

# Psalm 23

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Preacher: Rev Thomas McNeil

- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     So if you grab your Bibles, and certainly to preach something as familiar as the 23rd Psalm is both a great joy and a task of daunting proportion.
- I think that would be fair to say, and I'm sure those who preach regularly in the life of the church here will agree with me, that when you preach something that is so familiar, the fear is always that familiarity in God's word causes us just to almost switch off from it unintentionally and allow the words just to pass over us and think, oh, I know that.
- My hope tonight is not that I will say anything new about Psalm 23, but rather that the Holy Spirit might take these familiar words. And use them to penetrate our hearts and to encourage our hearts.
- As I said earlier on, the further challenge of Psalm 23 is a context in which we often receive it, which is very often in the funeral. It is the funeral psalm. And in some cases, it does seem as though we have taken this psalm and relegated it to say that really that is the only place we can use it.
- But as I say, I hope tonight we will see that this psalm is not a psalm for death, but rather a psalm for life. And it's very much a psalm for the living.
- [ 1 : 3 8 ]     So let me read Psalm 23. Psalm 23.

Amen. For you. staff they comfort me you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies you anoint my head with oil my cup overflows surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and i shall dwell in the house of the lord forever amen well i'm going to divide the psalm into two sections and i'm going to steal headings from one of my one of my old lecturers bob file and bob taught ministered down in durham and more recently taught in glasgow and and and bob and splits the psalm into two sections the first four verses the shepherd who leads us all the way and then the final two verses the host who welcomes us home and so first of all as we think about those first four verses the shepherd who leads us all the way this psalm speaks that speaks to us and about the reality of who god is and and sometimes and and there's a very very real sense in which and there was a an incredible note of of personal you know personal nature to this psalm but even though it is personal it doesn't mean it's all about me and and sometimes what we can do with with these kind of verses and scriptures we can take the personal nature of it and then make it all about me as if it's it's only got to speak to to me and whereas actually really the wonder of this psalm is it speaks about who god is in his personal relationship with each one of us and it's it's a wonderful and psalm it's also and very true that it is not a sentimental psalm and you know sometimes we we take these kind of words and and we almost want to you know write it on a valentine's day card from god to me it's not that kind of love and anybody who has spent any time uh amongst uh shepherds know that they tend not to be you know sentimental types you know they are those uh who um are out there uh in in all weathers uh you know looking after and caring for the flock um i have to say being an eastco bride boy um there's there's very little uh you know farm experience uh in my blood uh at all um my uh my brother uh however married into a farming family uh up north and uh my brother's father-in-law uh keeps sheep uh so my brother has very quickly gone from eastco bride life to helping out on the farm uh and uh well i think he had i think it took my well to work out what well he's where but uh yes but it's it's not uh it's not sentimental work um the the shepherd's not out there you know they're they're my little sheep um but much you know much more is is out caring for the sheep protecting the sheep um and much more in the days of david and than than even today you know we have you know farms where sheep are kept in nicely penned in areas and you know it's it's all been uh you know managed very carefully and not in the days of david when he would be out in the hillside with the sheep and literally as we know protecting them from bears and wild animals uh as we hear from even the likes of the goliath story and when when david goes to saul and speaks about how god has protected them from all kinds of wild animals um and uh and and

is that work of the shepherd that were introduced in verse one the lord is my shepherd this is the covenant god you'll notice in in your bibles lord as in capitals it is the divine name of god this is the covenant god who has a relationship with his people who has promised and to keep his people and and to care for them and to lead them this is a god who has made everything and who relates to his people by the promises that he has made to them promises that he has never broken and will never break this is the god of covenant promise the one upon whom the sheep utterly depend and we must remember that the shepherd is the shepherd of the sheep and we must remember that as wonderful as that is as those who would find ourselves in the flock of god who benefit from all the things the shepherd does for us and all the things that we'll hear about in a few moments we must remember that not all are sheep we must remember the gospel tells us the lord jesus tells us that there are sheep and there are goats but not all are sheep and of course one of the dangers and the way that this psalm is often used is that it's read in such a way that sometimes we can give the impression that that god is a shepherd over all people and that actually the benefits that are described in this psalm are universal for everybody but it's not the case the lord is the shepherd of the sheep and so as we go through this psalm it brings great encouragement to those of us who would say i am i belong to jesus i am his and he is mine but it also brings great words of challenge to anyone here tonight who is not a christian who's not decided to follow jesus yet it brings great words of challenge to say this is what the god of the bible this is who he is and sometimes we can think of god as being this far off distant being who has no care for for me or for anybody else but what we find in this psalm is is a lord who is very intimately cares for his sheep and so if you find yourself this evening having not yet committed your life to following jesus i encourage you to listen to the words of this psalm and to hear how king david describes his god to describe the kind of relationship that he had with his god and the kind of relationship that many of us here have with our god so of course the beginning point therefore is to accept that i am a sheep and that i am in need of a shepherd it's the beginning point for all of us isaiah 53 speaks of this all we like sheep have gone astray sheep have a tendency to just wander all we like sheep have gone astray we have turned isaiah says everyone to his own way and so the first place to begin as we think about the lord as our shepherd is to actually say are you a sheep are you a sheep or are you still on that journey of trying trying to trying to go your own way the wonderful news is that the shepherd is one who goes looking for his sheep he'll leave the 99 on

