

Our Shepherd With Us

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Preacher: Mike Salvati

[0 : 00] Amen. You may be seated, kids. You are excused to your King's Kids class. And if you would open up your Bibles to Psalm 23. It's on page 541 of your Pew Bible.

I'm going to read Psalm 23 in its entirety one more time. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down, settle down in green pastures.

He leads me besides the waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His namesake.

Even though I walk to the valley of the shadow of death, 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 enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely, goodness and mercy, your goodness and mercy, shall follow me, pursue me, all the days of my life.

[1 : 07] And I shall dwell in the house of Yahweh, the great I am, forever. May God bless the hearing of His word. Well, this past Wednesday, Charlie Kirk, an outspoken conservative activist, a Christian, was murdered in broad daylight in Utah.

And we've been living in the shadow of his murder since in a variety of different ways. Later that afternoon, a 16-year-old gunman walked into a Colorado high school and started firing, wounding two classmates, then taking his own life.

In late August, a confused young man opened fire through the windows of a Catholic school in Minneapolis, killing an 8-year-old and a 10-year-old and wounding 18 others, then killing himself.

On August 22nd, the Ukrainian refugee, Irina Zarushka, was stabbed to death by a deranged man on a train.

On June 14th, Minnesota Democratic Senator Melissa Hortman and her husband were murdered by a man posing as a police officer after that same man tried to kill two other people in their homes.

[2 : 22] These are just some of the murders from this summer. We're not even talking about the murders in cities.

These are high-profile murders. These murderous death cast a shadow over the last four months.

We've been walking through the valley of the shadow of death or the valley of deep darkness.

And if you aren't walking through a ravine of deep darkness regarding death, maybe the death of someone or maybe your own death, how about the deep darkness of just being disoriented, of your health declining, of despair?

The valley of the shadow of death is real. And we walk through it. Last week, we looked at Psalm 23, 1 and 2, our shepherd who goes before us.

And so we say, I lack nothing. Next week, we're going to look at Psalm 23, 5 and 6, our shepherd who comes after us. So we can say, surely, your goodness and your mercy follow us, pursue us all the days of our lives.

[3 : 49] This morning, we're looking at Psalm 23, 3 and 4, our shepherd who is with us. So we say, even in the valley, I will fear no evil.

Here's what I want you to walk away with this morning. Fear not. Our shepherd is with us.

Fear not. Our shepherd is with us. Three points. Our shepherd restores us. Our shepherd leads us.

And our shepherd comforts us. So let's work through these two verses so that you can rest assured.

So you fear not for Yahweh, the great incarnate I am, Jesus, is with us. In 23, verse 3, the first four words, we read this.

He restores my soul. Notice, it's the third person singular. He restores my soul.

[4 : 53] And just to remind you of who this he is, last week we looked at that verse 1, the Lord, all caps, is my shepherd. It's the personal name of God, the memorial name of God, Yahweh.

I am who I am, the great I am. David is saying, he's making quite a declaration, quite a claim. The great I am is my shepherd. He's saying, I'm his sheep.

I follow him. He's my leader. I trust in him for daily provisions of green pasture and still water. And last week, I wanted to show you that in multiple places in the gospel of John, but in particular, John 8, 58, Jesus claims to be the great I am incarnate.

Remember when he said before Abraham was, I am? There's no missing the grammar. He's claiming to be the God of Exodus 3, 14. In the flesh.

The good shepherd. He claimed to be two chapters later in John, the good shepherd who lays his life down for his sheep. The great incarnate I am has laid his life down for his sheep.

[6 : 06] And now his sheep who hear his voice, follow him wherever he would lead us, whatever path he leads us down. That's the he.

He restores my soul. Your soul is your inner being. And at the very center of your soul is your heart, not your physical blood pumper.

Thump, thump, thump. It's your central operating system. In the West, we tend to separate our heads and our hearts. We think with our heads. We feel with our hearts.

But David would have thought about it this way. He thinks, feels, makes decisions out of one place. His heart. His central operating system. His inner being.

The very animation of his soul. The implication here is this. David's soul needed to be restored. Our souls need restoring.

[7 : 11] Our souls need renewing. Our souls need refreshing. And our souls need only what our shepherd can give. And do you know what that is?

