

A Psalm for All Seasons

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[0 : 00] Well, we've sung from Psalm 23. Let's read now from Psalm 23, first of all. And then we're going to go into John chapter 10.

So Psalm 23, a Psalm of David. 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 : 03] Then in John's Gospel, John chapter 10, we'll read the first 18 verses, these great words of Jesus telling of his being the good shepherd.

Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again, so Jesus again said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

[2 : 08] All who came 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.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.

And I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

[3 : 15] For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down.

I have authority to lay it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. May God bless these readings. I have these from God's holy word.

As we turn to Psalm 23 again, this great psalm. This, in many ways, a psalm for all seasons, whatever time of year, whatever circumstances. It's a psalm that speaks to all our needs at all times.

This great psalm that tells of the Lord's love when we state that great, and affirm that great statement of David, the Lord is my shepherd.

We'll explore what David's saying in relation to the love of God as his shepherd. And then, as we read on, and as we read on in the psalm, the believer's comfort.

[4 : 20] The comfort that we have knowing that even in the times, in these times of most difficulty, even when we're going through even the valley of the shadow of death, the Lord is our comfort.

And then, finally, the believer's rest that David expresses, even as he looks not just to the present, but the eternity, and sees the place of rest that God has prepared for him, even in the glory of his Father's house.

The Lord is my shepherd. And, as of course you know, the shepherd theme has been very much part of our services, both morning and will be this evening as well.

This morning we were looking at the response of the shepherds to the birth of Jesus, as these ordinary, humble shepherds whom God, in his perfect wisdom, had given that word, that message of the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth.

These humble shepherds who responded to that word with joy, with gladness, with haste, hastening to the manger, to Bethlehem, to see what they'd been told, to hear what had been told to them.

[5 : 41] It was the truth. Yes, the Messiah had come. Christ the Lord had come. And they'd been so privileged because of the love of God, choosing them, choosing them to hear and to see the news of salvation, and through the Lord Jesus.

And as we said this morning, these shepherds would never be the same again. And this evening, then, we're going to continue the shepherd theme, because this theme has got so much to tell us. It's got so much richness, so much meaning, so much purpose, so much direction for your lives, so much encouragement, or so much joy in these words, that as we worship the one true God and Savior, that even the psalm helps us, even as we said it, for all seasons, even this time of year. And I pray that we'll grasp the truth of the Lord as our shepherd. We'll grasp the Lord's love and sending His one and only Son. Because remember, what we've sung, what we've read, these are the words that God has given to us.

God, in His wisdom, breathed out these words. And these words, as you know, they've blessed the Lord's people through the millennia. Ever since David first penned these words, ever since David sang these words, even through the centuries, even through the millennia, these words have spoken to the Lord's people.

[7 : 12] David, of course, remember, he at one time was a shepherd. He became the shepherd king of Israel. David had shepherded animals.

He'd shepherded sheep. And this king, he shepherded the people of Israel. But even in the psalm, as we'll see, he's looking to the ultimate shepherd.

He's looking to the Lord Jesus Christ. He's looking ultimately to the one who truly does care for His people, who cares for His flock, the Lord Jesus, who came to be that good shepherd, to nourish His church, nourish His people.

And as we read there in John 10, Jesus who came as the good shepherd to lay down His life for His sheep. So let's be immersed in this word, in the word of God.

And if we want to put it poetically, put it like this. Let's imbibe the pure nectar of this psalm. Drink in what you've been reading, what we've been singing.

[8 : 16] And may you be given, all of you, given encouragement for this psalm for all seasons. Because this psalm, let's be more precise, this psalm speaks to you in times of great distress.

And at the same time, it speaks to you in times of great joy. And certainly speaks to us, even at this time that we're living through, this time of continued world crisis.

And whether it is Christmas time, when the Saviour's birth is remembered, when we do need to proclaim loudly that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus has come.

Because amidst all the trivia and secularization, even traveling to church this evening, just bombarded with everything that seems to be so anti-Christmas, anti-the Lord Jesus, let's drown that secularization out with the Word of God.

What truly matters is the Saviour has come. He's come to lead His flock. And He's come to make one the flock of Christ by His life and by His death.

[9 : 24] So that you, so that I, the lost people, can echo the words of David, the Lord is my shepherd and shall not want. So let's just reflect in our hearts and give praise to God what we're reading here.

The Lord is my shepherd. David's using the covenant name of Lord, Yahweh. He's using this name that tells of the relationship that God has with His people, that faithfulness of God towards all who are His.

