

# "The LORD Is My Shepherd"

## Psalm 23

I originally titled this sermon "The Work of the Shepherd" which is a fitting way to consider the content of the psalm.

The title of this psalm is simply, "A Psalm of David." The occasion of it is not given and is unknown. All we can be confident in is that David was drawing upon his knowledge of being a shepherd and the Holy Spirit used that knowledge to guide him as he penned this psalm.

One thing to note about the first statement of the psalm is the comparison between the LORD of this psalm and the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ referred to Himself as "the Good Shepherd" as recorded in John 10. Every Israelite that heard that statement would have immediately recognized what Jesus was saying – that He was (is and always shall be) the Great I AM.

John 10:11-14

<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

<sup>12</sup> But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

<sup>13</sup> The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

This is without much doubt the most familiar and oft-quoted psalm in the Bible, if not one of the most quoted and referenced portions of the entire Bible. Nothing new can be said about the text, so our time will be spent just refreshing our thoughts on the work of the Shepherd.

## **I. WE BELONG TO HIM – VS. 1A – “MY SHEPHERD”**

What a wonderful thought! As sheep, we aren't wild animals left to fend for ourselves against all the predators out there. We are an object of property and as such we are cared for and protected by the one who owns the sheep.

The individualization of this entire psalm shows how personal God was to David, and how personal he should be to each of us as believers.

John 10:27-30

<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

<sup>28</sup> And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

<sup>29</sup> My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

<sup>30</sup> I and my Father are one.

## **II. WE NEED NOT BE CONCERNED FOR LIFE – VS. 1B – “I SHALL NOT WANT”**

### **A. Physically**

1. The word for “want” here is one that means to be lacking, to be needy. It's not saying, as we use the word “want” today that God will give us everything that we want but He will give us what we need – there is a difference. There are enough Scripture references to show that God will supply our needs physically. There may be exceptional cases where God allows trials to come our way to strengthen our faith that will seem to go against these Scriptures, but God will never abandon us.

2. Consider the entire scope of Scripture here – the Bible cannot contradict itself, and God cannot lie. The problem we might have is understanding how this verse fits into our lives when we do seem to have a very real lack of the basic necessities of life. This may not be a problem for the believer in America, but it is a very real, common, everyday part of life for the believer in other parts of the world today.
3. Considering that aspect of life, I believe that this statement is summed up in the last verse of this psalm, in the first verset: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” With God as our Shepherd, even though we may have very real needs, the one thing we will never again “want” for, we will forever, throughout eternity, have is His absolute goodness (grace) and His mercy (tender care).

“He lacks nothing who has everything.”  
Remember what Job said after he lost all he had.

#### Job 1:20-21

<sup>20</sup> Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,

<sup>21</sup> And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

#### Job 2:10

<sup>10</sup> But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

Job 13:15

<sup>15</sup> Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

Job 19:25-27

<sup>25</sup> For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

<sup>26</sup> And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

<sup>27</sup> Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

## **B. Spiritually - God gave us His Word so we would know how to follow the Shepherd.**

Hebrews 4:12

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

## **III. HE GIVES US PEACE - VS. 2**

There is that synonymous parallelism that I've talked about, and we've seen numerous times in our study of the book of Psalms in this verse where the second line is very closely related to or is a synonym for the first line.

"He maketh me to lie down" corresponds to "He leadeth me" and "in green pastures" corresponds to "beside the still waters."

This verse is saying, in essence, that the Lord, as a Shepherd would do, provides pasture (here the term "green pastures" is speaking of pastures of tender grass (literal interpretation) which is the first shoots of

vegetation. "The idea is that of calmness and repose, as suggested by the image of flocks lying down on the grass." They do this because they are fully fed and satisfied.

He provides a place for us to feed ("green pastures") and to find plentiful and beneficial water. This goes to verse one and the phrase, "I shall not want." We don't need to "want" (lack) anything because He has provided the place for us to be at peace in our lives.

#### **IV. HE RESTORES US IF WE STRAY - VS. 3**

The parallelism here is not so much a synonymous one but is what is known as synthetic parallelism. In synthetic parallelism, the second line will sometimes repeat the first and broaden it or add something to it, or it will qualify or explain the first. That's what is happening in this verse: the second line explains how our soul is restored.

The word for "restoreth" we've seen numerous times in the first twenty-two psalms but not translated as "restoreth." The majority of times it's appeared in English it's been translated by some form of the word "turn" or "turn back." The one occasion I commented on it and referenced this verse was in Psalm 19:7 where it is stated that the purpose of the Word of God is "converting the soul," a text speaking of restoring a child of God back to a right relationship with Him.

The way we are restored when we stray is through the convicting power of the Word of God: "he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." As our Shepherd, the Lord will take whatever measure is needed to bring us back to Him, beginning with that conviction of the Word of God as the Holy Spirit works on our heart. As a Shepherd sometimes needs to do, the Lord may need to chasten us in other ways to get

us to come back to Him.