Himself. Augustine or Augustine, depending on your circles, is well known for this quote.

You have made us for yourself, O Lord. And our hearts are restless until they rest in you. All of us have a God-shaped vacuum in our souls that only God can fill.

We need God. And so when we talk about this idea of restoring, you restore my soul. Soul restoration is going to come from eating your fill from His green pasture, from drinking deep from His still waters.

And I made an argument last week. That is God's Word given to us, and God's Word gives us God. He gives us Himself through the Word. When your heart is content, satisfied, in God alone, you are going to find your soul restored.

[8 : 38] restored in a right relationship to God, refreshed, renewed, because you have the life of Jesus pumping through you.

Jesus went into the tomb dead, and He came out of the tomb alive, so that your restless heart can find its resting place in Him.

find life, find peace. So our great incarnate I Am, our good shepherd, is on a mission.

He is on a seek and restore mission. Your soul is His target, and His purpose is to give you Himself, to restore you, to refresh you, to renew you.

If you want to listen to a passage from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is being watched by Pharisees, and they accuse Him of, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

[9 : 47] to which Jesus gives this parable. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. He's rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who have no need of repentance. Here's what I want you to see.

Your good shepherd is on a seek and restore mission. If you're lost, if you've never become a Christian, could it be that the good shepherd, the great I am, is calling you to himself to enter into a relationship with him, to be restored, and you can find life?

Or maybe you are a Christian, but you've been wandering. You've been wandering in the desert places, and your good shepherd's saying, come back. Come back. Come back.

[11 : 09] And there's reunion. There's restoration in your relationship with God. And maybe you are a faithful follower, a sheep of the shepherd, but we are prone to wander.

Lord, we know it. Prone to leave the shepherd we love. Here's what this means. We need our shepherd, and our shepherd restores us to himself.

He restores my soul. And that's really important when walking through the valley of the shadow of death. That means whether we're walking through green pasture, or we're walking through dark valley, we always get to say, blessed be your name.

Our shepherd restores us. Fear not, brothers and sisters. Our shepherd, he restores us to himself. Second point is our shepherd leads us. We read in the second part of verse three, he leads me in path of righteousness for his name's sake. When you experience soul restoration of Christ, and you are in a vibrant relationship with him, you've essentially responded to his call.

[12 : 33] If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. And when you follow me, when you say yes to Jesus, you are going to follow your shepherd where he leads you.

And he's going to lead you on his paths. He's going to direct you in his ways. And they are called paths of righteousness here. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

So what are these paths of righteousness that our shepherd leads us on? Well, back in the day, David wrote this, and he was writing it in a dry, desolate, rocky, hilly climate with many paths crisscrossing the landscape.

But not all those paths were right paths. Think of these paths of righteousness as moral pathways our good shepherd leads us on.

And he tells us these good ways. He reveals these good paths to us through the scriptures. These paths of righteousness aren't mysterious.

[13 : 41] They're not something that you've got to meditate on and say, oh, Lord, show me your path. He's shown us his path. He's revealed them to us in the scriptures. Let me make a case from Psalm 119.

Let me just show you how Psalm 119 talks about paths. I love Psalm 119. I think I'm in the eighth round through it this year.

I can't get enough of it. Listen to Psalm 119. This is on page 606 of your Pew Bible. Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.

Blessed, happy, joyful, experiencing goodness of blamelessness, of integrity, of walking in the way, the law of the Lord, right out of the gate.

Psalm 119 starts talking about following God in terms of pathways. Verse 9, How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

[14 : 51] Lord, we pursue sexual holiness by walking along the path of God's ways revealed in the scriptures. Verse 33, Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will keep it to the end.

Verse 35, Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and give me life in your ways.

Life, delight, joy, goodness, blamelessness. It's his path, his ways.

Verses 59 and 60, When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies. I turn my feet to your ways. I think on my ways. I turn my feet to your ways. And then, I hasten and do not delay to keep your testimonies, your commandments.

I get at it. I hustle. I'm quick to obey. Because your commandments are not burdensome. We could go on and on. 105, Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path.

[15 : 56] If you flip over to the book of Proverbs, Proverbs 3, 5, and 6, familiar to many of you, trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.