Because that word, the Lord, tells of that sure, secure relationship. It tells of God's abiding presence with His people. And so David can say, the Lord is my shepherd, because he knows that He's safe

and secure in His loving Saviour, His loving Lord.

I mean, David himself, as we notice, he knew himself what it was like to be a shepherd. He knew what it was like to have that care over his flock. Even care over the little lambs.

Even individuals that needed particular help in particular circumstances. And now, He's not just caring for the sheep. He is one of the sheep.

[10:35] He's the one who knows what it's like to be cared for. And to be cared for, to be comforted, to be nourished by the most loving of all shepherds, His Lord, His Redeemer.

And so He can say without any fear of contradiction, that His covenant Lord is His shepherd. And so therefore, He lacks nothing.

I shall not want. I shall lack nothing. You see, David had that confidence in the Lord. That confidence that God would meet every need of His. He had that confidence.

But what about you? Is your confidence in the Lord? I mean, can you echo these words of David? You've sung them so many times. But can you truly in your heart echo David's words?

That because the Lord is your shepherd, then you can affirm with absolute, utter confidence that you lack nothing. Absolutely nothing. That you have all in Christ.

[11:39] Because, you know, this time of year, you've seen it all around. This time of year, you may almost say boasts. It boasts. It boasts of excess. Now, of course, there are degrees of excess.

From a world-famous London department store that can set your Christmas table for £40,000.

That's, I suppose, one extreme of excess. But I suppose there's the massive excess of food consumption that, dare I say, most of us mortals will indulge on point this week.

It's as if, you know, we're not satisfied unless we have more, when less isn't more, and when more isn't enough.

But in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord who's your shepherd, my shepherd, he's all in all. Less than Jesus won't satisfy you, and more than Jesus isn't required.

You know, there can't be anything more than Jesus to give you that utter fulfilment. Because with David, you can say, I lack nothing, I shall not want. It was the great American Jonathan Edwards who said this of Jesus, He who has Christ has all he needs and needs no more.

[12:56] Let's put it simply like that. He who has Christ has all he needs and needs no more. And so let's develop what David said when he said, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Well, David himself developed that truth when he said, He makes me lie down in green pastures. In fact, four things to look at, as David said, that tells that the Lord was his shepherd.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. I suppose if there's a word that maybe captures the 21st century so far anyway, or one word, I suppose a number of words, the word would be green.

Green. Green that speaks of care for the planet. Green that speaks about, you know, the focus of the environment, protecting our environment, keeping our world.

I suppose they've now drifted a wee bit far from our consciousness.

[13:59] Green, I suppose, can refer to safety. You know, the green light that we drive from in our cars. So bring all this together. Green, green.

It speaks of protection. It speaks of cleanliness. It speaks of care. It speaks of safety. That's what David was writing of here in Psalm 23. The green pastures for the sheep that tell of, you know, a place of safety, a place of nourishment, a place of contentment.

Not like the dry, arid wilderness, but the lush green pasture where there was plenty of nourishment, plenty of food. And surely that tells us, that speaks of that care, and comfort, and nourishing the Lord who's your shepherd.

Because notice, as David said, he makes me lie down. And the Lord, you're gone. He makes you, he leads you. He takes that initiative, leading you to, to that place of comfort and care and nourishment.

That leading, that guiding, that directing you to that place of absolute welfare. the Lord who leads his people, who leads his flock.

[15:16] I mean, that's the greatest welfare we can talk about. Because the ultimate welfare of the Lord's people, the soul of God's people, the welfare, yes, welfare of your soul, welfare of your mind, welfare of your heart, that well-being that comes from, from that true pastor, the pastor that's the Lord.

The word pastor, of course, comes from the Latin word for shepherd. And you know, when we think of ordinary pastors, the pastor in the church who has that responsibility of caring for the flock, caring

for the people whom God has given to him to care and bring that to the Lord Jesus. He is our great pastor, our great shepherd. And he is, in many ways, the pastor of pastors, but he is our pastor. And he truly does lead you to that, that life-giving nourishment and leads you by his word.

And in these places of pasture, by the pastor, that leading gives you that peace, that peace of the Lord Jesus that certainly David saw in vision when he said, he leads me beside still waters. Because what the still waters portray, they portray calm, they portray peace, you know, as opposed to the turbulence of stormy waters.

[16:38] Isn't that the case for the person who's led to these green pastures, the Lord's comfort? He's led to these still waters, that place of peace.

