BACK ON THE RIGHT PATH

**DATE: 9/15/2013 am**

**TEXT: Psalm 23:1- 4**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Humor:** Two students got a summer job working for the DPW. They were given the responsibility of painting the center lines on rural roads. The supervisor told them that they were on probation and that they must do an average of two miles per day to keep their job. On the first day they completed four miles. Yet, on the second day they only completed two. Their supervisor was a little concerned, but didn't say anything because they were still on average. However, on the third day, the students only did one mile. The supervisor decided he needed to talk to them because they had gone from four to one mile in three days. He called them in and said, "Boy's, you did so great your first day, and although the second was not as good, you did the average. But today you only did one mile. What seems to be the problem?" The students replied, *"We’re sorry sir, but we keep getting farther and farther away from the bucket of paint."*

There are times when we find ourselves getting farther and farther away

Of course, I am talking about getting farther away from the Lord

**Ill.** I think of Robert Robinson. Like all of us, he lived a reckless and wicked life before he got saved. One night he heard George Whitfield preach from Matthew 3:7 on, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" That night, Sunday, May 24, 1752, Robinson found a new life in Christ. Upon his conversion he joined the Methodists, and not long after answered the call to preach, and was appointed by John Wesley to pastor in Norfolk, England. He became known as a preacher who could say, "What he pleased, When he pleased and How he pleased." Three years after his appointment to the Norfolk Chapel, he penned the words of the great hymn, "Come, Thou Fount." As for me, “Come, Thou Fount” speaks to my heart.

I love everything from the melody, to the words. There are many days I find myself singing this song. Every stanza; every line is meaningful. *Come, Thou Fount of every blessing, Tune my heart to sing Thy grace; Streams of mercy, never ceasing, Call for songs of loudest praise.”*  In the second stanza we have the words that would become tragically prophetic for Robert Robinson: *"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love."* His biography tells us that for some reason Robinson wandered away from God. It is said that toward the end of his life, living in sin, he was traveling by stagecoach and a woman, who was also a passenger, brought up the hymn "Come, Thou Fount." Having no idea that he was the author she told him what a blessing it had brought to her heart. Robinson tried to turn the conversation to another topic, but when the lady persisted in talking about his hymn, he broke down and said, *"Madam, I am the poor, unhappy man who composed that hymn many years ago; and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had that joy again and, to enjoy the feelings I had then."*

The Psalmist testified in **Psalm 119:176 - *“I have gone astray like a lost sheep”***

Like Robert Robinson, and like the Psalmist …

We can say - *"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love"*

We are on a journey, that will conclude one day …

When we***“dwell in the house of the Lord forever”***

However, sadly, like sheep, that easily stray, and are prone to wander …

We can find ourselves off the right path and away from the Lord

As we continue drawing lessons from **23rd Psalm**

We find in **v. 3a** the Phrase - ***“He restoreth my soul”***

We all have a tendency to stumble and stray while on our journey

Yet, we also find that the Shepherd has His Way of Getting us … ***“Back on the Right Path”***

Let’s pray and think on this thought this morning

***“Back on the Right Path”***

**~~~Prayer~~~**

First, let’s look at -

**I. THE “PURPOSE” OF RESTORATION**

What does ***“He restoreth my soul”*** mean?

Its been translated by others as …

- *“He converts my soul”*

- *“He revives life in me”*

- *“He causes my life to return”*

The word ***“restore”*** comes from a Hebrew word that is often translated ***“restore”*** just like our text

But on 369 other occasions it is translated, ***“to return”*** or ***“to return again”***

It is found in **Ruth 1:22** where we read –

***“So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, …***

***… which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest”***

The word has the idea of *going back* or *coming back home* or *to return to the place one should be* or *is supposed to be in the first place*

The Restoration Described, is one, in which the Shepherd, brings his sheep back to where they are supposed to be

We hear Naomi saying in **Ruth 1:21 -*****“I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again …”***

(The word ***“brought”*** is the same word as ***“restoreth”***)