He will light up your paths with his paths. The way of wisdom. To be a follower of Jesus, to follow after the good shepherd is to walk on his paths.

The path of God's blessing outlined in the scriptures. Let me drill down a little bit more. We live in a culture in which one's sexuality and gender is under assault.

There's a lot of confusion out there. In Genesis 1, 27, we learn that God says that he has created in his image both male and female.

He created them biologically sexed. And that's a way for us to walk. We think about sex and gender in terms of biologically defined.

[17 : 04] There's only two sexes that are biologically determined. And this is a way of righteousness.

Genesis 2, 24 through 25, when it comes to marriage, it's very clear. One biological man is joined by God to one biological woman for an exclusive one flesh union for life.

It's a path we walk. It's a good way. It's blameless. Ephesians 4, 29 shows us a way to walk in terms of our speech.

Let no unwholesome talk come from your mouth. Don't go off the path with gossip. Don't go off the path with scornful, hateful speech.

Stay on the path of God's blessing. Build up those around you. Give grace to those who hear. John 13, 34 through 35.

[18 : 10] Another pathway. Jesus gives us the great, the new commandment. A new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you. You also love one another.

And by this, all people will know that you're my disciples if you have this kind of love for one another. And so it is a path, a good way to walk. These paths of righteousness in 23, they're not mysterious.

They're very clear. They're good paths. They're right paths. But did you notice at the end of verse 3, for his name's sake, that seems a little odd.

God, because maybe you're thinking something like this. He leads me in paths of righteousness for my good.

Or this is going to be tongue-in-cheek. He leads me in his paths of righteousness so I can be the best version of myself. No. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

[19 : 24] Remember, this psalm starts with the name of God. The great I am is my shepherd. And it ends with the name of God.

I shall dwell in the house of the great I am forever. And here in the middle is another reference to his name. He leads us on paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

For the name of Yahweh or the incarnate Yahweh, Jesus. A shepherd's reputation depended on his careful leading of his sheep.

And so when we walk on his paths of righteousness that have been revealed in his word, it's not just good for us, it gives him glory.

It magnifies his name. It says to a watching world, this is legit. Being a follower of Jesus, being a sheep of his sheepfold changes things.

[20 : 29] We experience his goodness and he gets the glory. Have you strayed? Have you strayed off his path?

Are you doing what's right in your own eyes? That's not his path. You want to stay on his path and if you've strayed from his path, you have a gentle, loving Savior who's saying, baby, come back. Come back to the path of blessing. Come back to blamelessness and goodness and experience the goodness of my ways for the glory of my name. So far, we've seen we are to fear not because our shepherd restores us to himself.

We are to fear not because our shepherd leads us on his paths and those paths of righteousness, they go through both green pastures and dark valleys.

So let's look at the last point. Our shepherd comforts us. Fear not. Our shepherd comforts us in the valley.

[21 : 47] Verse 4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

There are a number of things I want you to see in verse 4 designed to comfort here's the first thing. I want you to see the connection. I just said it. Verse 3 and verse 4.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his namesake. There's not a full stop there. The psalm continues and that path of righteousness will lead through the valley of the shadow of death.

He leads us through the valley of the shadow of death. God's paths of righteousness lead through dark valleys. It's part of his design.

It's part of his active leading of us in this world at this time. And yes, there will be times that are bright and good, ease and plenty, and there will also be times of difficulty and hardship when things get dark and we start feeling a threat, a danger.

[23 : 05] In other words, God purposefully leads us through valleys. And here's the comfort. It's not random. God is always at work for our good and his glory.

He's always at work. He is sovereignly overseeing all things, whether it's on the global front, whether it's on the national front, or in just your world.

He is sovereignly orchestrating over all things in ways that we do not comprehend. but we know the great I am.

God is sovereignly at work in our midst, even in the valley. The second thing I want you to see is actually just make a statement. Dark valleys are real.

The valley of the shadow of death can also be translated the valley of deep darkness. And in my study this past week, scholars think that this valley being talked about is not so much of a broad and wide valley, but a narrow ravine.

[24 : 22] And in the Middle East, there would be seasonal rainfalls that would fall down and it would cut out. It's like a slot canyon out west. Just this very narrow ravine.

