

The shepherd leads us home

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[0 : 00] I guess we sort of, some of us remember that from different versions of the Bible. I wonder if anybody was saying these and thou's, as we were saying that.

But it's such a familiar passage, and it has been great to open it up together over these last few weeks. Let me just read it. I think we did a brilliant job, but let me just read it from the NOV, just so we're on the same page, literally.

Psalm 23. Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His namesake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemy.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[1 : 12] Let's just ask for God's help now as we particularly meditate together on verse 6. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you so much for this precious psalm.

Thank you so much for helping us to remember the psalm that we have known and loved and treasured over the years.

And thank you so much. It reveals to us yourself and how it is following you as our shepherd through all the days of our life until you lead us home to be with you forever.

Father, we pray that this evening you would, in just this short meditation on this psalm, you would help us to see more wonderful things and encourage us and equip us for the journey of following you.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Over the summer holidays, Becky and I have been watching this program, Destination X, on the BBC, sort of a reality TV game show sort of thing.

[2 : 23] If you haven't watched it, it's where a group of people travel around Europe on this X bus, but they can't see where they're going. They have no idea.

They can't see out the windows except for a few seconds here and there just to give them some clues as to where they might be in Europe. And then they play various games and challenges to try and work out where they are.

And each round, someone goes out after they've guessed where they are. If they're the furthest away on the map, they're eliminated from the competition.

It's an interesting show to watch. But why do I say that? Well, I wonder whether that's how many people sort of live their lives. They don't really know where their destination lies.

Perhaps they have various goals in life where they want to be in maybe a few years' time, but where's their final destination going to be? Where are they going?

[3 : 24] And yet for the Christian, though we might wander around life, not really sure where things are taking us, where our shepherd is leading us, we do know the destination.

We might have many questions in the journey. There might be many things that are unclear, but we do know the destination. God is very clear to us on it. And in this psalm, we know the destination. We're going to see it in a moment in verse 6. Just by way of background to where we've got to together in the psalm, Psalm 23, I think we've seen as very much a psalm for the whole Christian life.

We spend the Christian life following our shepherds, our shepherd who gives rest for us, for our worries, our burdens, our guilt, our shame.

And we find we are refreshed by him in green pastures of his words. We find that we're led by him on his righteous paths.

[4 : 41] And even though those right paths include dark valleys, we have the wonderful assurance in this psalm that the Lord not only leads us on them, but he walks beside us in them.

And verse 5, we even have opposition. We have enemies. But even in the midst of dark valleys and opposition on the journey following our shepherds, we see, saw in verse 5, that we have innumerable blessings and so much joy that is found in knowing him.

And it strikes me that the psalm is a bit like Pilgrim's Progress. And interestingly, the full title to the Pilgrim's Progress is this, the Pilgrim's Progress from this world to that which is to come.

As Pilgrim travels through and heads to the celestial city, the world to come. And I think that would be a great title for this psalm. The Pilgrim's Progress from this world to that which is to come.

We're off to another world. We're off to a place where we're going to dwell forever. This world isn't our home.

[6 : 05] And verse 6 shows us that. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Friends, we're going home. We know the destination. The shepherd isn't just the one that we follow in this life.

He isn't just our dinner host, as we saw in verse 5, and our companion in the dark valleys. He's also just going to invite us into his home to live forever.

Imagine a shepherd doing that. Sheep out in the countryside, but then one day he says, just come and live with me. Wouldn't that be extraordinary?

That's the reality for us with this shepherds. The Lord are shepherds. God has made us for something more than living in this world.

[7 : 10] He's made us for eternity. Made us to enjoy an eternity with him and his people forever.

We're going home. We're going home. We won't just be left out in the countryside forever.

We're going home. We don't have to walk through dark valleys forever. We're going home. We won't be surrounded by enemies, by opposition forever.

We're going home. It reminded me of these precious words of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus who says, I am the good shepherd.

