



Psalm 23

The Lord is My Shepherd

The twenty third Psalm has been called "the pearl of the Psalms," and the "nightingale" singing in the dark night of loneliness.

The key idea in this great Psalm is because the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack anything. It pictures God in love with His people as a kind, loving and caring shepherd. Because the LORD is my Shepherd, He provides rest and guidance, protection, food and fellowship. He provides for all of my basic needs in life.

Our Psalm easily falls into two halves with both having the general thought of God's secure care, but with different illustrations and applications. In the first half (verses 1-3), Jehovah is our Shepherd and we are the sheep of His pasture. In the second part Jehovah is our Host, and we are the guest at His table and residents in His home.

There is no reason to doubt the Hebrew Psalmist David is the author of this majestic poem. Suggestions abound as to what time in David's life he composed it, but it is hard to determine exactly the setting. Some scholars suggest it was when he was a lad tending his father's flock. Others suggest later in life as a mature man who has walked with his Shepherd through many a dark valley.

When I examine this lovely Hebrew song in detail, I have the firm conviction that it reaches a perfect climax in the person and work of Jesus Christ. I see in the character of the Shepherd the sweet fragrance of the Lord Jesus Christ. This Psalm may not be strictly Messianic in its prediction of the coming of Jesus the Messiah, but in its ideas, expressions, and applications it points to the Good Shepherd who is the Messiah. Let's ponder together the beauty of the Psalm and the life and work of the Good Shepherd, who is also the Great Shepherd resurrected and dwelling in heaven and the Chief Shepherd who will return for His sheep.

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming day when "the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him. Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes" (Isa. 40:10-14). Another Hebrew prophet Ezekiel in similar vane saw the coming of "one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I, the LORD have spoken" (Ezekiel 34:23-24). Keep in mind that king David had been dead six hundred years when Ezekiel was writing this prophecy! The prophet is speaking of a greater than David, the

writing this prophecy! The prophet is speaking of a greater than David, the Messiah who will come and shepherd His people.

JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD WHO LEADS AND GUIDES HIS SHEEP (23:1-3).

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). There is security in the presence of the good shepherd. Our Psalmist dares to reach out and call Jehovah his very own Shepherd. It is intimately personal. His God is a personal, loving Father. He is *my* Shepherd!

David uses the name *Yahweh* (Jehovah, LORD) who is always seen as absolutely faithful to His people. He has a vibrant, living faith in the LORD God. Therefore he can say just as God is faithful in meeting his present needs God will also meet all his needs in the future. He will never "suffer any want." Just as the good shepherd provides all that his sheep needs, the LORD will provide all that His sheep needs. With the Lord as his Shepherd, he confidently looks to the future. Why if you possess the LORD, who possesses all things, then you lack nothing.

Because the LORD is my shepherd I shall not lack any provision in the needs of my life.

Kyle Yates expressed it eloquently: "Because He loves me as the good Shepherd, I shall never want for rest, refreshment, sustenance, forgiveness, restoration, fellowship, guidance, deliverance from fear, comfort in sorrow, victory over enemies, security in troublous hours, joy in the Lord, power for service, or a home at the end of the earthly journey (*Preaching from the Psalms*, pp. 66).

In the Hebrew Old Testament God the Father is designated as "The Shepherd of Israel." He is the *Pastor* of the Jewish nation. When Jesus declared Himself "the Good Shepherd" in John 10:11 the Jewish people knew that He was claiming to be Jehovah in the flesh.

The Good Shepherd Jesus Christ has all the shepherd qualities and characteristics described in Psalm 23. He is the great I AM. The Good Shepherd of John 10 is the Jehovah Shepherd of Psalm 23. Jesus of Nazareth is the absolute timeless, eternal, independent, self sustained, pre-existent One. He is the great I AM (John 8:58).

