

I came across an interesting news item. In the state of Ohio, is a life-size wax museum, BibleWalk. The museum has more than 300 figures displayed in 70 scenes that tell the stories of the Bible and the life of Jesus. If you look closely, some of the Bible characters bear a striking resemblance to famous people. King Solomon looks like John Travolta, while the lady standing nearby has the face of Elizabeth Taylor. Jesus Christ with flowing hair and full beard is unmistakably Tom Cruise.

In one corner, standing solemnly in an all-white gown posing as an angel, is a young-looking Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. BibleWalk buys these life size wax models

from Madame Tussaud's wax museum, which are surplus to requirement.

The human mind is so easily conditioned to think in certain ways, that we cannot imagine a young prince Philip as an Angel, or Elizabeth Taylor posing as the Queen of Sheba! It is our natural tendency, to close our minds when we have decided how we want to think.

This affects how we read and understand the Bible. Words convey images; images stir our minds and stoke our imagination; images also convey emotion, sometimes awe and wonder, and sometimes dread and fear.

At the start of the Bible the word which captures our imagination is **God**, *In the beginning, God...* we imagine God to be timeless: God existed before the beginning! Then we read God's first words, *Let there be light!*

At 186,000 miles per second, God lights up the darkness!

In the brightest of light, God orders into creation, a planned sequence of creative acts. It really does not matter whether God created in 24 hour days, or whether each day was a thousand years, because it does not change who God is, and how we relate with Him; what matters is, God created what

we have on this earth, and He created it **ALL**, to sustain human life.

We have several words that trigger our imagination: flood, boat/ship, land, some of which cause problems.

The word **land**, for example, is fraught with tensions: can it be owned? If I own it, can I be settled on it? Can I build what I want because I own it?

The word we are examining this morning is one whose meaning has been lost to history, and therefore, we are unable to appreciate what it says and means to us today. The word is **Shepherd**, a fascinating word, rich in meaning. So let's unpack it, and make a

conscious effort to allow the Holy Spirit to teach us.

Starting the 6th September, we shall begin a series to examine the ***The Good Shepherd*** as revealed to us through the pages of history found in the Bible.

A good place to start is with a popular and much beloved text which we have just sung, Psalm 23, a favoured reading at weddings and funerals, and other events at which people want a Christian focus, and rightly so.

This Psalm is written by David, who is known as the Shepherd-King. We first meet him as a young shepherd who was sent by his father to take food for his elder brothers fighting the Philistines (not Palestinians) and there

he hears and sees this giant called Goliath, who stood 9 feet tall. David is enraged by Goliath's jeering and taunts. He asks Saul to send to kill Goliath. He declines the offer of protective clothing, and says, *I have been keeping my father's sheep. When a lion or bear came, stole and ran off with a sheep/lamb from the flock, I would chase after it. I would attack and strike it and rescue the sheep from its jaws. If it turned and attacked me, I caught it by its jaw, hit it and killed it. I have killed both lions and bears! This uncircumcised Philistine will be like them, because he has taunted, defied and challenged the armies of the living God.*

Then the wonderful words that stirs courage and faith in little boys, including myself: *The*

*Lord God who rescued and delivered me from a lion and a bear, **WILL** rescue and deliver me from this Philistine.*

And we know what happens. The first stone from David's slingshot kills the ugly giant who dared insult the people of the living God!

As we read the Psalm, the first thing we notice is that David is describing the living God! Drawing on his experience of shepherding his family's flock, David is saying, *God looks after me in an even better and greater way than I look after my family's flock. Let me tell you about Him!*

This Psalm is **ALL** about God!

The Lord ... He lets ... He leads ... He gives ...  
He protects, He comforts ... He prepares and  
feeds ... He pours ... He fills to overflowing ...  
He pursues me with His goodness and love,  
until I make my home with Him in His house  
forever!

This Psalm describes the person of God, and  
this Psalm describes how God gives us, a  
taste of Heaven on earth.

## **Who is this God and why does He do this?**

In the older **er** testament, the image of the  
Good Shepherd is used in three ways:

First, God is described as the Shepherd of  
Israel<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 78:52, 79:13 and Isaiah 40:11



Second, the leaders of Israel are also referred to as shepherds.<sup>2</sup>

Third, a new leader in Israel who will come from Bethlehem.<sup>3</sup>

We will study these in detail starting in September. This morning we do not have time to go through the entire Psalm in detail, so let me share a few observations to whet your appetite.

The first is that this Psalm invites us to relate to God as a person. Yes, He is **like** a high tower<sup>4</sup>, **like** a fortress<sup>5</sup> and **like** a rock<sup>6</sup>, but God is not an inanimate object, God is a person with feelings and emotions, who

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<sup>2</sup> David in Psalm 78:70-71; Isaiah 63:11 describes Moses

<sup>3</sup> Micah 5:4

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 59

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 18:2, 10; 144:2

<sup>6</sup> 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 78:35 and 42:9; Isaiah 30:29; Habakkuk 1:12; and many more

cares and will not allow those whom He loves, to suffer in eternity.

David had many ups and downs in life through which he recognises that to be guaranteed his **needs** is far better more desirable than to bargain for and expect his wants and desires to be granted. This Psalm is about the Good Shepherd providing his sheep **ALL** they **NEED**: food, drink, peace and tranquility, rescue and recovery when we lose our way, freedom from fear, especially fear of evil and of death, a sense of security by the presence of God, and a permanent home in the House of God.

The second thing David tells us about God is that the Good Shepherd **leads me**, he does

not “drive me”. We have this image of God as a demanding task-master, who **drives** us to do things - do this, do that, **don't** do this, **don't** do that...

David says God **leads** and we are invited to follow. As we know, when farmers are personally involved in *lambing*, the lambs know their voice and their scent. As soon as the farmer approaches, the little lambs hear his voice and come running, and once with him, they have a tremendous sense of peace. This relationship continues throughout their lives.

Then, God will **ALWAYS** lead us to still waters. Sheep will not drink at a running stream, but will drink to their fill in pools of

still water. God has **OUR** best interest in His heart, and we must trust Him to deliver our best interest.

There is so much more to unpack in this Psalm, but let me close with this. David makes three personal declarations in the Psalm:

***I shall not want (I lack nothing to live this life)***

***I will walk ahead with confidence and not fear***

***I will dwell in my Father's house.***

Following each of these personal declarations, David describes God's actions.

For example, when David says ***I will walk straight ahead with confidence, and not fear***, he explains:

- *When I walk through dark and difficult times, when death seems too close for any hope of life, I know you are with me, and I know when you are with me, your **rod** (with which you keep the enemy away) and your **staff** (with which you keep us safe), the knowledge of this, comforts and consoles me, and I can walk ahead with confidence*

In a final triumph David declares, ***I will make my home in my Father's house, forever!***

Does this challenge your image of God? It should, because all of us, including myself,

all of us have not as yet, fully grasped the character and nature of God.

Perhaps it is time to ask the Holy Spirit to remove our wrong impressions of God and reveal to us, the person of God, who is the One and Only, Good Shepherd.

**AMEN**