He said, my father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, I would have told you. Would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you?

And if I'm going to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

[8 : 24] The Lord Jesus, he has gone and he's preparing a place for his people to be at home forever in his father's house.

Some of us love to be in our homes. Perhaps we're even looking forward even now. As good as it is to be at church, we're looking forward to being back home. Home sweet home.

That's where we feel safest. That's where we feel we can rest. That's where we are known by others. That's where we can just be ourselves.

But for some of us, we actually feel far from home. We have a place to sleep tonight in Brighton. We have a place to live. But we don't actually feel at home.

We long for home, but perhaps we don't even know where home is. We'll take that feeling of longing to be home and think of the place that God is preparing for you.

[9 : 34] This world we live in is really not our home. There are so many things that are just not right in this world.

So many things which make us feel out of place as a Christian. The Bible shows us elsewhere.

We're aliens and strangers in this world. We're just passing through.

We're living in the tent of our bodies. This is temporary. There is something more. One day we will be truly home.

Truly home forever. Dwelling with our Heavenly Father. At home with Him in the place that He has prepared for us. Where you will forever feel safe.

Where you will forever be able to rest secure. Where you will be known by others and most wonderfully known by your Lord.

[10 : 37] But perhaps you wonder how we make it home. How we make it home. Because life is hard.

There's the dark valleys. We mentioned that there's the enemies, the opposition to us. How are we going to make it home? Perhaps you wonder how can I keep going for another 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 40,

50 years.

Following the shepherd in this world. Verse 6 says that God will make sure we get home.

Verse 6, surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. On the Woolly 3 summer camp that I was a leader on over the summer.

We took the camp off out to Didcot. A town somewhere in Berkshire. To have lunch and then off to the cinema.

[11:43] And between lunch and going to the cinema. There was a little time where we could explore in our little dorm groups.

Of about 7, 8 young people. We had the opportunity to explore different shops in the town. We had to keep an eye on them.

Because the group of boys that I had. One wants to go to one shop. Another to another shop. And they just couldn't agree. So we had to settle on the entertainer toy shop.

And make sure that we didn't veer off anywhere else. So one leader that was me. Went at the front of the group. To lead the way. Another leader went to the back of the group.

To make sure we didn't lose any on the way. To keep us safe. And to get to the cinema on time.

And for us as we follow our shepherds.

[12:43] Who leads us. Goes ahead of us. Leads us on those right paths. We also need him to make sure something is behind us.

Making sure we keep going. Following. And that's where verse 6. His goodness and love come in. Surely your goodness and love. Will follow me all the days. Of my life. God will make sure we get home.

Because of his goodness. And love. And just to say. On the word follow. Apparently that's a really weak translation. It should actually say something like pursue.

He pursues us. To make sure we get back home. Like a lover. Pursuing the one they want to marry. He pursues us.

[13:41] He loves us so much. He wants us to get home. To strong words. To strong words. Now if you're a shepherd.

Leading sheep. You might well have one of these. A sheep dog. To help sheep stay on course. As you lead them.

To where you want them to go. And goodness and love. Here in verse 6. We could think of as a little bit like two sheep dogs.

Going along beside us. Making sure we get home. And that's a good illustration. But all illustrations fall down somewhere. And actually I don't want us to separate the shepherd.

From the goodness and love. Because. God's goodness and love is who he is.

[14:42] God is love. God is good. God is good. And so I think we can say that. Not only does he lead us.

But he is also behind us. Pursuing us back home. And leading us back home. I said follow is pursue.

When we were saying it together. I think we said mercy. That's often the translation. Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me. What's that word?

Well love as it is in our eyes. A good word would be loving kindness. God's loving kindness.

Or his loving mercy. He shows to his people. His faithful covenant love and mercy. They don't deserve it. But he's committed to it.

[15:37] They are like sheep who wander. And stray from his ways. But he keeps pursuing them. With his loving kindness. His love.