It's that place of peace that we read elsewhere in Scripture. Psalm 91, for example, he who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

You know, even think about all the turbulence, all the, what we're living through in the stormy waters of what's happening all around, the continued impact of the coronavirus, all the political instability that we're seeing all around, even in our own land, social and economic stress and turbulence, the rage against the church.

Don't you have, and amidst all that turbulence, if you like, don't you have the greatest of assurances that you who are in Christ, you've been led to green pastures and you've been led to these still waters amongst these green pastures and that you know you have that peace, that calm as you dwell in the shadow of the Almighty.

Well, David spoke of that peace. David knew the Lord's peace in his heart and knew that work of the great pastor in restoring him to himself.

[18:03] He restores my soul. In the Psalm 23 version we're going to sing at the end, we sing these words, something like, he brings us my wandering steps, he brings back to his way.

That's what restores mean in the original language, bring him back, bring him back. And if David's saying he restores my soul, he brings back my soul, the strong suggestion is that David at one time in his life he'd been wandering like a wandering sheep, a sheep wandering away from the flock. He was a backslider at one point and God bringing him back, bringing him back to the fold. And surely that's the testimony of each and every one of us who in our own experience can tell of these times of wandering, wandering from God in our thoughts.

We do it every day. Wandering from God's word, wandering even in our own actions, backsliding away from that, that narrow path that God requires of you in your obedience.

but you know even from that wandering you've been brought back. You've been restored by God's grace. Brought back, as David says, well, that's the psalm, to back to his way.

[19:23] You've been brought back to that one true way, that narrow way, that way, that right way, that path, that path of righteousness as David rejoices and he leaves me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

He's been wandering, he's been brought back to the one true path. And you know yourself from wandering in paths of unrighteousness, you were brought back to the right way, that right way that's the way of holiness.

Brought back for his name's sake, in other words, for the glory of God. Because, yes, when God's people, when God's flock, when we wander, it's not to the glory of God.

We're brought back just to God's glory and praise that he brings you back, that he restores you.

You see, all that we've been saying and all that David's been writing so far of the Lord as shepherd, it speaks of the love of God.

It speaks of that love of God, the Lord as a shepherd. The love of God and caring for his walk. And it's that love of God that reaches to you and reaches to me in every aspect of your life when you're on that, well, as you're walking in that path of righteousness.

[20:41] And yes, even when you walk that last stretch of that path, that path, that route, that way that God puts you on, even when you're walking on that path through the valley of the shadow of death, as we read there in verse 4, and as we come to what we can truly see as the believers comfort, these great words, again, that have blessed so many particularly difficult times.

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. Because you know as I know that the reality of death and the great fear of death, it's never far away.

You know, even for the Christian, there can still be that tremor of fear at the thought of the sting of death. It just came to me just, well, last week and as I was led to read a particular biography of one of the great free church ministers, Mordor McCauley Back.

He was ministering Back Free Church in Stoughton Lewis from 1956 to 75. And in his latter years when Mordor McCauley was approaching death, he knew he was dying.

It's said of him, and I'll just read the words, he so often expressed the wish to be with his Lord and Savior. But he also expressed that fear of dying that's so natural to us all as we face an unknown experience.

[22 : 17] And you know, when that does happen, when there is that fear of death, yes, turn to God's Word and find in God's Word that great comfort just as David knew comfort from the Lord, the shepherd, when he was aware of the reality of death.

Because David knew that God's presence with him is eternal. and he knew God's protection and he knew it would be with him even when he trod that path from earth to heaven.

And you who know the Lord as your shepherd, well, be reminded of the comfort of these great words, these words of promise, they're words of power, they're words that God gives to you to heal a troubled soul.

So you can declare with Paul and Paul himself who spoke of his assurance of salvation even in the face of death when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting? Because the Lord, your shepherd, with that absolute assurance will be with you in that final step to glory.

[23 : 35] Even in your last journey, the good shepherd continues to be your good shepherd. Read in Revelation 7, 17, for the lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd.

He'll guide them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Is that your hope? The Lord Jesus is your hope in life.

Is he your hope in death? And can you see even beyond the present to the eternal? Do you know that underneath are not just the present but the everlasting arms of the Savior, the one who died for you so that you might not know eternal day?

You know, we're living in a world where we have to say death surrounds us every single day. We see it every day in the news, the figures that are mentioned in regard to, obviously, the pandemic. Even at the end of the year, there's always the so-called celebrities who've died that particular year. And there are these prospects even of loved ones teetering on the brink of eternity.

[24 : 46] Even in your own memories of those who've gone before you, particularly towards the end of the year, it comes before you perhaps even more strongly. But can you still trust the words that David was given in testimony?

