

The Lord is our Shepherd

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[0 : 00] I shall not want. I suppose of all the 150 Psalms in the Book of Psalms, Psalm 23 is probably the most well-known.

We sing it at weddings, we sing it at funerals, and the version we were singing there, the old 1650 version, the Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want. Certainly these words, they used to trip off the tongue of so many in Scotland and even around the world.

And of course we have to say, sadly, that's no longer the case. Other versions of Psalm 23 have certainly become more popular, even the version we're going to sing at the end, the more modern Psalms version, a delightful version.

Some of you know the Stuart Townend version of Psalm 23, true to Scripture. This psalm is certainly a dear place in our own hearts, certainly in our own church's tradition.

Some of you, of course, know that probably the, you have to say, the greatest series of addresses, certainly on the Psalm, certainly in the modern era, it was by the late Douglas Macmillan, the late free church minister.

[1 : 16] And it so happens exactly 40 years ago at the annual conference of the evangelical movement of Wales and in Aberystwyth, Douglas gave a series of addresses on this psalm.

And he gave these addresses not simply as a minister, but also the fact that he had been a shepherd in North Argelshire in Arne-Murchen. And his, if you ever get the little book, *The Lord is My Shepherd*, please get it, please read it.

Because Douglas gives a great insight into the psalm having been a shepherd. But of course you don't need to have been a shepherd to appreciate the sheer magnificence of the psalm.

You know, we can all derive a blessing, and much blessing, and much help, from the psalm that speaks of the Lord's great comfort to his people, to his flock.

And, well, this is the third of our psalms. We'll be looking at what we call generally psalms for a summer evening. And, you know, we're better to find a repose, and a rest, and a comfort, and a blessing than to contemplate and to dwell in this psalm.

[2 : 25] It's a psalm of trust. It's a psalm that enables you to look to the Lord, your shepherd, to look to the Saviour, and look, yes, to look to the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the one, as we read in John 10, the one who laid down his life for his flock.

And, yes, you and I will have sung this psalm many, many times, thousands of times, perhaps. But we can, the meaning of the psalm, it can never be exhausted, surely not certainly from our own finite understanding.

But there's always something new to glean from, you know, from taking it time to reflect on what God has given us through, through his word, through his precious word, even in this psalm.

And I pray that none of you will leave this building, that we're empty, but you'll have been filled with something of the beauty of the Lord, who's our shepherd. You'll see, in fact, that the psalm actually is, well, the psalm is in two parts.

We're going to look at the first part, God willing, this evening, and next Lord's Day evening, look at the second part. The first part, certainly for the first four verses, that speak of God our shepherd, the Lord our shepherd who cares for his flock.

[3 : 42] And then the second metaphor from verse 5, 5 and 6, God, if you like God, the host, who cares for his guests, who cares for his friends.

But this evening, because there's so much within even these first four verses, just this evening, let's look at God, the shepherd, who cares for his flock. As we said, it's a psalm of David, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Of course, you know that David himself, David was taken from shepherding sheep, physically shepherding sheep, to shepherding the people of Israel as king.

He was Israel's shepherd king. And yet, in the psalm, as you see, David acknowledges a greater shepherd than he. I mean, David himself, he tended sheep, he'd cared for his sheep, he'd provided for them, he'd nourished them, as he did as king of Israel, in the same manner to provide, to care for the people that God had given him.

As you see in the psalm, David recognizes there's one greater than he is, one who is his shepherd. And so clear, certainly in this psalm, certainly in the first four verses.

[5 : 01] Let's take time to consider what David says of the Lord. And what do we see here right at the start? We see the greatness of God.

Because you know in the Bible, we see so many symbolic references to God, God and the way that he deals with his people. And these references help you to capture the very love and the very grace of God towards us.

I mean, for example, there are times when God's referred to us as king. You know, when his power and his majesty and his sovereign rule over the nations are emphasized, then God is referred to us as king.

Other times, God's referred to us as a rock or even a shield to emphasize how God is utterly reliable, utterly strong, in whom we can find a refuge.

But notice here, God's referred to us as shepherd. And what's happening here, surely, is this emphasis in God's closeness to his people, God's care for his people, God's provision for his church, God's guidance, God's protection.

[6 : 14] And you know, this theme, this theme of God's nearness, that intimate care, that's surely what we're reflecting on when we're told that the Lord is my shepherd.

Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth. You know, that our God and king, that God should even stoop to compare himself with a humble shepherd.