Naomi could have said - *“The Lord hath restored me”*

David could have said - *“The Lord hath brought me home again”*

The word ***“restoreth”*** implies that you and I, as sheep …

… wander away from God

This suggests to me 2 ideas

First, there is -

**A. The ‘Paths from Which We Drift’**

**1.** Sheep are easily Distracted

And if not carefully watched by the Shepherd …

.. They will drift away

- They nibble on the grass with their heads down

- Lost in their own little world

- Paying no attention to what going on around them

Then suddenly they find they have drifted far away

**2.** As Christians, we are no different

There are certain paths the Lord leads us on

Specific Paths we are to follow

But we are easily Distracted

We let the Cares of Life take our eyes off the Lord

And before we know it

We have drifted from the paths in which we are to walk

There are 2 paths, I think, that are Vitally Important to Follow

**a.** There is the Path that Leads to Church

It is the place where God’s flock gathers on the Lord’s Day

There will always be something else

Something else will always detract us

You shouldn’t let yourself be deterred

**Hebrews 10:24, 25 – *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:” “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”***

**b.** There is the path that leads us to our time with God in Prayer and in His Word

**I Thessalonians 5:17 – *“Pray without ceasing”***

But one day you tell yourself you are too tired or just too busy and we don’t take that path

And it’s just that much easier the next day to do the same

It happens again, and then again, until one day our soul is spiritually empty

We began to lose interest in eternal things

Other things began to take priority in our life

Until one day we find ourselves away from God

I think you understand what I am talking about

These are **The ‘Paths from Which We Drift’**

But even more serious, there is -

**B. The ‘Person from Whom We Depart’**

When the sheep stray …

We not only find ourselves separated from the flock

But even more Serious …

We find ourselves separated from the Shepherd

We find ourselves away from the One who …

- Leads us and Feeds us

- Our Provider and Protector

Getting away from the flock is one thing,

But even worse …

… Is getting away from the Shepherd

Straying always begins benignly (innocently)

- The sheep stray because it took its eyes off the shepherd

- It strayed because it failed to listen to the voice of the shepherd

When we drift from the right paths …

It only Reveals that we are no longer Following and Listening to the Lord our Shepherd

This is the Purpose of Restoration

It is bringing the sheep back to the right paths

The sheep back into the presence of the Shepherd

Restoration is the work whereby God brings us back to where we should be as the sheep of His pasture

You may say, *“Not me, I would never drift from the flock or depart from the Shepherd”*

Yet, I remind you of the words of Robert Robinson,

*“Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God of love.”*

- Noah Wandered and he ended up getting drunk

- Abraham, wandered away into Egypt (Type of the World)

- Moses lost his temper and struck the rock when God told him to speak to the rock

- Solomon was one of the wisest sheep God ever had, yet he multiplied horses and women

- David, whose name means *‘Beloved,’* wandered into adultery

- Peter denied the One he loved

- So have you … So have I

**THE “PURPOSE” OF RESTORATION**

(Is to bring us back to the Place we should have never left)

Furthermore, think with me of -

**II. THE “PROCESS” OF RESTORATION**

How are the Sheep restored or brought back?

Let me point out 2 instruments that are found in **23rd Psalm**

And the use of those instruments to restore the sheep

We find this thought at the end of **v. 4** – ***“thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”***

First, let’s look at -

**A. The ‘Staff and the Straying Sheep’**

As I said earlier, sheep easily stray

One of the ways the shepherd restores his sheep is the use of his Staff

There was no instrument of the shepherd that is anymore representative of the Shepherd than his Staff

You have seen paintings of a shepherd and in his hand was his Staff

Whenever you see the shepherd, you see him with a Staff in his hand

The word ***“staff”*** speaks of a support

We might call it a walking stick

Yet, it was more than a Support for the shepherd

It was a Tool that he used in Restoring the sheep

The Staff was made from a sapling that the shepherd carefully chose

It was just suited to fit his hand and height

He would cut a sapling just above the roots and while it was green and pliable, he would bend one end to form the crook or hook