the hillside in order to go and search the one that's lost and so if you find yourself in that position this evening i encourage you to hear these words and to ask yourself if these are the words that you would like to accept yourself is this the god that you would like to accept yourself the lord the covenant god the god of israel the god of the church is my shepherd it's personal isn't it it's intimate it's intimate he's my shepherd he's your shepherd together as a church he is our shepherd he is the one who leads us and guides us he is the one who so personally knows us again the lord jesus said that the that god knows even the number of hairs that are on our head and for some of us that's not as difficult a task as it maybe used to be but but god knows the number of hairs on our head he knows us so personally so intimately how different that is from from so many other gods small g who are out there in the world who do not know in fact even the idea of some other gods knowing their people so intimately would be an affront how would such a great and divine being lower themselves how would he lower himself so much to know me and to know you but yet that's a great god of the bible he's a great god who who has divinely condescended himself to to know us to enter into that personal relationship with us the lord is my shepherd and of course in order to be my shepherd it came at a cost what comes before sam 23 it's not a tricky question sam 22 it opens with those words my god my god why have you forsaken me there are no still waters in sam 22 but it was through the experience of suffering and through the experience of death that our lord jesus made it possible for us to say the lord is my shepherd he is the one who lays down his life for the sheep how wonderful that we have a god who does not think it beyond himself to lay down his own life in order to allow us to say he is my shepherd it's all his initiative it's all his plan it's not that we are smart sheep that manage to find our way to the shepherd never works like that you never find a man out in the hill the whole load of sheep and say oh i didn't really come out planning to be a shepherd i just came out in the hills and they came to me it doesn't work that way it's all the plan of the shepherd it's all his great initiative his great plan he is a shepherd he has called us to be his sheep he's chosen us

brought us into his fold it's all his work but yet we still get to say he's my shepherd he's my shepherd and david goes on and he describes how with god as our shepherd we shall not want the shepherd's leading means that i don't want for anything the fact that it is a shepherd who is taking care of me the fact that it is a shepherd who is leading me i don't want for anything i don't lack anything that i really truly need he is the one who gives me my daily bread he is the one who provides for me and you see in a world that is saturated with discontentment we've got a testimony here from king david who says because god is my shepherd i want for nothing brothers and sisters because god is your shepherd do you want for nothing i think if we're honest the answer is sometimes i think the answer if we're honest is in some ways we do want for nothing but yet sometimes we still drift into all the things the world wants to fool at us and we want some of that as well sometimes don't we and it's a constant battle to say no jesus is enough jesus my shepherd is enough he is the one who satisfies my soul it is not all the things the world wants to offer me it's not you know the material wealth or the family look that looks just how it's meant to look or it's not these things but it's the lord who is my source of satisfaction my source of contentment he is the one who causes me to say i want for nothing and we do sometimes that drift into that place where we seek our contentment in other things in other places in other people and we come back again and we say no the lord is my shepherd so i want for nothing and again it's it's a great word of truth isn't it in a world where people are striving day after day after day to find you know find contentment and find satisfaction and to do it you know i'll be happy just when we move into that next house you know it'll just that extra bedroom it'll just be everything i've ever needed you know the new car the new job the next promotion the next degree the next qualification the next baby then i'll be satisfied then life will be what i've always wanted it to be and of course the problem is that there's always just the next isn't there but not when we have the lord and we know that he is the one who provides us with contentment he is the one who leads us and by green pastures and by still waters he's the one who restores our soul we don't need to go looking for anything else because we have the lord and he is the one who leads us and because he is the one who leads us he leads us in life life in all its fullness is what jesus said when we know jesus we have life life in all its fullness he is the one who leads us by the still waters and the green pastures so that we have everything that we need he takes us into that quiet place of intimacy with himself he gives us

[ 18 : 29 ] all that we need and our hearts are able to say i shall not want but it's not simply a leading that leads to contentment but it is also a presence that leads to peace for even though i walk through the valley of the shadow of death i will fear no evil what on earth causes someone to say that when i go through the darkest valley that there could possibly be in life i will have no fear what on earth causes somebody to be able to say that the next line you're with me you're with me what causes us not to fear any evil when we face the darkest of trials the darkest of days the darkest of times what is it that causes us to say i'm not going to be afraid of this it's the presence of god with us god doesn't i was reading a little book recently and there's this little phrase in it and god doesn't promise that he will build a bypass around difficulty and trial but he promises that he will journey right through it with us that is a god that we have the god of the god of presence where his presence with us means that our response is to say i will not fear because he is with us and because of that because of that little line about the shadow of death it does mean that this psalm is so often used in that context and it applies in that context of course but it's not simply in that context it can be through whatever dark time that we might face and let's be honest we all face it and it continues to remain the thing for people who are not christians it continues to be the thing that is of great challenge because how do you explain suffering how do you explain how to navigate the darkest of times in life when you're on your own how do you do that when you don't have the answer to cancer or you don't have the answer to why your grown up children are going through a divorce so you don't understand you know you don't have the answer to whatever is going on in life how do you navigate all these trials and difficulties when you don't have the answer and you're just on your own again it is great truth for the unbeliever as they go through great times of difficulty and trial themselves we have a wonderful opportunity to draw alongside and say my friend you know

