

# Our Great Shepherd

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 May 2023

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, church. The scripture this morning is a familiar passage, Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

! He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. 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.

[ 1 : 14 ] Good morning. Good morning. The Lord could have saved us and kept us by ourselves.

But as our brother Clarence prayed moments ago, the Lord placed us in community. And in placing us in community, he called us to share in each other's joys and in their pains as well.

Today, as a church family, we mourn the loss of our dear sister, Orly, who was beloved by all of us. She, together with her husband, William, worked for many years with our young people. So to our church community, but especially to William, Gio, Debbie, BJ, Cedric, Rose, Paul, Philippa, their spouses, and, of course, her nieces and nephews, I wish to put you in remembrance of this truth as you mourn the loss of your wife and mother, sister, auntie, sister-in-law, and friend.

Our dear sister sits in the arms of a loving Savior for whom she lived and in whom she believed.

[ 3 : 13 ] One day, soon, we will see her again, and what a glad reunion that will be. Our prayers are with you.

Our prayers are with you.

It is a psalm that rightly understood brings comfort to us in all of life's challenges.

It reminds us how we ought to view disappointments, heartaches, including those caused by the death of a loved one, and how we ought to navigate the treacherous shores of life.

A survey of the author's, David's, life, as recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, reveals a man of breathtaking contradictions.

[ 4 : 49 ] Chosen by God to be king, which he was for 40 years. Pursued many years by Saul, which resulted in him finding refuge in caves and among his enemies.

Triumphant in many battles. Historic self-centeredness, which resulted in him taking as a wife Bathsheba, wife of a loyal soldier, Uriah, while having him killed.

Loved and revered by those he led. Made to endure unimaginable pain as one son, Amnon, raped his daughter, Tamar, while another son, Absalom, killed many of his brothers, then sought David's own life.

Husband to many wives and friend to an even greater number of concubines. And yes, a man beloved by God.

Let us pray. Father, we pray. Father, we come to you in our hour of need as we consider this psalm that was penned by David, inspired by your Holy Spirit.

[ 6 : 38 ] And we pray and we ask for illumination. We pray, Lord, that you would cause your word to come alive in our hearts this day.

And we pray, Lord, that you would be glorified in the name of Jesus. Amen. I believe the message of Psalm 23 is quite simple.

It is this. The Lord is the believer's shepherd. The Lord is the believer's shepherd.

This popular psalm that is perhaps the most quoted of all the psalms. The Lord is the believer's shepherd. Psalm 23 is a thoughtful and thorough picture of God's relationship to his children.

David uses metaphors of sheep rearing, which he was intimately familiar with, to our relationship with God.

[ 7 : 49 ] I've organized my thoughts around three themes in Psalm 23 that support the summary, the Lord is the believer's shepherd.

And those points are, the Lord provides, the Lord guides, and the Lord blesses.

As you listen, I want you to hear, and I pray that the Lord will enable you to understand how we as believers should see, respond to, and seek to reshape the events that take place in our lives.

Verse 1 of Psalm 23 is a good introduction to the psalm. Verse 1, real good introduction.

Indeed, the entirety of the psalm rests on the truth of verse 1. Therefore, we'll do well to consider it before launching into the three points.

[ 9 : 01 ] Everything in Psalm 23 hinges on five words. The Lord is my shepherd.

That's it. We could truly spend a lifetime preaching messages on that truth and its byproduct, which the psalmist himself simply and boldly summarizes these words.

Psalm 23 starts, the Lord is my shepherd. And then he goes on, he says, I shall not want. That's it. The Lord is my shepherd.

Colon. I shall not want. Notice, if you will, that David makes the point that the Lord is my shepherd. My. My. My shepherd. He individualizes the point.

[ 10 : 27 ] Also, he does not say only that the Lord was or will be my shepherd, especially when things are going well. He uses the present tense and could just as easily have said, the Lord is shepherding me.

Therefore, I shall not want. That needs to sink in, brothers and sisters. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd.

That is so profound that I believe only the Holy Spirit can reveal its full truth to us on an individual basis.

I can try, as I will try to do, but I must acknowledge my inability. The psalmist tells us that with God we have all that we need.

He says, the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

Please don't take that to mean that he is saying to us that the Lord is my shepherd.