#### Psalm 51:10-12

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> **Restore** unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

### V. HE GIVES US COMFORT - VS. 4

Even in the times when we are afraid, when we are in danger, or when we are facing something that may very well take our lives, we need never fear: "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me..."

"Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me": "The one rod, which the shepherd holds up to guide the flock, and upon which he leans and anxiously watches over the flock, has assumed a double form in the conception of the idea. This rod and staff in the hand of God comfort him, i.e., preserve to him the feeling of security, and therefore a cheerful spirit. Even when he passes through a valley dark and gloomy as the shadow of death, where surprises and calamities of every kind threaten him, he hears no misfortune" (Alford).

"The shepherd walks before his flock, ready to protect them from assault; they follow gladly and fearlessly wherever he leads." (Cambridge Bible notes)

#### 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

<sup>4</sup> Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse was one of America's great preachers. His first wife died from cancer when she was in her thirties, leaving three children under the age of twelve. Barnhouse chose to preach the funeral himself. What does a father tell his motherless children at a time like that?

On his way to the service, he was driving with his little family when a large truck passed them in the highway, casting a shadow over their car. Barnhouse turned to his oldest daughter who was staring disconsolately out the window, and asked, "Tell me, sweetheart, would you rather be run over by that truck or its shadow?"

The little girl looked curiously at her father and said, "By the shadow, I guess. It can't hurt you."

Dr. Barnhouse said quietly to the three children, "Your mother has not been overrun by death, but by the shadow of death. That is nothing to fear." At the funeral he used the text from the twenty-third Psalm, which so eloquently expresses this truth.

## **VI. HE WILL DELIVER US FROM OUR ENEMIES - VS. 5**

- A. They will know that it was God - "thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."**
- B. They will know that the deliverance is complete - "thou anointest my head with oil."**

The word for "anointest" - **משח** - means to be fat, to grow fat; figuratively, to anoint or to satisfy. This is to show that his deliverance was complete, as ours is because of the Good Shepherd.

- C. The deliverance and provision will be abundant - "my cup runneth over."**

No matter what happens in our lives, no matter what attack the enemy brings, we are already victorious because of the Shepherd.

**Romans 8:35-39**

<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

<sup>36</sup> As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

<sup>37</sup> Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

<sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

<sup>39</sup> Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **VII. HE GIVES US ASSURANCE THAT HE IS ALWAYS THERE - VS. 6**

### **A. Assurance that He guides our lives - "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."**

One of God's faithful missionaries, Allen Gardiner, experienced many physical difficulties and hardships throughout his service to the Savior. Despite his troubles, he said, "While God gives me strength, failure will not daunt me." In 1851, at the age of 57, he died of disease and starvation while serving on Picton Island at the southern tip of South America. When his body was found, his diary lay nearby. It bore the record of hunger, thirst, wounds, and loneliness. The last entry in his little



book showed the struggle of his shaking hand as he tried to write legibly. It read, "I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God." Think of that! No word of complaint, no childish whining, no grumbling at the circumstances — just praise for God's goodness.

**B. Assurance that we can know our salvation is forever - "and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."**

The words for "for ever" are words that literally translate "length of days" (לְאֶרְךָ יָמִים). From the time we put our faith in the Good Shepherd on through eternity, we will dwell in His presence.

**Conclusion:**

After losing their husband and daddy, Mike, at age 37, Jay and Julie Alexander composed this poem in his memory:

These three little sheep have a Shepherd who cares.  
As we give Him our pain, our sorrow He bears.  
The Lord is our Shepherd, He will lead us each day.  
Our job is to follow Him and listen to Him say --  
"Be still my little sheep and know that I am God;  
I alone can bring you comfort -- take my staff and my rod.  
This road of much sorrow I've walked in it too.  
It led Me to Calvary where I suffered for you.  
I know that your pain on this earth is intense,  
But look to the future -- heaven's glory is immense!  
So, trust Me each moment -- one day at a time,  
My grace is sufficient for each sheep of mine."

Jay soon will be ten, his interests are many,  
It seems that Mom's taxi is running a'plenty!  
There's sports and piano and scouts and school,  
And time at the computer is another new tool.  
Now Julie is five, but approaching fifteen,  
Her vigor is constant -- always full steam!  
But her child-like faith has been such a guide  
To learn how our Shepherd wants us to abide.  
Her memories of Mike have brought joy each day  
As she fondly reminds us "what Daddy would say."  
It's a matter of fact and so full of love  
We can't help but smile and look up above.  
Then back to our Shepherd we come for that hope;  
We give Him the glory as we're learning to cope.  
"Be still my little sheep and know that I am God,  
I am with you each moment, each step that you trod.  
Stand firm in the fact that I don't make mistakes,  
Your days have been numbered -- it wasn't left to fate.  
Just look to eternity as you shine forth My light,  
And soon that strong faith will become full sight."  
These three little sheep are "going for the gold,"  
As to our dear Shepherd we tightly hold.  
We're thankful for family and friends each day  
Who've been faithful to remember us and continue to pray.