His goodness. Follows me. God will make sure. His sheep make it home. God will make it home. At the end of the day.

I wonder if you pause to think. How has God's goodness and love. Been following me today. It can be easy to think.

On a good day. When things have gone well. When the sun has been shining. When people have. Been so kind to us. When we're on top of the world.

To think. Yeah. God's been good to me today. But when it's been raining all day. When the pressure at work. Is driving you crazy. When you barely had time.

[16:34] To open a tin of beans. And put it on some toast. To eat. Would you say. God has been good to you. And if the day is even harder than that.

On the very hardest day of our lives. Would we say. God has been so good to me. And so lovingly kind to me. Well I think.

If we know the shepherd. If we know the Lord to be our shepherd. We can always say. The Lord has been so good. And kind to me. I can say that particularly.

If you remember. What the Lord Jesus. Has done for you. If you remember. His loving kindness. Shown to you at the cross. As we heard this morning. Even though we're like zombies.

The walking dead. Who spiritually before God. Cannot. Do anything. And yet in Jesus.

[17 : 32] He rescues us from our sin. He has such wonderful mercy. And grace on us. Nothing we deserve. But all because of his wonderful loving kindness.

And in him. I am at peace with God. And so even on the very worst day of my life. I can say I'm at peace with God. The Lord Jesus has still died for me.

He is still leading me home. And this is a dark valley. And he is walking beside me. Being in Jesus means that I can look forward to one day arriving home.

To dwell with him. And his people forever. And I know that he knows. That he knows. When the light in the dark valley will come.

I know that he will lead me through. And in that place that I'm going to dwell with him forever.

[18 : 40] In his. In this eternal home that I have to look forward to. There will be no more darkness. Darkness won't dwell there. Only light. Only righteousness. Only goodness.

No more pain. No more mourning. No more sickness. For the old order of things will have passed away. And the best part of our forever home. I think it's this.

Revelation 7 verse 17. For the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

The best thing we have to look forward to about our eternal home. Is that the lamb will be there. The lamb who's also our shepherd. Who will continue to do the things.

As Psalm 23. He'll continue to lead us. To life giving springs. And he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

[19 : 42] And he is the center. What a wonderful blessing. What a wonderful grace. To little straying sheep that we are. We will respond in song in a moment.

But I wonder. Could maybe a few people just lead us in some prayers of praise. For what we've heard. Just now. I'll lead us off briefly.

Heavenly Father. Thank you. Thank you that you are leading us. And pursuing us. Following us. Home. You're going to make sure your sheep get there.

Thank you Lord. Amen. Amen. Father God. I do thank you Lord. That even in our darkest times. Even in the darkest, darkest times.

There is that spark. That knowledge. That you. Have not. The sacred. You are not there. You are there.

[20 : 48] You are there constantly. And I thank you for that. Thank you. I know. I know what it is to be. You've done. I know what it is to be.

Distraught. and we can get pushed around and put it in our thoughts, our feelings.

They seem so good to us at the time, and yet we know who we are to be who you are. We know the promises that you give us, and we will not say to you.

Our part in that is just to believe and know that despite circumstances, despite an uneasy feeling or whatever's going on, that in our lives, when you've done a change, you've never changed.

You're always there. You just desire us to believe that and live with you and keep our focus on you because that's the way you've created us to be, to live in the form of a relationship with you all.

[22 : 26] I just thank you for that. That's so amazing. We all know the things we've gone through and the feelings we have, and they're just lies.

They're not the truth. They're not the truth about you. They're not the truth about where our lives are. I just thank you so much. Amen.

Thank you so much, Father, for your steadfast love, your covenant faithfulness, your love for the energy that you've done on us, your love for this infinite and eternal love-changing.

Thank you for your love, and goodness for us, you are in such a fear, it's such an honesty. and thank you that it's you that holds on to us.