One seasoned, veteran missionary in Africa once said, "God always heard the scraping of the bottom of the barrel," and He always provided the necessities of life. That was also true in the Apostle Paul's personal life. He found the LORD faithful and true in his prison cell in Rome. He wrote to a faithful church in Philippi the words of encouragement, "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

The Apostle Paul reminded the young pastor Timothy to, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). It does us good to remind ourselves often who it is that provides us with our job opportunities and earthly goods lest we become arrogant. With the resurrected Christ empowering his daily life Paul knew he could depend on Him. "I can do all things through Him (Christ) who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Have you found Him to be true in your daily life? Can you shout with Paul's great doxology these words in Ephesians 3:20-21? "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." He is faithful to do exceedingly abundantly above and beyond all that we can imagine.

Because the LORD is my Shepherd I shall not lack nourishment and rest.

The Shepherd can be depended upon to provide nourishment and rest. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters" (v. 2). The imagery is of sheep moving around grazing during the morning hours. They have found enough grass to make them full, and now they are tired and need to rest. The shepherd causes them to lie down in the grassy meadows with a sufficient water supply. When rest becomes imperative for us He supplies it. The parallel line reinforces the same thought. He finds a safe place for the sheep to rest beside the still waters. What is pictured by the psalmist is nourishment, safety and a peaceful resting place for the sheep.

Do you find yourself needing the "bread of life"? Have you come hungering and thirsting for that which the world can never satisfy? Have you come like the woman at the well in Samaria to the "water of life"? Jesus said to the woman, "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14). The "water of life" makes Himself available to us with refreshing rivers that bubble up within us. Again Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). On the last day of the Feast of the Tabernacles "Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39).

As we feed on Christ in His Word we see Him, eat Him and drink Him. He is our spiritual food. It is the responsibility of the sheep to appropriate the spiritual food daily.

Not only does He lead me to spiritual nourishment and needed rest, but He forgives me and restores my soul.

Because the Lord is my Shepherd I shall not lack forgiveness and restoration.

The shepherd as a guide now appears. "He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (v. 3). The emphasis of the verse is on the righteousness of God. God always leads men into His righteousness. His reputation and character are at stake. It is "for His name's sake." His character and reputation must be upheld. Just as the Lord Jesus is a perfect example of the character of God, so we His followers are to become like our model.

The Psalmist uses an interesting word signifying "to bring back the soul that is as it were flown away, so that it comes to itself again, therefore to impart new life" (Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 1081). "This He does to

it comes to itself again, therefore to impart new life" (Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 1081). "This He does to the soul, by causing it amidst the dryness and heat of temptation and trouble, to taste the very essence of life which refreshes and strengthens it."

We are like wayward sheep wandering about aimlessly. Isaiah 53:6 describes us spiritually. "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."

Are you in the need of His restoration, reconciliation and revival? Come to His fountain for cleansing. First John 1:9 is the secret. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God reconciles us to Himself based on the death of Christ. "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Romans 5:9-11).

The God of grace sets before us prodigals the fattened calf! He gives me back my life.

Remember how Jesus restored Peter after He rose from the dead? The Apostle Peter was acutely aware of God's forgiveness and restoration. He wrote, "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (2 Peter 1:3).

We have a gracious Shepherd who provides forgiveness, peace and reconciliation to God. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Because the LORD is my Shepherd I shall not lack a right relationship with God.

Do you hunger for righteousness? Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness . . ." He restores my soul. He revives, reinvigorates, and brings the soul back to itself. Jesus uses the same analogy in Luke 15:3-7. The Good Shepherd goes in search of the one lost sheep. He puts the ninety nine sheep in a safe open pasture and continues to go out and look until he has found the one which is lost. "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing." He calls his friends in and says to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!" Jesus concluded, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

This is exactly what the Good Shepherd did for us unrighteous sheep! Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He added, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:11, 14-18).

The Good Shepherd has in intimate, love relationship with His sheep (John 10:14-15).

His relationship with His sheep is compared to the relationship with His Father. The "knowledge" is one of intimacy. It is personal first hand experiential knowledge. In verse 15 the Father and Son have an intimate

intimacy. It is personal first hand experiential knowledge. In verse 15 the Father and Son have an intimate personal knowledge. It is a close relationship. Verse 14 tells us the Good Shepherd has the same kind of relationship with us! It is a mutual relationship "I know My own, and My own know Me."