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Or does that mean nothing to you? In 1946, when the Nazi, I suppose, we'd say those who were put in trial for war crimes, and there was a famous pastor called Henry Gerica.

He was a German, a Lutheran, American Lutheran. He was a German speaker. Anyway, it went through every one of the war criminals who were condemned to death. Some, it seems, had made a profession of faith.

We can't deny that. But he came to one of them. You'll have heard of him, Hermann Goering. And he spoke about eternal matters to Hermann Goering. And he asked, Gerica asked Goering what his attitude was to eternity.

And Goering's response was this, I'll take my chances. I'll take my chances. Now, eternity has got nothing to do with taking your chances.

[26 : 11] It's all to do with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for you, the one who came from heaven to earth, so that it was possible for you to know eternal life in his presence, so that when you do go through that valley of the shadow, that dark valley, you won't fear if you'll have that comfort of the Lord's presence with you as you enter your eternal rest.

That really leads us to our last point about the believer's rest. Because notice the way that David in verse 5 here in Psalm 23 as he moves the metaphor from shepherd really to another picture.

And this time, notice, he's addressing God as you. In fact, even before verse 5, verse 4, he said, you are with me. Verse 5, you prepare a table before me.

You anoint my head with oil. See, up to this point, he's been speaking of the Lord as he. Now, he's addressing his relationship, his secure relationship with God the Lord.

He's saying that, you know, I have that secure relationship with you, Lord. It's never going to be broken in life or death. And it's that relationship that David expresses in this last section of the Psalm, the section that tells of God blessing him.

[27 : 40] And the blessing that David speaks of in verse 5 and 6, it's a feast, a blessing of a feast, a blessing of anointing and the blessing of fullness. This feast, in all likelihood, would have been a feast of victory.

you know, when a victorious king came back from battle and had a great feast and celebration, even those he defeated would be watching on from the side.

An anointing from aught with oil. Again, it happened at these feasts. The fragrant oil poured on the heads of those who were the guests. This, creating this pleasant atmosphere.

The overflowing cup of wine. As we read there, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. This overflowing cup telling of the generosity of the host. And we can bring that into application.

The Lord gives his children. Because you know that victory in the Lord Jesus. You know that the good shepherd came to make it possible for you to know that victory over sin and Satan and ultimately death itself.

[28 : 52] He's given you that new life. He's given you that anointing, that anointing of the Holy Spirit that tells of the fragrance of God's love towards you. That you are that sweet smelling sacrifice of praise to God.

The cup running over, it tells of that, the generosity, the magnificent generosity of God, the generosity of his love towards you. Just what we were thinking of a moment ago and we're thinking of Christ as all in all.

Jesus, he who is Christ has all he needs and needs no more. My cup overflows. That's that overflowing love that's given in abundance so that you can truly echo the words that David concludes in the psalm.

Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That's the believer's rest. That's the rest that the believer knows in these paths of righteousness and the goal of these paths, the goal of heaven itself.

You know, this time of year, there are many ways we look back. We look back over a year that's almost over. Yes, there have been trials and there have been sadnesses and the ongoing pandemic has created such a terrible strain in life itself.

[30 : 22] Can't you still say that God is good? That God has been merciful? That goodness and mercy, his goodness and mercy have never left you? That even in the most difficult days that you've known, that you can still say that you're resting in the love of God and that you have mercy and shall follow all the days of my life.

Are you resting in the love of the Good Shepherd even in expressing that truth? Even, even at this time of year because as we know even at this time of year so many of us traditions are being cast aside.

Certainly, as I said, it was quite incredible coming to church this evening and the immensity of the triviality all around. But even, as we're knowing that scaling down even of the carol services this year.

But the Christmas message of hope in the Lord Jesus, that can never be trivialised, never be abandoned. It's that great message that helps you to know that your true rest is in him.

He's come. He's come to save you. And he's gone. He's come to save you and he's gone to prepare a place for you. Where has he prepared that place? In his Father's house in heaven.

[31 : 45] So rest in that world. And only in the world of the Lord.

Yes, Jesus, worshipped by human shepherds 2,000 years ago and continually worshipped through the centuries. Will be so until Jesus returns.

And in the glory of the new heaven and new earth that continued worship of the Lord Jesus, the one who is our shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, we give you praise. We give you thanks. thanks. That we can truly say that goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

May that be true of everyone here this evening. Worshipping from this building, worshipping from home, worshipping later on. May there truly be that resonance of joyful sound that the Lord is my shepherd.

[32 : 56] Hear us, Lord, as we continue in praise before you now. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.