And Lord, thank you that this is for all the days of our life. Thank you so much for today, let's see what happens tomorrow, and then we have to have to come. Thank you that there's such a

certainty, such a thought, such an assurance, and such a rootedness, and such a stability of this steadfast love that brings to our lives, because it's not based on our performance, it's not based on our morality, but it's based on the promises of God, and it's an everlasting.

[23 : 50] Thank you that we can live in the business of that now, even in the darkness of the day. It's an action to ourselves, even in those times when we feel that we're on the brink of despair, or giving up, so we can rest assured that we're holding on to us.

And thank you that we, not only can we look to that in these days, but we can look ahead and we have a hope. But we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

We can have that everlasting perspective that our place in heaven is secure. It's secure because of that steadfast love. Thank you so much.

Thank you so much. Amen. Amen. You are selfishly, Lord, and you know. You know. You know. You know. You know. You know. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[26 : 06] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Reflecting together on Psalm 23, I thought it particularly would be good to encourage one another with how the Lord might be encouraging us over these last few years.

Amen. Yeah, I'll submit.

[30 : 09] Let's take the mic back to its home. Yes. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. You probably need to turn it on as well.

Okay. um what i'd like to share one thing it's not actually my testimony but it's about a man that was in the church i was in before and he always he was a very quiet elderly man and didn't speak up much but one day he got up and he stood in front of us all and he said all my life or i don't know how long in his life he always felt he was followed he always felt he was followed and he would always look back and there was nothing and and he felt that it was like two dogs were following him and um and then he said i realized that it was mercy and love that followed me and i've never forgotten that it was just so so real for that man so that was his testimony but my testimony is that i as you guys know i suffer from depression every so often and so often i sometimes just go down without even realizing it but and there's a but god is faithful he brings me back up to see that he was there all the time you know and and the lord is my shepherd is one of the when i walk through the valley of shadow of death you're there and i just it's just it leaves me speechless because well because it does thank you it's wonderful how we can just look back and just recognize how how the lord is leading us and with us um as we follow him yeah any any others want to share anything at all thank you phil this isn't particularly profound over the summer holidays i think uh it we say summer holidays a great chance to relax and get away and so on and that's certainly true but it's also a time of getting out of routine and not uh not keeping things in focus so the a couple of the sundays we were away or let's just i think one of them we we set our minds to go to church and we looked on a website and it said this church is a bible church gospel church we thought yeah right that that's a good place to go and there wasn't anything from the bible at all and there was no reading we had a video about what somebody thought about what the bible said or then we had the as an interview what a person thought about the person who thought this about the bible but we didn't get bible and i was so encouraged and indeed challenged to get back to hearing psalm 23 because it is it challenges us from god's word i think that first um sentence the lord is my shepherd i lack nothing that is a very challenging thing isn't it because when you lose the plot you could begin to think of all the things you lack and all the things that aren't right and all the things you have to sort out and i think about all the painting i've got to do and shelves to put up and so on like that but to hear what the bible says uh i mean ephesians says we're blessed in christ jesus with every spiritual blessing and to hear

the lord is my shepherd i lack nothing that's not telling us what we feel or what we would naturally think it's telling us what god says is the case that is about us and i'm just very grateful that uh that daniel has brought these scriptures to us and we've heard what god says about our situation which i think we always need to be reminded of thanks phil thank you any any others ruth there you go um yeah i i guess i think i told a few folk so i can't remember when it was now but a few weeks ago in a kind of home group time that um i was in a kind of french exchange and the girl i speak to is not not a believer and very suspicious of christian things and she she said i i hear this thing of like um you