[ 11 : 42 ] I'm going to get everything that I want. That's not what he says. He says, I shall not want. I shall not want anything else, is what he's saying.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want anything else. He is enough. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. We see that it is the sovereign one who is shepherd.

If one is not careful, one could miss the most important implication of the opening clause of the psalm. It is vital to our understanding that we not only see the Lord as shepherd, but implicitly and obviously we must see ourselves as sheep.

There can be no shepherd without sheep. So when David said, the Lord is my shepherd, David meant obviously that he was sheep.

[ 13 : 00 ] There can be no shepherd without sheep. Sheep, smelly, dumb, and rudderless. It's one thing to be called an eagle or a lion or even a bear but a sheep.

The point is that David recognized and embraced the fact that when it came to life in general, he was ignorant like a sheep and needed a guide.

When it comes to salvation, he couldn't do it. Yes, the man who slew Goliath became king.

Hundreds, thousands at his beck and call was wise enough and humble enough to know that in the broad stroke of life, he was nothing more than a sheep.

Amazing. What is the posture of your heart today? Are you a sheep or are you a king?

[ 14 : 15 ] Notice David's declaration in the second clause of verse 1. I shall not want.

David says that God's shepherding leads us to a place of sufficiency. How are we going to consider this psalm?

I want to suggest that we place this psalm into a bowl, into a crucible, as it were. That we see this psalm through the lenses of God's providence, lens of God's sovereignty, of his power.

And I think we ought to see this psalm through the lens of our faith. David is calling us to have faith. He's calling us to say, see that the Lord is our shepherd. We shall not want. You can't have that posture without faith. You can't have that posture unless you believe that the Lord hears.

[ 15 : 37 ] You can't have that posture unless you prepare to have the peace that God gives. Not that the world gives, but that the Lord himself gives.

In the next verses 2 and 3, the psalmist shows us that God sufficiently provides for several basic needs.

This leads me to my first point. The Lord provides. The Lord provides. The psalmist writes, the Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. He makes, underline, me lie down in green pastures. He leads, underline, me beside still waters.

He restores, underline, my soul. He leads, underline, me in paths of righteousness.

[16:43] For his name's sake. While it is true that the psalmist has in view our physical needs that the Lord takes care of, as a shepherd would care for his sheep, he also has spiritual needs in view.

Matthew Henry.

about the green pastures. About the green pastures. He says, God's ordinances are the green pastures in which food is provided for all believers.

The word of life. The word of life. God's word is the nourishment of the new man. It is milk for babes.

Pasture for sheep. Never barren. Never eaten bare. Never parched. But always a green pasture for faith to feed in.

[18:13] God makes his saints to lie down. He gives them quiet and contentment in their own minds. Whatever their lot is. Their souls dwell at ease in him.

And that makes every pasture green. What is the point? The point is that God himself has given us his word.

He's given us word, his word to live by. And the psalmist tells us that he causes us to feast on his word.

To dwell on his word. And his word is green pastures as it were. We must delight in God's word, which is truly food for our souls.

Jeremiah 15, 16, we find these words. Your words were found and the prophet said, I ate them.

[19:19] And your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart. I want to suggest to all of us that this ought to be the posture of our hearts.

That we ought to delight in the word of the Lord, which is a green pasture for our souls. He leads us beside the still waters to refresh and to wash our souls.

This is his doing. Speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit to refresh us, to comfort us, to lead us, to cleanse us, and to guide us.

He restores my soul. Sometimes, in fact, perhaps many times, in this fallen world, it is often true that we grow weary and despondent.

Many times we have more questions than answers. David tells us that our shepherd, he restores our soul. We can pray to him during times of despondency.

[20:50] Moreover, he forgives us when we sin. He brings us back. He forgives us when we sin. He restores us to fellowship. He restores our soul.

He leads us in the paths of righteousness. This clause reminds us that the Lord truly cares for us. Just like the shepherd leads the sheep along certain paths, it is the Lord who leads us along the paths of righteousness. He makes a way for us to escape sin.

He makes things better. He gives to us means of grace. He places us in community. He gives us brothers and sisters who care for us.

He gives us his word. Why? One reason the psalmist gives is for the sake of his name.

[22:03] The Lord desires to be glorified through our lives, through our sanctification. But not only does the Lord provide for his children, the Lord, the psalmist helps us to see, guides his children.

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.