The crook was just the right size to reach around the body of a little lamb or the neck of a larger sheep

- If a little lamb began to stray from its mother,

Oftentimes the shepherd would take his Staff and tenderly pull or draw that lamb back to her side

- If a sheep nibbling on the grass was not paying attention and beginning to drift from the flock,

The shepherd would walk over the to the sheep,

Reach out with his Staff, and turn the sheep back in the direction of the flock

I found this thought in **Zechariah 11:3**

Israel is spoken of as a flock that has wandered and is in danger, and the Lord used his Staff to restore them

We read - ***“And I took unto me two staves* (staffs)*; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock”***

The Lord took two Staffs …

One He called Beauty and the other He called Bands

And restored His flock to where they should be

Just as the Lord used two staffs to restore Israel,

Let me suggest two types of Staffs the Lord our Shepherd uses to bring us back

**1.** I think of the **Spirit of God**

The Holy Spirit lives within every child of God and when we began to stray, the Spirit of God begins to pull at our heart

He begins to draw us back to the right paths and to Himself

If a person has been saved, you can be sure that when they began to drift, the Holy Spirit that lives within, will tell them

You will hear the Holy Spirit say,

*“Little lamb, you are going down a wrong path. You are getting away from the Shepherd”*

The Holy Spirit is one of the Staffs the Lord uses to restore us

**2.** There is also the **Word of God**

God will reach out by His Word and pull at your heart

God’s Word has a convicting power about it

It has a way to addressing the need of our heart

It acts like a Staff to draw and pull at us

Many a sermon has been used as a Staff ...

To get our Attention and to Draw us back to God

We all have experienced the feel of the Lord’s Staff upon our heart when we’re drifting

Furthermore, we not only see that the shepherd using

**His ‘Staff to Restore the Sheep’**

But he also uses -

**B. The ‘Rod on the Stubborn Sheep’**

In **Isaiah 53:6** we have a picture of Stubborn sheep

We read - ***“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way…”***

This is a picture of sheep that are bent on doing their own thing and going their own way

It is a picture of Stubborn sheep

Occasionally, a shepherd will have a sheep in his flock that is just plain Stubborn

He has often pulled the sheep back in with his Staff,

But in its Stubbornness it keeps Straying

The shepherd is first, always Patient with the sheep

But if the sheep keeps straying, he might have to take other measures

**1.** His Rod

His Rod then becomes the instrument whereby he restores the sheep

The Rod was different then the Staff

The Rod was made of a sapling that was cut off a foot or two above the ground (Much shorter than the Staff)

The shepherd would then dig the sapling up, leaving some of the root

He would shape and smooth the root into a ball

It became an instrument of protection

The shepherd would use the club / rod to fight off robbers and wild animals

But he also learn to use it on the sheep

Now before you get nervous and think that he used it to beat the sheep, your wrong

But he did learn to use it to his advantage

In the case of the stubborn sheep …

…he would use it as a Tool of Restoration

After trying often to use his staff to draw the sheep back,

If a sheep persisted in wandering, he would throw his Rod in the direction of the sheep

He would Not hit the sheep, but hurl the Rod so it fell just in front of the sheep

This would Startle the sheep and make it run back to the flock

Oftentimes we have felt the pull of the shepherd’s staff upon our heart

Yet like stubborn sheep, still refuse to come back

Patiently the Lord deals with us,

But in time He begins to take other measures to draw us back

He Sends or Allows certain things to happen to Startle us

You know what I am talking about

Certain things in life that happen …

Have a way of Frightening us and making us say -

*“I’m going to get back in Church and I’m going to live for God”*

Many know what it is for God to throw His Rod in our direction

That doesn’t always work though, so …

**2.** More Drastic Measures are Needed

In some cases, the sheep are really Stubborn

- The shepherd’s Staff trying to Pull them

- The Rod thrown in their Direction

…Ceases to Startle the sheep back

If no other measure has been successful,

The shepherd would then take some very drastic steps

The shepherd then will take his Rod and Break the Leg of the sheep

There are times when only drastic measures taken by the Lord will get our attention

As a pastor, I have heard people say …

(on more than one occasion)

*…“Preacher, I know why this happened. I’ve been away from God”*

A way ware child, heartbreak, an accident, a sickness, a tragedy, etc.