You know, that should fill you with awe and praise. The Lord, the covenant God of Israel. The Lord who made that eternal covenant of faithfulness with his people, that he should even have that desire to be compared with what he has formed in creation.

Surely that should bring into your heart a wonder, the wonder of his grace towards you. This is our great God. This is God so great, if you like, so big enough that he's been compared and compares himself to a menial shepherd.

That should bring joy to your heart as you worship him in his presence. He is Lord. He's God. He's the God of all grace. And you see that even in God being a shepherd.

[7 : 29] The shepherd. My shepherd. As David tells us there in verse 1. So, here's David telling us, immediately telling us of his personal trust in God.

He's telling, yes, he has that secure relationship with his covenant Lord. And David knows that he's got that incredible privilege that God knows David.

And David knows God. So, David's affirming that he has that secure relationship with God, that relationship that can never be broken. So, right at the start of this psalm, these words of trust, David wants to tell those who are going to sing from these words, he wants to tell those who are going to read from these words, that this is the basis of his trust.

The Lord is his shepherd. And that bond is there, that bond that can never be severed. And the bond that's expressed in these opening words. And, you know, it's so important, I think, to read these words in the original language.

If, you know, if you're able to do so, of course. But, you know, when you read the original text, the opening words after the psalm of David, you just see, psalm of David, Lord.

[8 : 41] David, Lord. The two names go together. And, you know, that emphasizing, that closeness of the relationship that David has with his covenant Lord.

And, you know, nothing, nothing coming between David and God. And that expression of that eternal relationship with David and God because of the Lord God's eternal love for David.

And you who are a Christian, you who know the Lord as your Savior, put your name beside our Savior. You have that relationship, that eternal relationship with our Heavenly Father, with the Lord Jesus, with God the Lord.

So, David, Lord. The two names together emphasizing that nearness, that closeness of God with David, with, of course, bring that to application to ourselves, with God, with you who know Him as

Lord.

But then there's something else that comes out of the passage that's really, truly amazing about our Lord. I mean, we're told here that He's David's shepherd.

[9 : 50] Yes, that's clear. But again, in the original language, it's really quite precise. We're told, the Lord is my, well, the Lord is my shepherding one.

It's a verb. It's not a noun. It's a verb. The Lord is my shepherding one. And this verb, the shepherding one, it comes from the words to pasture or to tend, to look after.

And if it's a verb, of course, you know a verb speaks of action. So here, David is affirming that God is acting towards His people. God's action is real towards His people, towards His flock.

It's not that merely, that God's merely a shepherd, a shepherd by name. But He's a shepherd in action. So that God is directly involved with His people.

In other words, God's not remote. God's not some kind of distant deity. No, He's with His people.

And if the shepherding one, therefore, asks one who tends His flock, who pastures His people, God looks after the needs of His people, His flock, and care, and provision, and the one to whom you can put your absolute trust in.

[11 : 11] God is not far away. God is active with His church, with His people. He's near you. He's near this congregation. He's near God's people, wherever they are. And you know Him.

And you know Him by faith in the Lord Jesus. So, the very fact that the Lord is David's shepherd in one, in fact, as David says, my shepherd in one, my shepherd. I mean, again, you're seeing that relationship affirmed.

It's not that, you know, David has written, the Lord is the one who shepherds Israel, shepherds his church. Well, of course, that's true. But here, the personal's been brought here.

We're seeing God's amazing love for sinners, for you, and for me. I mean, have you ever observed shepherds? Well, I lived four years in the Isle of Barra, believe it or not.

And my neighbour was a shepherd. And that neighbour knew every single one of his sheep, from the early lambs to the older sheep. I couldn't identify most of these sheep individually, but my neighbour knew every single one of these sheep.

[12 : 22] He knew. I didn't know. And, you know, when you think of the individual care that we see that the Lord God gives to His people individually, you can truly see, yes, the Lord is my shepherd, my shepherding one, that I can truly say of Him, He is my shepherd.

He knows me. I know Him. He knows me, and He loved me first before even I knew Him. You can say these words as a believer. You know, even as we read in God's Word further, I mean, that person relationship that God has with His children.

In Galatians 2, for example, Paul writes, we, the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

And it's that relationship that the believer has with, yes, with the Saviour, with the Lord Jesus, then that surely points to that status that our Saviour has in His work as shepherd.

Because, yes, many times the Old Testament points, surely, to the Lord Jesus. So when Jesus, as we read there in John 10, when Jesus claimed to be the good shepherd, when He said, I am the good shepherd, He was affirming His divinity.