know psalm 23 and and the idea of god being a shepherd it's like does it not insult you the thought of being a sheep and god being like a shepherd and i i've just we had an interesting kind of conversation since then but i i think the more we've been delving into this psalm and just you know daniel been sharing these other passages about the the different dimensions of the shepherding of god the more i think what a privilege there's nothing but a a glorious truths in that you know obviously every metaphor is is limited but you know ultimately i was just felt so so blessed by um by this this teaching and all the the lord's been showing from it and i i guess i wanted to also um give testimony from a real miracle that was rg coming this morning to church um so many things in that but i i guess i'm just reminded of that luke 15 um uh you know the pharisees muttering and saying of jesus you know this man welcomes sinners and eats with them and then jesus told them this parable suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them doesn't he leave the 99 in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it um and when he finds it he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home and he calls his friends and neighbors to get together and and and says rejoice with me i found my lost sheep and you know i i you know go i someone going to church and sometimes not seem like such a big deal but i i think a lot of the things that that surround surround what's been going on is is is just just so much of a picture of what daniel was preaching on just the the the grace and sweetness and the pursuing love of god um and uh that we are all um un unworthy beneficiaries of and uh and to have witnessed another picture of that this morning has been a has been a humbling indeed and i've got if i may one song i'd love to read out the lyrics to um just because i think it just um uh just kind of highlights i think in a really very real way this um what i think might be quite familiar um kind of picture to to some of us of uh of what we we can be like so it's called run away by uh by a lady called jess ray um it goes i can see it in your eyes um i suppose it's kind of coming spoken almost from the perspective of of god in a way you could say i can see it in your eyes that you are going to run you're going to run i can hear it in the way that you speak to me that you are going to leave so as you slip away i will say as you pack your things i will sing even if you run away from me over the mountains through the valleys i will not rest but search east and west to bring you back to me even if you sail away from me across the oceans and the seas i will move again like the mighty wind and blow you back to me i'm going to move again like the mighty wind and blow you back to me i've seen this all before it's all too familiar but you will never see the bottom of my storehouses of love so as you use the night to make your flight no choice that you will make or path you take will change my mind even if one day you decide you find somewhere else to hide i will walk away i will walk your way and call your name and wait for your reply even if you make up in your mind you don't want to be by my side i will leave behind the 99 oh that you'd be mine i'll leave behind the 99 oh that you'd be mine even if you stomp and scream and huff tell me that i'm not good enough i'll take every swing and every blow until you know my love even if you beat upon my chest tell me you don't understand i will love you and teach you to love me again i'm going to love you and teach you to love me again thank you so much for sharing that that's powerful any any others uh steve over there i always actually hate being asked things like this because i'm deeply skeptical person and i think well maybe i'll feel differently tomorrow um people know not to ask me what my favorite verse is because they know they know they'll probably get the ostrich one thing that has struck me is that we're still here but i'm still here and brenda's still here there's a group of us university students who we have a way well obviously not now we're university students we met at university we regarded as a bit extreme by most of the sea we're a bit too calvinist for most of them um but we've been meeting now when do we start in the 90s wasn't it that's probably 15 years after we left university but we got together and we've been meeting pretty well every year since the remarkable thing i think is that well three or three of them two of us have died but only one that initial group has gone away from the lord those of us are married are still married interestingly not necessarily to the people we first went out with in the group and we've swapped partners a bit where we were still students but once we got married we stuck i'm still here brenda's still here and i have to say you know it's very encouraging the lord has kept kept all of us we different we come from different sort of church backgrounds and so on but um and i have to say you know we're grateful for the faithfulness that it not only that those of us are married have stayed married this is where it gets a bit difficult to say because we're grateful that in vast majority of cases our children and our grand even now our grandchildren seem to be working with the law walking with the lord and i know there's people here who would love this evening who'd love to be able to see that say that and can't so i don't know you know i don't know what we did right or you know why why that should be but it is

Thank you.

[49 : 19] Thank you so much particularly that we could testify of your keeping power. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Father God. We thank you for. Um. helping us to just keep following you.

Thank you for your goodness and love which are following us all the days of our life. Thank you for Ray's reminder of the Holy Spirit who was within us and working in us, working in our hearts.

Father, we've got so much to praise you for. Help us not to quickly forget the truths of this psalm.