And if you're a shepherd leading your sheep going from one pasture to the next, sometimes you had to bring your sheep through these narrow ravines. They're dry creek beds, sheer walls, that once you descend into them, it is very hard to escape them.

They're narrow, you feel confined, they can be very dangerous in light of this. If there is a flash flood, those narrow ravines can fill with water and they can roll down rocks, big rocks.

And so if you are a shepherd of a herd of sheep, you can lose your herd in one flash flood. Another danger is wild beasts lurking in the nooks and crannies of these dark ravines.

Another threat are bandits who in that day would use these ravines to trap people, to take advantage of them, to rob them, to beat them.

[25 : 47] Last week I told you that sheep by nature are defenseless. They are easily disoriented. They are on the duller side of the intellectual spectrum of animals and they are skittish.

And if you're bringing sheep through a dark ravine, they would be quite nervous. And we, like sheep, get nervous in dark and threatening places or seasons.

Death is one of them. Whether it's the death of Charlie Kirk this week or other people that have been murdered in the past several months or several years. Maybe it's the death of someone close to you, their pending death, a possible death.

Maybe it's even thinking about your death. Your body is declining. That can insert fear and anxiety. And if you have lost someone close or if you're in a nation that is going through turmoil, it can lead to grief.

Grief is a dark valley. But there's also other kinds of deep darknesses that we need to go through. Despair. When you find yourself trapped in a ravine of life and there is no escape, you feel like you're at a dead end, you are hopeless because you feel helpless, that's a dark place.

[27 : 21] And you can start feeling acutely aware of being alone, of being fearful, being disoriented.

Disorientation is a dark place. I'm in my 50s and I've seen our nation change dramatically over the last three decades, four decades.

There's a disorienting effect to it. What has been happening to our nation? What's taking place? I believe that we are being handed over by the living God to the sinful desires of the greater people that we live amongst.

I believe that we are living in a day and age that's changed. That we are living at a time when people are not looking to the king of the universe, but they're doing what's right in their own eyes. And that kind of disorientation, that kind of change, is hard to bear and hard to process. And then there's the deep darkness of disappointments, whether someone has disappointed you, whether it's a person or a group or an organization, or there's another kind of disappointment, is that you are living in fear of disappointing other people.

[28 : 52] And it is like this cavern without a top, a ravine. You feel enclosed, you are regularly anxious, you are wondering what people are going to do, and it is a very difficult place to live.

And wouldn't it be nice if these valleys took their turns? That's not the way these things unfold. Oftentimes death, despair, disorientation, disappointment, declining bodies, they all hit at once. All under God's sovereign purview.

And the effect of these deep, dark places, these ravines, is isolation. fear, anxiety.

And God gives paths to lead us right through them. He has paths for us to walk through deep, dark places, through the valleys.

[30 : 00] And we must walk them, and we must walk them individually, and we must walk them corporately as a church. And we must walk the valleys real.

These dark places are real. Let's not minimize them. Here's what else is real. You're not alone in the valley.

Here's the good news. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you have led me here. I will fear no evil, for you are with me. You are with me, for you are with me.

There are a number of promises throughout the Bible. And this one in which God promises to be with us, and to fear not, for he is with us, is a glorious one.

Let me share with you a few. Here's some of my faves. Joshua chapter 1, I'm going to start in verse 6. Skip to verse 9. I have this passage taped up at different places in my house because I'm regularly tempted to be afraid of things.

[31 : 10] I'm afraid be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers and to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses, my servant, commanded you.

Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left. That's pathway talk. That you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it, for then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success.

Have I not commanded you? Joshua, Mike, have I not commanded you? Christ the King Church, have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Give me an amen. I need that. Amen. Wherever you go, Isaiah 41.10.

Fear not for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Do you know what the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 1?

[32 : 25] For all the promises of God find their yes in Christ. Amen. Amen. Be not dismayed. Do not fear your great incarnate.

I am is with you. Unbelievable. No, no, no. Believable. The Gospel of Matthew starts with this fulfillment of Isaiah 7.14.

There's Emmanuel coming, God with us. Wah! Jesus the baby! God, the I am incarnate. And then the book of Matthew closes with Jesus risen and glorious.

