

The good shepherd

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[0:00] really at verse 1. And then this evening, verse 2. We're not going to get very far. Verse 1. How does it start? It starts, the Lord's.

The Lord's. We love the shepherd imagery in this psalm, don't we? But do we stop and remember those first two words first?

The Lord's. What is that word about? The Lord literally, Yahweh, is a name that's to be highly revered, highly honored.

He is the Lord who has promised wonderful promises to his people. He is a covenant-keeping Lord. He's the eternal Lord. The one who has created not just this world that we live in, but the entire universe.

[1:12] If you look up to the night sky and see stars shining, it can be a wonder, can't it? It's even more of a wonder to know that there are 200 billion trillion stars in the observable universe.

And according to NASA, there's one septillion stars. That's 24 zeros after a one that have ever been created, that are in the universe right now.

It's extraordinary. And they have been placed there by the Lord of this psalm. By Yahweh, the great, eternal, mighty, magnificent Lord.

The Lord. The Lord who is revealed to us in the pages of the Bible.

The Lord who we saw at the beginning of our service in Exodus 3 in that burning bush.

[2:27] That strange sight that Moses saw. In fact, it wasn't really a burning bush. It was a bush that was on fire, but wasn't burning up.

It was strange. And the Lord spoke to Moses and told him, You are on holy ground. I am the Lord. I am Yahweh. And when Moses asks him later on in that chapter, What is your name? Who am I to tell the people that you are?

The Lord says, I am who I am. Which is the Lord saying, I am totally sufficient.

I don't depend on anybody else for who I am. I just am. I think for a moment, if someone was to ask you who you are, what would you say to them?

[3:33] Who are you? You might say, I'm a man or a woman or a boy or a girl. But the Lord just says, I am.

Or you might say, I'm the husband of so-and-so or the brother of so-and-so or the sister of so-and-so or the mom of so-and-so or the friend of so-and-so. But the Lord just says, I am.

Or you might say, I'm a cook, I'm a cleaner, I'm an accountant, I'm a doctor, I'm a musician, I'm a student, I'm retired.

But the Lord just says, I am. It would be weird if someone asked you who you are and you just said, I just am, wouldn't it?

There's an American singer who changed his name from William to Will I Am, saying that he wants to express himself more.

[4:41] It's a statement of self-expression. And he wants to create his own future. But he is not Yahweh. He is not the great I Am.

God is the almighty and eternal God who happily existed before there was anything else.

He's not dependent on anyone else. He is not from anyone else. He can't say, I'm the son of so-and-so. He's eternally existed, forever existed.

He really is, I am. In that sight that Moses saw, that bush that was on fire but doesn't burn up, that shows to us that that fire, the Lord, was not dependent on anything else.

He was not dependent on the bush to keep him going, keep the fire going. Revealing to us that he really is, I am who I am.

[6:01] I just am. I don't need anything to keep me going. So no wonder Moses found that he was on holy ground.

before this self-existent and eternal Lord, who this psalm is about.

In the book of Psalms so far, we've seen many other things about the Lord, which help us to understand his character, haven't we?

In Psalm 2, for instance, we saw he is a king who is enthroned high above all other kings. In Psalm 3, David described the Lord as his glory.

In Psalm 8, there's more about glory. He has set his glory above the heavens. In Psalm 19, the creation speaks of his glory.

[7:08] The heavens declare the work of God. In other early Psalms before this one, we find he's a shield for his people.

He protects his people against the wicked. He is righteous, perfectly right and just in all that he does.

He is majestic. And his words, they are perfect. They are flawless. They are richer than the finest gold and sweeter than honey from the honeycomb.

He's a rock. He's firm. He's dependable. Psalm 18, the beginning of Psalm 18, I was reading this the other day, is full of images about God.

Let's just see a few more for ourselves. Psalm 18, just the first couple of verses. David says, I love you, Lord.

[8:21] You're my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, one who defends us.

my deliverer, my deliverer, my rescuer. My God is my rock again. He's a firm, safe, dependable, faithful God in whom I take refuge.

He's a safe place. My shield and the horn, the strength of my salvation, my stronghold. Just in that verse, there's many images of God there.

And so, verse three, I call to the Lord who is worthy of praise. If he says things, he is worthy of our praise. Of course he is. Of course he is.

He's of great, immense power and glory. Of course we would praise him. He deserves it. But people of immense power and glory don't often want to have anything to do with us lowly people, do they?

[9:50] Over the years in living in this part of the world, people have pointed out houses that they think the house of like some footballer or YouTube or some other famous person.

And the thing that many of these houses have in common are big gates in front of them. You can't just rock up and get to know these people.

Perhaps that's what we might imagine about God. He's a big, glorious God. We can't just rock up to his house and get to know him, can we?

He doesn't need us. He's a self-existent God. He doesn't need us. But remarkably, Psalm 23 continues beyond the Lord's Yahweh and says, the Lord is my shepherd.

Which doesn't sound quite right, does it? How can this big, eternal, majestic Lord take the role of a shepherd? You wouldn't expect the President of the United States, I'm not just talking about Donald Trump, but anybody who's in that position, President of the United States, the most powerful person in the world, to be roaming the fields and looking after little sheep, would you?

[11:31] They're far too big, far too important, far too busy for that kind of stuff. But our majestic, glorious, holy, eternal God is pictured to us here as a shepherd.

It's the most wonderful image. And David, the writer of this psalm, has good authority to tell us that the Lord is a shepherd because that was his job before he became king.

He was a shepherd. Often, shepherds, were the role of a youngest in the family. In the book of Genesis, Rachel, the youngest daughter of Laban, who eventually married Jacob, she was a shepherdess.