[13 : 45] I mean, the shepherd motif that you read in the Old Testament where, well, more than just in Psalm 23 on a number of occasions, God was referred to us as shepherd.

Well, Jesus in that shepherd motif, Jesus, of course, is claiming for Himself that divine care, that compassion, that provision, that protection for all who are His.

And so, that knowledge that the Lord is my shepherd, my shepherding one, that personal relationship that you have with the Lord Jesus as your shepherd, the good shepherd, then you can echo the words that David has here as he continues in verse 1, I shall not want, I shall not want, I lack nothing.

I mean, here is David expressing his faith. We might even say his forward-looking faith. He knows that the Lord is his shepherd and he knows he will lack nothing there, then, and in future.

He knows that God cares for him there and then. And David is affirming that, yes, he knows that God will care for him continually. Yes, today and tomorrow and for all eternity.

[15 : 02] It's a present reality. God's care. David knows God has always cared for him. There's never been a moment when God hasn't cared for David. And David knows as you who love him know the Lord and the Saviour know God doesn't change.

His present care is as his past care as will be as future care of you. Again, we can see this so it's evident in Scripture itself.

Remember when Moses was addressing the children of Israel, remember after the Israelites had spent 40 years in the desert, they'd been wandering in the desert. And Moses said to the people, the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands.

He knows you're going through this great wilderness. These 40 years the Lord your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing. You have these words that David echoed there in Psalm 23. I have lacked nothing. I mean, the Israelites had lacked nothing. God had never given them up these 40 years. Even the rebellion against them.

[16:10] God didn't give them up. God led them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They'd never lacked God's provision even in the desert, even by the manna, even by the water, even in all that God gave them and fed them.

He clothed them, He brought them into the promised land as God had promised. And, you know, here we're hearing David echoing these words that Moses gave to the people of Israel. The people of Israel had lacked nothing in their wilderness journey.

And in your wilderness journey, you, who are in Christ, lack nothing. You can say these words, I am, I shall not want, I am not in want.

And when you look to God, when you know Him as your Lord and Savior, you know that you lack nothing in terms of His care for you, of His love for you.

His love is never diminished. His protection of you never weakened. The same God who promised David never to leave him, the same God who promised to care for David, is the same God who's promised to be with you always.

[17:21] And as Jesus said, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age. And, so these words that we see here, even this very first line of the psalm, these are words of trust for you and I to dwell on, to meditate on, and to praise God for.

Because, you know, as you utter them, as you utter them by faith, well, delight in that knowledge that the Lord is, as you can say, my shepherding one.

Therefore, I shall like nothing. But, you know, is that the reality of your heart in your daily life? Do you truly find that He is your all-sufficiency?

That you're, you're, that you're nothing to desire other, other than Him? Are there times even in a Christian's life when you're tempted to be even dissatisfied with God's provision for you?

and these temptations that Satan sows in your heart to make you think that, well, somehow you're missing something, that somehow God has left something out of your life and you're tempted to think that you lack something that you think should be yours, maybe particular talents or particular possessions or maybe the occupation that you have or maybe the kind of personality that you have and you see others have a particular personality you want and so on, others have gifts that you think the Lord should have given you and, no, no, what does Peter say?

[18:52] What does Peter affirm? 2 Peter 1.3, His divine power has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness. You lack nothing.

You in Christ lack nothing. And David can affirm and he can, he's so confident when he says, I shall not want, I shall lack nothing. And, how does he prove that?

Well, he proves it in, I think it's six ways. He gives examples of how he knows that he lacks nothing that we see from verses 2 to verse 2 to verse 4.

And let's just take these examples that David gives to prove that he lacks nothing, that he is not in want. Let's look at verse 2 where David says, he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters.

So here's David now giving himself a picture of a sheep. He knows that he's a sheep that's cared for by a shepherd. He knows that he's well looked after.

[19:59] He knows that he has a good shepherd who cares for him. And that shepherd takes the initiative in his care. The shepherd knows what's best for that sheep. So what do we find in that initiative of the good shepherd?

He makes the sheep lie down. In other words, the sheep is contented. The sheep doesn't fear because the sheep's been cared for, fully fed. It's not been harassed by wild animals.

The sheep is safe. And then we're told that he leads the sheep beside still waters. And the words lifted are waters of rest. David is saying, this is God who's given me that security and safety that I

desperately need.

And you know, think of that initiative of God as your shepherd. Think of his complete care for you and yes, for his complete care of his flock, of his people.