The Apostle Paul applies this great truth to us when he says, "He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

We have a loving, caring Shepherd who guarantees a right relationship with God.

Not only is the Shepherd the one who leads and guides, but He is also the Shepherd who is our host.

JESUS IS THE SHEPHERD WHO SERVES AS A GRACIOUS HOST (23:4 ☩)

Because the LORD is my Shepherd I shall not lack for a constant friend.

The abiding presence of the Shepherd is the emphasis in verse four. "Thou art with me." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (v. 4).

When we fail and feel beaten down and done in our Good Shepherd comes to our side to demonstrate His changeless love and faithfulness. When we feel like all the music has gone out of our lives He gives us songs in the night. When we lay shattered in the dust He holds us in the palm of His hand. Nothing in life, death, pain, disappointment can separate us from our Shepherd.

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37-39).

Before ascending into heaven Jesus reassured His disciples, "Surely, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). I shall never lack a constant companion in this life. If our priorities are correct we need not worry, "for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT SHALL MAN DO TO ME?" (Hebrews 13:5 ☩).

Because the LORD is my Shepherd I shall not lack encouragement and hope.

The "valley of the shadow of death" is literally "valley of deep darkness." The Hebrew word does not refer to death, but is much broader and includes all the profound dark bitter experiences in life including death. It represents the deepest valleys you go through in life. God's comfort is with us in all kinds of darkness in life. The psalmist is picturing those experiences in life when sorrow and disease, disappointment and distress, pain and anguish of the soul make the heart break under its heavy load. He abides with us to comfort us in the valley of depression, serious illness, rejection, disloyalty, death of a spouse or loved one, even the experience of death itself.

Jesus reminds us there is no dark valley at death for the believer. Jesus conquered death. Only the one who is the Resurrection and the Life can take us by the hand and lead us into eternal life. Every individual who has put his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior will "dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Jesus said to his friend Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). The Apostle

everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). The Apostle Paul was awaiting word from Nero as to whether he would be set free or be put to death. He expressed his faith in the resurrection of Christ when he wrote from his prison cell in Rome, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). The Good Shepherd is my constant companion in life and death.

Because the LORD is my Shepherd I shall not lack leadership and protection.

What are we to do when the heart is breaking and the deep dark shadows of life gather about us, when the sun refuses to shine on us and our tears flow without end? Like the psalmist, we are to remind ourselves, "Thou art with me!"

"Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." What are some of the deep dark valleys you are going through today? Our Shepherd walks through the valley hand in hand with us. He drives away the enemy with His rod, and He guides us with His staff. Talk about security! The Apostle Paul acknowledges this and brought to mind numerous experiences and the Lord's abiding presence in Romans 8:31ff. The Lord who is all knowing can give us guidance.

Because the LORD is my Shepherd I shall not lack honor and respect.

The enemies of the Psalmist look on helplessly while he is the honored guest at a magnificent banquet given by a gracious host. His enemies can only look on quietly as the host anoints him with sweet perfume. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" (v. 5).

In David's day, the banquet table was a large piece of leather on which food was set. His enemies were seated at the same banquet helpless as his host anoints him.

The shepherd carried a flask of oil to anoint the scratched face of the sheep. Our gracious Shepherd comes to us in our dire need and anoints us with His healing touch as the Great Physician. He comes with healing in His wings.

We have been invited to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb when Christ returns for His bride (Revelation 19:9). What a banquet that will be! His name will be vindicated and He will be glorified.

Because the LORD is my Shepherd I shall not lack joy and abundant life.

My cup overflows. Our kind Shepherd spreads a table of abundance before us every day. God provides even to the excess. There is no lack of provision. It runs over the rim. My cup runs over the brim. He fills my cup brimful. There is fullness even to excess. He more than supplies everything I need. What a God we worship!

We come like the prodigal son or the lost sheep and realize the Lord's calf is always the fatted calf. His robe is always the finest robe. The joy He gives is always inexpressible. His peace is always beyond understanding. It is grace added to more grace. Grace upon grace results in a cup that is constantly overflowing.

Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). The idea is, "I came that they may keep on having life, and might keep on having it till it overflows in super abundant surplus!"

Because the LORD is my Shepherd I shall not lack contentment.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (v. 6).

I am a constant companion with "goodness and lovingkindness." It is not "I shall pursue good," but "*they* [the goodness and lovingkindness] will pursue me." "They will follow," means, literally, "they will pursue." Goodness and lovingkindness pursue me like two good sheep dogs that operate all the days of my life. They are unchangeable and constant. Goodness is God's giving what we don't deserve. Mercy is His withholding what we deserve. Goodness supplies our every want; mercy forgives us of every sin. Goodness to provide; mercy to pardon. "The LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting." God is merciful. He acts in mercy toward us every day of our lives. Through the death of Jesus Christ our penalty for all our sins was paid in full. The blood of Jesus covers all our sins. God in mercy forgives and cleanses us. It should cause our hearts to rejoice and overflow with contentment.

Because the LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not lack assurance of eternal life.

"And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Unbroken, eternal fellowship with God! What fellowship! What joy divine!

Heaven is a place where we will be in eternal fellowship with our Shepherd King Jesus Christ. Jesus promised, "Let not your hearts be troubled . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go . . . I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). "The LORD is my shepherd . . . I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Will you dwell in the house of the LORD forever? The only way we can possibly enter into His house is because He loved us so much that He gave His own Son as a sacrifice for us. He took our place on the cross and died in our place. Because we are radically depraved sinners it took the precious blood of the Son of God to pay the debt.

Because He died for us we receive eternal life through faith in Him as our crucified and risen Savior. The condition of our salvation is faith in Jesus Christ. The real ground of our redemption is the blood of Christ. The Good Shepherd died and rose again for us. The moment we believe on Him as our Savior He lives in us.

God the Father took the initiative in our salvation. He is the source of our salvation. God the Son is the channel through which it comes to us. God the Holy Spirit is the agent who makes it successful in us.

Indeed, this is the only way we can live the Christian life. Our Shepherd has provided all we ever need. As we hand over to Him our needs, He graciously hands over to us the provision. All we have to do is acknowledge our need and surrender it to Him. I exchange my need for His abundant provision. Please keep in mind it all begins with a spiritual birth the moment you place your faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

Though He is in heaven, the Great Shepherd is still seen caring for His sheep (Hebrews 13:20).

"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

He has risen from the dead and He has "equipped you in every good thing to do His will. He "works in us to

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He has risen from the dead and He has "equipped you in every good thing to do His will. He "works in us to do that which is pleasing in His sight." It is all done to glorify Him forever and ever.

The Chief Shepherd is going to make Himself visible one day.

"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:4)

The word for "appear" means "to make visible, clear, manifest, know, to uncover, to lay bear, reveal." One day He is coming and every eye will see Him. It will be at awards day in heaven. He will honor those who have been "good and faithful." It is another trophy of grace. Undershepherds will "receive the unfading crown of glory." It will not be a bouquet of flowers that will fade and die. It won't be a wreath that will fade away in a day or two. It won't be the applause of men that diminishes. It will be an eternal crown of glory.

BECAUSE THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Because *The LORD is my Shepherd,*

I shall not lack any provision of needs in my life.

Because *He makes me lie down in green pastures,*

I shall not lack nourishment.

Because *He leads me beside quiet waters,*

I shall not lack rest.

Because *He restores my soul,*

I shall not lack forgiveness and reconciliation.

Because *He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name sake,*

I shall not lack a right relationship with God.

Because *I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, and*

I shall not lack encouragement and hope.

Because *Thou art with me,*

I shall not lack for a constant companion and friend.

Because *Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me,*

I shall not lack guidance and protection.

Because *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies,*

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I shall not lack honor and respect.

Because *Thou hast anointed my head with oil,*

I shall not lack power and authority,

Because *My cup overflows,*

I shall not lack joy, and abundant life.

Because *goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,*

I shall not lack contentment.

Because *I dwell in the house of the LORD forever,*

I shall not lack assurance of eternal security.

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