[50 : 19] Amen. And would we rejoice together on that day when we're finally home with you, when our pilgrim journey through this world has led to the next, and we're safely in.

Help us to persevere. Help us to keep walking those right paths. Amen. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. It would be really lovely to just spend some time praying. We haven't done that so far. We haven't got very long left.

But here's a few things that we could pray for that I'm sure there are other things. Southern Cross and Park Hill Church, as I mentioned this morning, the Southern Cross Induction Service yesterday, huge encouragement from it.

God has answered prayer. God has been faithful.

[51 : 32] God has raised up pastors where a year or two ago it just looked impossible. We must praise God and we must pray for them as these churches enter a new season.

And the blessing that we're finding, many people coming to us on Sundays, pray that the Lord would build these churches up, strengthen them.

When the members at Southern Cross stood up, there was like maybe 10 at best of them yesterday. We long that God would strengthen them, not just spiritually, but also numerically as well.

The witness of that church can grow stronger. Pray for street preaching. Mercy talked about a ban on street preaching in Brighton. There's a guy called Ollie who's been out and I'm not quite sure where he's at in terms of the Lord.

Clearly he is a passionate guy. Preaching the gospel, but also just annoying people, making people angry. Very, very loud.

[52 : 46] Provocative. We need to pray for the witness of God's people in the city. We don't want that to be damaged.

We, ourselves, will often go out and do book table. We don't want people to walk by and think they're probably connected with that Ollie chap somehow. We need to pray.

Pray for that House of Lords debate on assisted dying on Friday. We mentioned that this morning as well. Let's pray for that. Baptisms. We're having a baptism Sunday again in a couple of weeks, twice in a year.

How exciting. Him of our geese and jency are due to be baptized in a couple of weeks time. Let's pray for them. Praise God for God's work in them, leading them to this step and pray that they go on.

We've testified that the Lord's keeping hold of us over many years, some of us. Pray that the Lord would continue to do that in these guys. For a student church search happening 25th of September, we've been invited again to that.

[53 : 53] Such as the university, please pray for that. And those that go, CY 2.0, church away day plans. New Christians in Brighton who are coming.

People move this time of year, don't they? Students will come. Let's pray that they'll be led to good gospel churches. We're not saying you have to come to our church, but led to a church which preaches the gospel where they will grow as a Christian and be blessed as a Christian family.

And do pray for students who are with us, like Carmen and Daniel and Maggie, going off to study Maggie for the first time over in Ireland to study dentistry, Northern Ireland, I think.

Pray for her. And Elias, the student who joins us when he's back home over the summer going back to Southampton for a final year. Perhaps there's many other things and people we have on our minds.

Let's just turn in groups. Let's just... Oh, our summer. Yeah. Can you say, someone once told me that bullying is not created to end a church.

[55 : 01] Maybe we can pray that it's not created to end a church. I believe so, but I don't know. And that may have changed. Yeah, let's pray for that.

Let's turn in groups. Let's pray for the next 10 minutes and then we'll close in song at that point. Thank you, Jack. Close in prayer. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound God save the wrath like me I once was lost But now I see

What grace has taught my heart to fear His grace my fears really How precious grace did the grace of His He I I have already come.

His grace has taught me, save the stars and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me.

[58 : 00] His love my hope secures. My tears and grace rewarded me.

As long as life endured. And when this mortal life is come, I shall possess good to me.

I shall possess good to me.

Love his heart, oh joy and peace.

The earth will soon dissolve like snow.

[59 : 32] But I'm no longer a sign.

The Lord has called me here. The Lord will be forever.

The Lord has called me here. We have already come.

But your grace, Lord, has brought us safe this far. And your grace will surely lead us home. Thank you for that.

Thank you that we can have confidence in that because of your word. Because of that verse 6 in Psalm 23. And now may the Lord bless you and keep you.

[60 : 38] May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.