clarifies what Satan will do through Peter
- i) Jesus’ pledge of community, his prayers, his vision for a rebounded leader – are not contingent on Peter not yielding to his temptation.

3) Yet, now Peter knew him as the lamb of God, who washed his sin.

18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.-1 Pet 1:18-21

C) RESTORING GRACE RESULTING IN FREEDOM

*“In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?”
-John Stott, “The Cross of Christ”*

1) ***This sacrifice of the cross frees me***

- a) To view life as unfair but God more than loving and fair.
- b) To loosen my grip on my own life, which would otherwise paralyze me by fear, self-centeredness, etc.
- c) From pride.

Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, who takes away sin (John 1:29); who takes away the scroll (Rev 5), Who shepherds the saints of heaven (rev 7:13-17), who

III. THE PATH OF RIGHTEOUSNES

David then describes this path as he follows his Shepherd. It gives us insight into our own paths.

B/c of the preference of sheep and their preference for certain favored spots, these well-worn areas become quickly infected with parasites of all kinds. In a short time a whole flock can thus become infected with worms, nematodes, and scab. The final upshot is that both land and owner are ruined while the sheep become thin, wasted and sickly.

The greatest single safeguard, which a shepherd has in handling his flock, is to keep them on the move. That is to say, they dare not be left on the same ground too long. They must be shifted from pasture to pasture periodically. This prevents [destruction of sheep]. In a word-there must be a pre-determined plan of action, a deliberate, planned rotation from one grazing found to another in line with right and proper principles of sound management. This is precisely the sort of action and the idea David had in mind when he spoke of being led in paths of righteousness. The owner's entire name and reputation depends on how effectively and efficiently he keeps his charges moving into wholesome new, fresh forage. Casting my mind's eye back over the years that I kept sheep, no other single aspect of the ranch operations commands more my careful attention than this moving of the sheep. It literally dominated all my decisions. Not a day went by but what I would walk over the pasture in which the sheep were feeding to observe the balance between its growth and the grazing pressure upon it. As soon as the point was reached where I felt the maximum benefit for both sheep and land was not being met, the sheep were moved to a fresh field. ON the average this meant they were put into new ground almost every week. In very large measure the success I enjoyed in sheep ranching must be attributed to this care in managing my flock. Coupled with this entire concept of management, there is of course the owner's intimate knowledge of his pastures. He has been all over this ground again and again. He knows its every advantage and every drawback. He knows where his flock will thrive and he is aware of where the feed is poor. So he acts accordingly. "Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23"-Phillip Keller

A) FOLLOW THE SHEPHERD

1) **TRUSTING HIS SOVEREIGNTY** - *right paths, for His name sake*

"He leads them out" -John 10:3

a) Then David reflects on his life and how the Shepherd King has led him.

- i) There is a promise here to you that have fled to Jesus for refuge as your Shepherd-King.
- b) These right paths that David was led upon could not always be seen as right in his estimation. Even in this psalm he explains that there were times in extreme lows, and times of great joy and extreme high. In the Christian life we will experience both.
- c) So many of the psalms are psalms of lament. Jeremiah devotes an entire book (Lamentations to lament), but finds in the midst of his lament that God is near (Lam 3:24-25).
- d) Joseph seemed to be forsaken by God by all outward appearances, but God meant it all for God. Neither can the pain that we've experience-But what we do see is that they are justified in hindsight. In Rev we read the words, Just and true are your ways, O Lord.

You hesitate at this. You may be saying, "I can't feel that God's ways with me have been right. You are puzzled by their mystery. You are almost driven to despair by their mazy difficulties. He is very pitiful; "for He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust (Ps 103). Only do not judge God's ways while they are in progress. Wait till the plan is complete. Wait till the tapestry is finished, and you can see the other side where the pattern will be worked out. Wait till the sliver-paper is torn off the worsted-work and the blending of the colors is disclosed. Wait till, in the light of eternity, God can call you aside to reveal to you His purposes. "Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen" (Ps 77:19).

In the breaking of the dawn of eternity we shall discover that God could not have brought us by another route which would have been as expeditious or as safe as the one by which we have. But we do not need to plead and beg with Him for this. He is pledged to do it for the sake of His own great name. "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Remember how eager Moses was for the honor of the name of God. What is his name? "Wonderful"? Then there is a claim on the marvelous working of His power to overrule everything to our highest good. "Counselor"? Then there is a claim upon His unerring wisdom to work out a scheme which will fill heaven with admiration. "The might God"? The there is a claim on Him to do nothing inconsistent with divine integrity and glory. "The everlasting Father"? The there is a claim on Him to deal no less tenderly than with his child. "The Prince of

Peace”? Then there is a claim on Him in accordance the sweetness and beauty of His heart, the memories of His cross, and the tenderness of His peace.

-F.B. Meyer

- e) -Sometimes through valley, other times by still waters
- f) -Whatever they may entail, they are right paths
- g) -David was familiar with pain of difficult paths

— **What about the problem of pain? Disappointment with God? Injustice?**

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? -C.S. Lewis *'Mere Christianity'*

- i) Jesus says, “flip a coin, I’m right here.” Either you’ll make a wise decision or a foolish one.”

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, [11] for those who are called according to his purpose. **29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.—Rom. 8:28-30

11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,-Ephesians 1:11

2) **COMPREHENSIVELY**- If you are sheep, Jesus is calling you to complete lordship.

- a) He’s not just a king for you to obey, but as a shepherd, there is not any area of your life that he does not want you to bring to him.
- b) Shepherds took care of every area of life. The sheep needed the shepherd as a physician, provider, feeder, and protector. What does that mean?
- c) It takes years. We first almost always come to Jesus b/c there is an area of our life that we want Jesus to come in and to fix, and we say, come in Jesus.

- d) But the rest we keep away.
 - i) Sometimes we come to him b/c our career is falling apart.
 - ii) We say, Jesus come in and help my career, but stay out of my love
 - iii) life. But some times come to him b/c of our love life, and we say, "Lord come in and help me, my relationship/ love life, it's a mess, but stay out of my finances.

- e) And Jesus says, "I'm sorry, I'm the shepherd King, you must follow me comprehensively, in every area of your life.

*The God who made the world and everything in it is the **Lord** of Heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needs anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and **the exact places where they should live** (emphasis mine). God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us". -Acts 17:24-27*

3) PARADOXICALLY

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4) PERSONALLY- "leads me"

"He calls us by name"

- a) The bible says that when you become a Christian, he names you. It's from Him that you finally get what you are looking for.
- b) If you are looking to get your name from another, your identity from another [spouse, lover, parents, ministers], you will find some of them are like the thief, but others are like the hired man, and will run when you most need them b/c they are just sinners, and can never give you what you need.
- c) When you come to him and follow him, you will find that your particular name will become revealed to you over a period of time as to who God is making you and the particular lives and group of people he wants you to touch.

B) BE A SHEPHERD TO OTHERS

- 1) This shepherd became a lamb so that little lambs could become a shepherd.
 - a) The bible says that when you finally grow up, when you get over this insecurity, this need look just right way, to have the right person on your arm, to have the right career, to be right in the eyes of others.

- b) When you stop going to the rest of the world to name you, there will be an incredible source of security in you, and people will be attracted to you and they'll need you.
- c) And do what was done to you. Get to know people, show them how much you value them, spend time with them, and point them to the one who restores and leads, that they might follow him-the Good shepherd.