David here is the youngest in his family and he's a shepherd. It was the job for the youngest, the least, to look after those little sheep, those little silly sheep.

David knows what it's like to be a shepherd. And when he speaks about being a shepherd in this psalm, he is speaking about being a shepherd not in England's green and pleasant land, but in ancient Israel where the terrain was dry and dusty, to find green pastures would be an effort.

[13:19] The shepherd would really need to lead their sheep carefully to find the green pasture for them. I will think more about green pastures later. I forgot about this slide.

So often the youngest child, remember ancient Israel terrain, they want to provide those green pastures, those waters for their sheep.

They also want to protect their sheep. So in 1 Samuel 17, David speaks about fighting lions and bears to protect his sheep.

David knows first hand what it's like to be in this shepherd role. And David says, my Lord, he is like a shepherd.

He provides for me. He protects me. He comes and he leads me, even though I'm a weak, helpless, nervous sheep.

[14:41] And perhaps that just helps us to change a little bit about our view of God or perhaps other people that we know that their view of God, perhaps they view God as remote and distant and far away.

Perhaps they might accuse the God of the Old Testament to be particularly like some sort of moral monster, just angry and full of judgment. But this psalm tells us that this great, eternal, mighty, glorious Lord, he's a loving, tender shepherd shepherd, who comes close to these little helpless sheep and leads them and provides for them and protects them.

He is happy to get involved in the mud and muck of life. And as we will see as we go through the rest of the psalm together over these next few weeks, he is even more than a shepherd.

In verse 4, we'll find him to be a companion who walks beside us in the most difficult times of our lives.

And then in verse 5, we'll find that he's a dinner host. He sets a table of wonderful food for us amidst enemies.

[16:11] peace. And one day, we'll find that this shepherd invites his sheep into his home to dwell with him forever.

Some wonderful and extraordinary pictures of this great, eternal, mighty Lord, Yahweh, who provides such wonderful things for his sheep.

If a shepherd provides for and protects their sheep, their sheep shouldn't need to worry, particularly if their shepherd is particularly good. And that's surely the case Lord, if our shepherd is the almighty eternal Lord who has made this world, we his sheep, then surely lack nothing.

Verse 1, the Lord is my shepherd, shepherd, I lack nothing. We'll see more of the provision that he gives to his sheep in verse 2 later on this evening.

But just think about it for a moment, about the history of God's people. How is the Lord, the shepherd of his people provided? Egypt. Think about his people being held in slavery in Egypt.

[17:58] No way out. A pharaoh, a leader of the people there who just refused time and time again to let God's people go. God's sheep, God's people there couldn't find an escape.

escape. And yet finally, the Lord made the way for them to escape.

And then after that, they kept wandering the desert over 40 years and they knew God's provision.

Remember that manna that rained down from heaven each day, enough food for every day.

God provided for them so faithfully. And even when they started grumbling against Moses and against God himself, the people knew miraculous provision of water from the rock.

They were thirsty and yet grumbling and yet God said, Moses, strike that rock and water will come out. The shepherd providing amazingly in impossible circumstances so that the sheep could say, I lack nothing.

[19:34] God the God who needs nothing and nobody stoops down to provide for his creatures.

can we say this morning by faith, you are my shepherd, I lack nothing.

I trust you to provide everything that I need in my life. you know it gets even better than that in this verse.

It gets even better because we can say of the Lord, the shepherd, we can say that he is mine.

Notice that wonderful word, two letter word, my, my shepherd, the Lord, the eternal Lord of all is my, shepherd, I call him my.

[20:43] It's a staggering thing that we can say that. He is mine, I am his. We are lovingly looked after by the shepherds who is also the Lord of all.

But how can that be? How can we call the Lord our shepherd? How can we call him mine? Because the Bible reveals to us more about what sheep are like, what human beings are like.

We're compared as sheep in another famous passage in Isaiah 53. Do you remember this verse? we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way.

We've turned away from God, away from the Lord who's created the universe. We've turned our backs on him.

we're like sheep wandering away from where we're meant to be. So how can we say that he is mine? we all like sheep live without, live like we don't want the Lord as our shepherds.

[22:17] How can we rightly say he is mine? Well, Isaiah continues and he says this, the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

How can we say that he is mine? Because the Lord Jesus himself, the Son of God came to this world and was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. See, the Lord became like a sheep, became like one of us in order to be led to his own death.

And that was always the plan of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. It was always the Father's plan. Jesus speaks very openly about it.

Here's John 10 verse 11. I am the good shepherd. I'm the shepherd that this psalm tells us about. And the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

[23:52] Have you ever heard of a shepherd becoming one of the sheep? We are this morning hearing that. It's extraordinary. And so all who then look to the Lord Jesus, the good shepherd who has laid down his life for his sheep, all who look to him by faith and say, I trust in the sacrifice that you've made for me because I have turned away because I have sinned against you, all who looked him in that way by faith can say he is mine.

Which means if we do know him as mine, we can look up to those 24 septillion stars and we can only see a few of them and we can say my shepherd has made that.

We can walk on the beautiful green south downs and say, my shepherd has made this. We can look to the sea, the glorious sea on Brighton Beach and say my shepherd has made this.

And we can look at ourselves and we can say my shepherd has made me. and my shepherd knows that I have wandered away from him and yet he has laid down his life for me.

Providing for me what I truly need. Forgiveness for my every sin, forgiveness for my every wandering away from him.

[25:52] and he provides for me an eternal future in his house.

The shepherd's going to let me in his house forever. I'm eternally secure and safe in him and so I trust that in him I lack nothing.

and so I will look to my shepherds to provide for me all that I need. That's Psalm 23 verse 1.

It's wonderful. Let's pray. Let's pray.