…Has often been God’s Rod breaking our leg

When the shepherd broke the leg of the sheep,

Immediately he would bind the leg in a splint,

Then until the leg healed, would carry the sheep on his shoulders

Usually when the leg healed and the splint was removed …

The sheep that had been so stubborn …

Was usually the sheep, that stayed the closest to the shepherd

The Psalmist said in **Psalm 119:67 - *“Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Thy Word”***

The Psalmist had had his leg broken

The Lord has used his Rod on Him

The result was the Keeping of God’s Word and Living for the Lord

**THE “PURPOSE”**

**THE “PROCESS”**

The final thought I want to bring is -

**III. THE “PERSON” OF RESTORATION!**

Now someone may think that the Drastic Steps of Restoration, are harsh and cruel

Yet, when we stop and think that the One who restores …

… Is the Lord our Shepherd, is God

Then we see His work in our life in a different Light

***“…thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”***

When you look at the Lord our Shepherd in His work of Restoration,

We can be Encourage with the -

**A. The ‘Love the Shepherd Shows’**

When you see the shepherd Restoring His sheep,

You do not see an angry, harsh, and cruel Person

Instead, you see someone who deeply loves His sheep and wants only the best for them

He knows the dangers that can Harm and Hurt the sheep

Out of His love for their welfare, and wanting only the best for His sheep …

Does he take these Drastic Measures to Restore them

We might call it tuff Love

Restoration is never out of anger,

But only in love does He Corrects and Restores us

I think of the words of **Hebrews 12:6 - *“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth”***

The Lord chastens His children, children whom He loves

**Revelation 3:19 – *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent”***

Just as a parent chastens their children because they love them and want what is best for their life

**Proverbs 13:24 – *“He that spareth His rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes”***

The Lord shows His love for us when he chastens us

If a parent really loves their child, they will not let their child Do anything they want, or Go anywhere they want

I can remember times when my children would say,

*“Daddy, if you loved me you would let me go”*

Was my decision Not to let them do certain things or go certain places a case of just being mean? …

(I know they thought it was)

Absolutely not!

- Instead I knew what certain things could do to them

- How certain places could influence them adversely

My decision was motivated by my love and my desire was for their best

God is no different

He is a loving Shepherd, whose love is so deep, that He will restore us, taking whatever measure necessary

**The ‘Love the Shepherd Shows’**

Secondly, in the Lord’s discipline of our life we see -

**B. The ‘Life the Shepherd Seeks’**

As I have already said, the Restoration processes are for the benefit of the sheep

What the sheep may think is good for them …

…Will only put them into danger

The shepherd knows this, thus he takes the steps to restore them

He wants them to enjoy and experience a life of joy and happiness

He wants them to be able to say - ***“I shall not want!”***

Listen to **Hebrews 12:11 - *“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”***

The Lord wants a certain life for us,

That Desire motivates Him to Restore us

There are ***“the peaceable fruits of righteousness”*** that He wants us to enjoy

**CONCLUSION**

**Song:** Listen to the third stanza of Robert Robinson’s great hymn: *“O to grace how great a debtor, Daily I’m constrained to be! Let Thy goodness like a fetter Bind my wandering heart to Thee. Prone to wander—Lord I feel it— Prone to leave the God I love; Here’s my heart—O take and seal it, Seal it for Thy courts above”*

Are you a wandering sheep?

If so, will you come to the Shepherd of your soul and ask Him to bind your wandering heart to Him and seal your heart for His courts above?

One day we will conclude our journey by …

***“dwelling in the House of the Lord forever”***

Until then, we need to stay on the right path or He will bring us back

**THE “PURPOSE”**

**THE “PROCESS”**

**THE “PERSON”**