Think of that truth that you who know him are the object of his gracious care. And so, when that's the case, be still and know that God is God.

[21 : 06] We read elsewhere in Scripture, I have loved you with an eternal love. And here's David giving this picture of the God who truly cares, the God who is the God of peace, who gives his people peace through his love.

And yes, we can say this, that the good shepherd, yes, will give you that peace, even in the midst of many troubles. and that he will guide you and lead you, yes, to know that rest even in the Lord Jesus.

That peace, that rest, that, well, that many a believer can testify to even in the midst of many troubles. Think of what Job said, though he slay me, yet I will trust in him.

And here in Psalm 23, these words of certainly even verse 2, I brought comfort to so many believers and yes, in particular times of trouble. Even in the difficult providences of God, the frowning providences.

Within these frowning providences, you can find a rest and know a rest, a resting in the Lord that God is with you, that he is your shepherd, that he is your pastor.

[22 : 23] I mean, this pastoral scene that you've got here, that God is the pastor, or the same word that pastor comes from the word pasture. I mean, someone who cares for others, who tends others.

Here's a picture of our God as the true pastor, our pastor. So, when you're anxious, when you're lacking that trust in our Lord and Saviour, well, it can happen, it does happen.

Well, turn to the words of Scripture. Turn to these words of comfort. Look at what God is saying to you through this Psalm that you can't and do have that rest in the Lord.

And, as we see there in verse 3, this, again, David giving this evidence that he lacks nothing. He's telling of a soul, his soul being restored. I mean, he's lacking nothing from the hand of God.

He restores my soul. I mean, what's David saying here? Well, this sense of restore has the meaning of bringing back. Bringing back.

[23 : 24] He, literally, he brings back my soul. That's when we sing that the Sing Sam's version, it's, I have to say, it's spot on. My wandering steps he brings back to his way.

Isn't the suggestion here in verse 3 that somehow David has wandered, he's backslidden and God has brought him back. And, here's this testimony from David.

David, it's a testimony, it's surely the testimony of every believer. Yes, when we wander from God, whether it be in our thoughts or words or actions, we're backslidden away from the narrow path that God requires of us in obedience.

And God restores us. He brings us, he brings you back in his way. Yes, when we wander. And, you know, we can be so like these sheep that wander into ravines and places of danger and literally have to be brought back by the shepherd.

I remember when I lived in Skye, I remember fishing in the Skabos River. Some of you know where that is, I'm sure. And I remember once seeing this sheep in a very precarious ledge. It was more a lamb than a sheep.

[24 : 35] But I have no idea how that lamb got there. But the only way it could have been brought back, as it were, to safety, well, it wasn't by its own initiative. If it jumped, it was into the river, it would have died.

But that sheep needed to be brought back from its wandering way. It had to be done by its shepherd. And how much more, you know, ourselves, when we do wander off and you get yourself into difficult positions, spiritual danger on every side.

And we need to be brought back by the love and the grace of God. And that's what we see there in verse, the restored soul, the brought back soul. That person that's been brought back from wandering and where has he been put to?

He's been put, as we see there, into paths of righteousness. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. I mean, David, as we said, has evidently known a time of wandering.

He's wandered away from his shepherd, from his Lord. And it's only by God searching him and God restoring him, bringing him back, that he's able to carry on in his walk with God.

[25 : 50] He's been brought back to paths of righteousness. He's been back to the way of holiness. He's been brought back to that narrow way. And you who are in Christ, you know that's the only way, that way that Jesus spoke of, the narrow way that is the right way, the right path, the way that doesn't go to the danger areas.

Again, if you may, I go back to my fishing exploits and sky. I used to fish every Saturday. And I used to walk the hills to the best rivers. And the best paths to walk on in these hills, they were the sheep paths.

They weren't near dangerous edges. They were paths that had been trodden on for many, many years, maybe even hundreds of years. But they were the old paths. They were the paths that gave you security from falling and from real danger.

Of course, in the spiritual life, the life of the Christian, it's the old paths that give you that safety for your soul. What does Jeremiah say or what did he write in chapter 6 of his book?

That says the Lord, stand by the roads and look and ask for the ancient paths where the good way is and walk in it and find rest for your souls.

[27 : 09] And you see how all this is tied together. And here's David continually emphasizing that rest that he knows that he has in the Lord, the Lord who's his shepherd. And that rest that David knows is his in God's abiding care over him.