All authority on heaven and earth has been given to him and the last thing he tells us is I am with you always. Even to the end of the age. The God of the universe, brothers and sisters, the God of the universe is with us in the valley.

The creator of all, the sustainer of all, the savior of all, the judge of all, who knows all things, who's all powerful, who's all wise, who's all good, who's everywhere present, he's with us.

[33 : 39] That's why David says, I will fear no evil. Let's just be clear. He's not saying that evil will not befall him.

Let's be clear. He's not saying that he will not experience evil. He's saying, I will not fear evil because the great I am is with me and the great I am is greater than any evil that I would face.

Be strong and courageous for I am with you. This past Wednesday, I was at Frank and Sharon Schneider's house and they're sitting on the porch and me and another guy are helping out doing some stuff and I asked Frank who's got Parkinson's.

I said, Frank, how is God using your Parkinson's in your life? And his immediate answer was, well, I pray more. I pray all the time. I pray for my family. I pray for other people and then I said, well, Frank, what's your favorite Bible verse?

And he's like, Psalm 23. And I'm like, yes, I'm preaching that right now. And then he adds, when I was 10, I memorized Psalm 27. And then he goes on.

[34 : 54] He's standing, standing in his driveway and he starts reciting Psalm 27 and he's not just reciting it. He's weeping while he's reciting it.

Our brother with Parkinson's is weeping in his driveway while reciting Psalm 27 and here's what that says. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war rise against me, yet I will be confident and it closes by him saying, I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. wait for the Lord. Be strong. Let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord.

[35 : 51] Do you know who he was ministered to on Wednesday? Me. By our brother with Parkinson's. By way, there's another brother with Parkinson's serving the brother with Parkinson's. Unbelievable.

Believable! Unbelievable! The final piece I want you to see from this verse is a monosyllabic word. For you are with me. I quoted Spurgeon last week and he said that his, he thinks the most important monosyllable of verse 23 is the my of verse 1.

The Lord is my shepherd. I find myself saying, Mr. Spurgeon, this you is pretty significant. Did you notice the change? Did you notice it? He restores my soul.

[36 : 59] He leads me in paths of righteousness for his namesake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. He moves from he to you. He moves from talking about God, his shepherd, now to talking to God, his shepherd.

And you know what brought it about? The valley. The hardness, the difficulty, the fear. God uses valleys to draw us to himself, to cultivate in us a dependence on him, to call out to him, you, you are with me, you deliver me, you make straight my paths.

I look to you. We look to you. That you is a covenant you. We can call God our you shepherd because of the blood of Jesus built for us, our Emmanuel, our good shepherd, laid down his life and has bound himself to us.

And now we can say, for you are with me, Jesus, no matter what valley you are in. No matter what. David goes on to say that your rod and your staff, they comfort him, comfort me.

[38 : 29] These were the two implements of a shepherd back in the day. The rod was about a two foot club and it was used to beat against wild animals and bandits.

The staff was a shepherd's crook, a wooden pole with a little hook on the end to pull and push sheep in the way that they should go and they were a comfort to sheep.

Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus isn't carrying a beat stick. But his cross, oh, it's a club.

His cross defeated sin, death, and the devil, our enemies. He clobbered him with the club of the cross. And his cross, oh, it pulls us, pushes us.

It hooks us to himself. We're bound to him along his path. His path is a cruciform path. We walk his path and he leads us and his cross is a comfort to us.

[39 : 42] It tells us that we are his and he is ours. And if he has died for you, how much more along with that death will he give you everything you need for life and godliness even in the valley?

He's never going to let you go. Fear not. Our shepherd restores us to himself.

Fear not. Our shepherd leads us on his paths. Fear not. Our shepherd comforts us with his presence.

I will fear no evil for you are with me in the valley. Brothers and sisters, fear not. Fear not. Your shepherd is with you wherever you go.

Green pasture or dark valley, nothing is random. He is for you and with you for your good and for his glory.

[40 : 51] So we walk through the valley with confidence. Let's pray. God, thank you so much for Psalm 23. Lord Jesus, thank you so much for being our ever-present help in time of trouble, for being our shepherd in the midst of the valley, and we confess that we will gladly follow you on your paths because you are wise and good.

Lead on, good shepherd. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.