I believe in Jesus and I know the dark dark place that you find yourself in just now and I know that in that dark place you feel as if there's no hope but there is because my God is a God who promises to walk through it with you and if you believe in him he says that no evil will come of it because he is with us and not only do we have a good God who promises to walk through that valley of the shadow of death with us but that very same God walked himself through the valley of the shadow of death for us isn't it incredible that he is the one who would walk through the valley of the shadow of death for us as he went to Calvary's cross it's incredible

Jesus Jesus the good shepherd the one who has known that dark valley whether it be of sickness or illness whether it be that dark valley of mental illness of depression of great difficulty and trial our world needs to hear of the Lord who is a good shepherd who will walk through these things with us notice how he changes halfway through verse 4 up to this point he's been saying he makes me lie down he leads me he restores me and now he changes for you're with me your rod your staff they comfort me in the darkest of times we do not need a distant God we need a God who is right there in the dark times with us and he promises that he will be that whereas Paul says there's nothing no height no depth no power nothing at all that will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus nothing no dark time no dark place no sickness no condition no situation that can possibly separate us from the love of God because he is right there in the valley with us it really is wonderful because the Lord is my shepherd he leads me so I do not want because the Lord is my shepherd he is with me in the valley of death so I fear no evil the shepherd who leads us all the way and then as he comes on to the final two verses we leave the shepherd image behind and we move on to the host who welcomes us home the host who welcomes us home you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies you anoint my head with oil my cup overflows

David David knew these words to be true for himself in his very own experience and it is true for us as well oil in the scriptures is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and a sign of being chosen David's head was anointed with oil as he was chosen king over all the people you see there my cup my cup of blessing my cup of joy it overflows this is not a God of stingy proportions this is a generous God who lavishes blessing upon his people my cup overflows

I don't want that my cup overflows all the blessings that I have in Christ just overflow I can't even contain them I can't begin to even number the blessings that I have in Christ it just overflows it's just wonderful all the days of my life will be characterized by the steadfast love of God surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life there King David uses goodness and mercy they are covenant terms God's steadfast love his goodness and his mercy they'll follow me all the days of my life it's all wrapped up in who he is it's not because I deserve his goodness and his mercy but it's because of who he is that he gives me that great mercy and shows me his goodness and it follows me all the days of my life there is nothing that goes on in my life that does not cause me to enjoy his mercy and his goodness not because

[ 28 : 20 ] I deserve it but because I am his because I am one of his sheep that promise that the shepherd will lead us all the way he is the one who will ensure that during our earthly time here we don't want for anything we have all that we need that he is the one who restores our soul he's the one who leads me in paths of righteousness it's all for his name's sake he's the one who is with us through the darkest of valleys he's the one who's ready to welcome us home the one the lord Jesus who has gone to prepare a place for us and I will dwell in the house of the lord forever the one who has led us all the way will be the one who welcomes us home into an eternal home a place where we will reside with Jesus forever my shepherd is the one who will keep me and keep you and then is the one who will welcome me and welcome you again what a wonderful gospel what a wonderful gospel to proclaim to those that you might happen to be having a cup of tea with this week you might meet up with during the course of the week friends or family or we have a God who will keep us nothing will ever snatch one of his sheep out of his hands but we have one who's preparing a place for us an eternal place a place where we will reside with him forever and in that place there is no dark valley the idea of wanting for anything there won't exist because we'll have Jesus we will see him face to face he will truly once and for all and forever be our everything because we will dwell in his courts forever brothers and sisters the Lord is our shepherd he's our shepherd today tomorrow all week and for all eternity it's why we need to hear it more than just in the grave side because it's words that can drive us through every day and it's words if we have them on our lips can actually be great testimony of who God is in our lives and can be great witness to those who don't yet know him let's pray heavenly father we thank you for King David we thank you for the words that he penned we thank you for the fact that these words have been sung from generation

to generation to generation we thank you that over thousands of years your people have been able to read these words and say that is true for me too and I thank that tonight on the first of March 2020 in the town of Bells Hill we can sit here tonight and say Father these words are true for us also we are those who belong to the good shepherd we know his voice he is our shepherd he is the one who has laid down his life for the sake of the sheep he is the one that we follow and he is the one that we depend on every day to keep us to ensure that we do not fall away but to keep us firmly in your flock until that day when you welcome us home Father might we meditate on these words ourselves might the testimony of our own lives echo the words of this Psalm and might you give us courage and boldness this week to draw alongside somebody and to share with them how you are our shepherd and how you are the one who leaves us lacking for nothing you are our source of great contentment great satisfaction and great joy you are the one who walks with us through the deepest valley and you are the one who has secured a place in eternity for us might we testify to your goodness this week and may you give us the courage to invite others also to become a follower of

Jesus in Christ's name we pray amen heed to heard very good to take ceremony Vit