As we consider these verses, these words in verse 4, I want us to carefully observe David's choice of words, the opening, words in the opening of this verse, even though, even though, David writes, those two words, they caught my attention as I was preparing.

David could have substituted them with though or although, but they were not strong enough. He could have said while or as, but he had perhaps.

perhaps we would have missed the fact that this walk was not at all desirable.

[23:40] Oftentimes. even though I walked through the valley of the shadow of death. I have no doubt that, like David, there are people here with some present-day stories that can start with even

though.

even though my health is not what it used to be. even though my finances seem challenging. even though, even though, David writes, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

for you are with me. to make the point that the Lord indeed guides his children, his sheep, the psalmist uses an extreme example of death.

doing so, the psalmist makes the point that if God can guide his children through death, he can guide them through anything.

[ 24 : 47 ] To fully understand what the psalmist is saying, let's consider the psalmist's condition. It's believed that when David wrote this psalm, he might have been, might have been before he became king.

His condition was one of extreme difficulty. He faced the possibility of death. Notice that the psalmist does not refer to his condition as pleasant.

He calls it a valley experience. It's not unusual for us to face valley experiences ourselves.

Perhaps you're facing one right now. And you're wondering, where is God? David answers that.

Notice how the psalmist responds to his condition. He walks. He does not run because he has faith. The psalmist says, though I will fear even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

[ 26 : 05 ] Why? Because you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. They bring comfort to me, the psalmist says.

The psalmist could have said about the rod and the staff, he could have said that I really have no use for it.

He could have viewed it. He could have said that these are punishment to me. But the psalmist understands the Lord's correction. He understands that as sheep, that from time to time, the Lord will need to correct one.

The psalmist does not fear any evil. He does not fear the evil of men, the evil of sickness. The psalmist offers an explanation for his peculiar response in the face of danger.

The shepherd is with him. The shepherd is with you and I. You and the Lord are winners.

[ 27 : 22 ] That's the point the psalmist is making. Your steps are ordered by the Lord. And so we wonder, the psalmist uses this example.

The psalmist says, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'm not alone. And every one of us one day will come to that point.

And we can take comfort in this truth that when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, that we will not be alone. and we need fear not because God's going to be with us.

He is our shepherd. Lord provides, the Lord guides, and the Lord blesses.

you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

[ 28 : 38 ] Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

how to be sure we've seen the blessings of the Lord from verse 1 all the way up to this point. The blessings of the shepherd.

In these verses we see even more care. The psalmist writes, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemy.

The psalmist recognizes the reality of life that when we walk through life we're going to have enemies. But he recognizes where his help comes from.

David says of the Lord, you prepare a table before me bearing in mind the analogy of shepherding. David writes here of the sheep being supplied even when others want to hand them a present.

[ 29 : 45 ] Perhaps David had in view that even when a lion or a bear sought to attack that there he was as a shepherd prepared to defend the sheep while supplying and meeting their needs in the presence of my enemies.

Then David goes on and he says, you anoint my head with oil. And how many of you know that it was indeed a practice for sheep haired to be anointed with oil so that the insects and things that would tend to bite them would just stay away.

And perhaps perhaps one way of us looking at this might be for us to think in terms of what the Lord does for us. That the Lord he fights our battles.

He protects us from things that we see and things that we don't even see. Things that we can imagine and cannot even imagine.

He protects us from these things. The Holy Spirit is present with us as our help. David says that surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

[ 31 : 18 ] Is David saying that everything is going to be pleasant in my life? No, that's not what he's saying. Remember, David is saying that you've got to have the right perspective. That God's providential hand is in my life.

And because his providential hand is in my life, I know that whatever happens to me, he allows to happen to me. And so I've got faith in him.

He is the shepherd. He's the all-knowing one. He's the all-powerful one. He's the creator of all things, seen and unseen. Time and life is in his hands.

And so I can rely on him. I can put my faith in him. So David says, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. there is a certainty there.

There is permanency there. How does David react to all of this? How would we as sheep react to the shepherd's care?

[ 32 : 23 ] David says, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. David said, I'm going to be present. I'm going to be with brothers and sisters.

But you know, guess what? Ultimately, David's point is that it's the Lord's doing. It's the Lord who holds on to him, who keeps him present, who causes him to remain and to dwell in the house of the Lord because remember he is sheep.