And he knows he's been brought back from his wandering ways to find rest in the Lord. He knows that the turmoil that's been in his soul is now at rest. God's rescued him.

Yes, he even rescued him from himself. And God has brought him back. He's restored his soul. He's been brought back to the paths of righteousness to the way of true rest for the weary sinner. You who know the good shepherd, the good shepherd of your soul, well, you walk on these ancient paths, these old paths because they're the right paths to keep you safe with a good shepherd beside you.

He's brought you by his initiative. He's brought you to these righteous paths, these good paths. And he's with you on that way. And notice, again, that the evidence that David lacks nothing, that the wandering paths that David's been kept from, the wandering way, he's been back, led to the paths of righteousness for his namesake.

[28 : 30] Because it's God's glory that we live for. It's God's great name that's to be honoured by his people, by his flock. When you walk in the way that God's given you, you're led by him in that right way, that way that leads to eternal life, that way that tells of the love of God for sinners.

So glorify him. Glorify his name. I mean, there's nothing higher than the name of God. Oh Lord, our Lord, as David is, for Sam, I said in Sam 8, how excellent is your name in all the earth.

And for God to rescue lost sinners, it's for you to give glory to his name. What you do, you do for his name's sake.

And all the energy that you expend and you're living for him is to glorify his name, not your own name, for his name. And David can write here, then, as he carries on with this evidence that he lacks nothing, that as the Lord has been with him in life, he'll be with him in death.

He lacks nothing. Nothing in life and nothing in death, as you read there in 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.

[29 : 53] David's not afraid of death. He knows that, yes, the Lord, his shepherd's been with him on the paths of righteousness.

And he knows that these paths that he's walked on, these paths, yes, they'll lead through the valley, the valley, the shadow of death. And David knows there is nothing to fear.

Why? Because the good shepherd, his shepherd, will protect him through that valley. The shepherd, the Lord, his shepherd, has protected him in life.

David knows that when he departs this life and enters into the glory of heaven, God is with him.

These paths that David speaks of there, the paths of righteousness, the right paths, yes, even these are paths that walk through the valley of death.

Even these are the right paths. When you walk on that path that leads to the glory of heaven, to that place of eternal rest, you know your rest in him.

[31 : 01] And yes, the paths of righteousness, the path of the valley and the shadow of death.

David's saying, you are with me. Your presence is with me. And you know, that very language itself, it brings out that great comfort for you who believe, you who trust, you who know the Lord as your

God and Saviour.

And yes, even through walking through the valley of the shadow of death, even David using the shepherd in imagery to speak of the power of God that David knows that's going to protect him even in death.

That's why he gives these illustrations there of the rod and the staff, the shepherd's rod, that implement that the shepherd used to ward off dangers, you know, things like wild animals.

And again, that speak of the power of God to defeat the enemy, the ultimate enemy, the enemy of death. That David's soul will be brought into eternal life.

And then the shepherd's staff, the stick that the shepherd used to walk on, to walk securely on, that imagery that points to the, you know, the steadfast love of God that, well, as David says, will keep him secure, will lead him to glory, to be with God and to see his shepherd face to face.

[32 : 19] And if David can write these words with that confidence that the Lord will keep his soul even in death, and for you who love the Savior, you maintain that confidence in him who promises you that he is with you always, that his presence goes with you.

for some here in the congregation, yes, even the reminder of death has been very real. But this psalm, this psalm, this breathed out word of God gives each and every one of you who know him, you know that you have that sure hope of salvation, how?

Through the love of the good shepherd. And your great comfort as a Christian, you know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, your great comfort is in the shepherding one, the one who feeds you, the one who nourishes you, the one who protects you in life and protects you even in death.

And you have that great assurance of resurrection and the promise of the Lord's return when he gathers his flock to bring his flock, his people into the new heavens and the new earth.

And again, you see the whole of Scripture revealing that truth because in that new heaven and new earth, in that new Jerusalem, the good shepherd will continue to be the good shepherd.

[33 : 51] You read in the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, that vision that John had of that new heavens and new earth. We read in Revelation 7, 17, for the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd.

And he will guide them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

And I pray that God will grant you that breath, that you will know him as shepherd, that you'll be able to echo these words of David, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

If there are any here this evening who doesn't know the Lord as your shepherd, listen to these words. Listen to what David has written. Listen to the words that we've sung before in the service and we'll be singing again.

May it be that you put your trust in him as your shepherd, that he'll lead you in his paths of righteousness forever. Amen.

Let us pray. Lord, me to... we pray. ...