And how many of you know that the Lord is really looking for sheep? That's what the Lord is doing. The Lord is looking for sheep. We, you and I, were made to be sheep.

Jesus himself, in John chapter 10, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. And Jesus didn't refer to himself as a good shepherd because he wasn't looking for sheep.

No, it's because he was looking for sheep. But what's the practical, as we consider these words in Psalm 23, what are some practical applications that we might draw from these words?

[ 33 : 50 ] things? I know the promises of Psalm 23 are sweet. Lest we leave here with, as it were, a sugar high, I want to talk to you about the practical applications of this message.

How do you apply this message in your life? First, we must remember that like David's, our life will not always be a bed of roses.

roses. The man who penned these words, his life was not a bed of roses. And often, like David's, things will not always go the way we want them.

However, we must view all of life's experiences, the ups and the downs, the joys and the heartaches, love.

Through the lens of God's sovereignty. Yes, the one who holds the world in his hand, holds you in the palm of his hand.

[ 34 : 55 ] Before you were formed, he knew you and he loves you with an everlasting love. When things are unwell, it is he we do battle with.

We will have a tendency to see people and things as the agents, but it is the Lord that we do battle with and to whom we pray. Psalm 23 covers a swath of, a wide swath of our lives and tells us, it tells us how to live.

It tells us how to live. It tells us that we ought to be sheep. It tells us to that the one to one who is high minded, it says be humble.

One who is high minded says be humble. To one who is in the midst of a decision, it tells him to look to God.

To one who has achieved any degree of worldly success, it says glorify God. To the one weighed down by the pressures of life, it says be restored.

[ 36 : 22 ] To the one grappling with besetting sin, it says look to Jesus. To the one who is walking through a difficult situation, fear not.

To the one who has enemies all around, it says ignore them. To the one who is uncertain, who is uncertain about his future, it says take heart.

Why? Why can we respond to those situations like that? Because we are sheep and the Lord is our shepherd.

Psalm 23 is a thirsty man's water brook, a hungry man's elixir, and a dying man's comfort. We would do well to commit it to memory and revisit it daily.

For some day, I can almost guarantee, each one of us will wish we knew it by heart. But it would not surprise me if some people have a negative reaction to the sermon because we said that believers should take comfort in knowing that they are the Lord's sheep.

[ 37 : 45 ] You know that, right? You know that there are some people, there's this quote-unquote gospel out there, and they don't have an appreciation for this concept.

But no doubt, some will say that they are nobody's sheep. Well, the reality is that every one of us belongs to one fold or the other.

Either we are sheep being led by material things, pride of some sinful thing, or we are the fold of pride.

Yes, if you're a believer, Jesus is your shepherd. Listen to what he says in John 10, beginning in verse 7. So Jesus again said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

All who come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

[ 39 : 10 ] the thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they might have, that they may have life and have it abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. If you're here today and you're not a believer, you cannot lay hold of the blessings in Psalm 23.

You do not have the benefits of viewing life, all of life, through the prism of God's amazing sovereignty, his unyielding love, and his unbevoing care.

all at work, even when we sometimes think otherwise.

Most importantly, you cannot appropriate the grace that rained down from Calvary. Instead, you face a just God.

[ 40 : 25 ] on your own merit, and not that of a good, a great shepherd.

I invite you to look to Jesus and to ask for his grace and mercy. Let's pray. Father, Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a comfort to our soul.

We thank you, Lord, that we are sheep. Lord, help us in this day and in the days to come to acknowledge that we are sheep and to understand even more fully what it means to be sheep.

Help us to embrace this reality. Help us, Lord, to look to you as a shepherd of our lives in every circumstance, in every situation.

Lord, help us not to grow weary. Help us not to faint. Help us not to become despondent. Help us not to fight others.

[ 41 : 49 ] Help us, O Lord, to bear one another's burdens. Help us, O Lord, to know that you are the sovereign God, that your providential hand is in our affairs.

O Lord, let these truths be a comfort to our heart. Cause us to rejoice, grace, Lord, knowing that everything that you do is well done.

Lord, you said in your word that you grant wisdom to those who ask. Lord, we pray that you would open our eyes to see and to understand those things that befall us, that happen that we might not understand.

Father, we pray for those who do not know you. We pray, Lord, that you would open eyes, that you would cause the light of your gospel to shine to darken us.

In the name of Jesus, we pray and all God's people say amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.