

Is the Lord Your Shepherd?

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[0 : 00] The Christian is the most blessed person amongst all of his peers. He may not have all that this world has to offer, but yet he is the richest.

He may not be where he wants to be, but yet he is in the best place he could be. He may be in danger, and yet he is the safest of all, and he has the happiest future beyond all imagination. The Christian is like a baby who has just inherited the throne as king. All he knows is his cot and his toys, and yet he is the richest in the land.

He is vulnerable and needs to be looked after, and yet he is the safest and most guarded person there is. All he cares about is his mother's milk, and yet he has the brightest future ahead of him. Now, how can I say these things? I can say these things with a firm confidence because Psalm 23 is in our Bibles. In this psalm, King David is describing the relationship that he has with God, and he tells of God's unending kindness towards him.

[1 : 20] David uses two pictures to describe this. He uses the imagery of a shepherd, and he does this in verses 1 to 4. And then in verses 5 to 6, he uses the imagery of a host and his guest.

In this psalm, we see that God provides, he protects, he guides, he cares, he's generous, and he is loving, and his love is unending. And all of this is based and founded on one thing, and that is found in verse 1.

And it's those words, it says, the Lord is my shepherd. And so the first thing we notice in this psalm then is that the Lord is David's shepherd. And it's because of this that everything else in this psalm is true.

It's because Yahweh, which is the name of God represented by the capitalized Lord in our translations, it's because Yahweh is his shepherd. The God of all the earth is the one who provides for him and protects him and guides him.

And so because this is true, because Yahweh is his shepherd, everything else in the psalm is true. He writes, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

[2 : 39] Because of this, therefore that. It's basic logic, he has God, what more does he need? God is his shepherd, and so everything else is taken care of.

David himself was a shepherd, of course. And before he came king, this was what he spent his time doing, looking after sheep. And so he knew what it meant to be a shepherd.

And in the same way, as he looked after sheep, he's saying that God looks after him. And of course, in that short phrase, there is much security and comfort that the Lord is my shepherd.

And as one author points out, he also shows intimacy. Just how a shepherd is close to his sheep and looks after them. And even in the night, in the Middle East, in the times of the New Testament, he would sleep beside his sheep to protect him from wolves.

In the same way, David's saying that God is close and intimate with his sheep. He knows him by name, and he calls them out one by one. In the Middle East, the shepherds would spend all their time with their sheep.

[3 : 54] It's not like today, where they're kept in barns and fields, particularly in the West. But the shepherd would be with them, and they would follow their shepherd, and he would lead them to grass and to water.

And this, of course, is the imagery which we have just seen, which is used by Jesus in John's Gospel in chapter 10, where he says that the sheep know him, and they know the shepherd's voice, and they follow him.

But what's even greater, and all that's been said so far, is that this shepherd, the shepherd took on a human body and laid down his life for the sheep, that they may know this intimacy, and that they may be his sheep.

So that the child of God can say, the Lord is my shepherd. Jesus said these words, didn't he, in John chapter 10, verse 11, which we've just read. I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus is the shepherd. Of course, God, in all of his being, is the shepherd. Father, Son, and Spirit, the triune God.

[5 : 07] We believe that God is a trinity. God is the believer shepherd. But as we look at the New Testament, we see that Jesus is called the shepherd multiple times. In Hebrews 13, verse 20, he is called the great shepherd.

In 1 Peter 5, verse 4, he's called the chief shepherd. And of course, in John's Gospel, Jesus calls himself the shepherd. And so before we go any further into the psalm this evening, we must consider the question of all questions.

And that is, do you know him this evening? Do you know the shepherd? Is Jesus your shepherd? Have you been found by him and brought into the fold of God?

Are you still lost like a sheep without a shepherd? If so, then come to him and put your trust in him. Call upon him to save you and to bring you into the fold.

Because as we are about to see, he is the best shepherd we could ever have. And to reject him is the height of absurdity. Jesus is the best shepherd we could ever have.

[6 : 16] And to reject him is the height of absurdity. And if God is your shepherd this evening, then everything we see in this psalm before us is true of you.

Just how he did these things for David, he also does and will do for you. And so the first thing we see then is that he provides for his sheep.

David writes in verse 2, he makes me lie down in green pastures and he leads me beside still waters. And so firstly, we see that he provides for his sheep's physical needs, such as food and water and all that they need.

In the Middle East, a place where grass and water are not easy to come by, of course, which is because of the hot climate, it was a shepherd's job to lead the sheep to water and to grass.

They would follow him and he would find for them all that they need in order to survive. And in the same way, King David is saying that God provides for him. Just how a shepherd provides for his flock, God provides for him.

[7 : 24] But in this verse, we also get a picture of safety as the sheep lies down in pasture and it's led beside still waters. Not rough waters, but still waters.

God provides for his flock. And not only for their physical needs, such as safety and food and drink, but also for their spiritual needs. And of course, we see this in verse 3.

It says, he restores my soul. Now, this can either mean that he strengthens me or invigorates me physically, or it could be pointing to a spiritual restoring and refreshing.

And the thing is, either one can be true because they're both a job of our great shepherd. And so whether King David felt weak physically or drained spiritually, God was the one who restored him and God was the one who kept him going in the faith to which he had called him.

And the final way we see that God provided for David was through guidance. Just how a shepherd would guide his sheep to safety and he would keep them on the right path.

[8 : 34] So God guided David. He arrives at the end of verse 3. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his own namesake. And so God was the one who guided King David.

And he led him in paths of righteousness. God doesn't just save his sheep and leave them to wander aimlessly, but he guides them. And he does this, notice it says, for his own namesake, which we could translate as for his own glory.

And so he doesn't save his sheep and guide them for their namesake or for their glory, but rather for his own glory. And now this brings us great assurance of his faithfulness, because not only has he saved us for his glory, but he's also guiding us for his glory.

And it means that he is faithful because his name is on the line. His glory is on the line. I guess we can use a similar picture of a mother duckling leading her chicks to safety and to water, feeding them and guiding them.

Except the one who does so for the people of God is not a mother duckling, but almighty God. The one for whom nothing is impossible.

[9 : 53] The one who spoke and all things came into existence. This is the provider and the guide of the Christian. If the Lord is your shepherd, because Jesus is your saviour, then everything that David declares is true of himself is true of you too.

The one who governs all things is your provider. Just how he provides for the birds of the air, so he will provide for you.

I once watched a documentary about the church in China, and it consisted of testimonies of all different Christians throughout China, especially during the time of persecution and just how God preserved his church there.

But there was one lady, an old Christian lady, who was sharing about how God had provided for her and her family when she was younger. She was, of course, a Christian, a young lady.

And it was during a time of great persecution, and her husband had been put into prison for being a Christian. And so she was left on her own to look after her children. She had no job.

[11:04] And soon they had no money and no food. But she prayed for God to provide. And each morning she would open her door, and someone left a bag of rice on her doorstep anonymously in the night, every night until her husband was released.

The great shepherd provides for his sheep. He would also give you strength and to help you keep going on, both physically and spiritually.

Just how he restores David, so he restores all of his sheep. He will also guide you. Maybe you're worrying about what you should do in a certain situation, where you should live or work.

We can trust that God has saved us and that he has a plan, and that his plan is perfect, and that his plan will come to pass. And so he will make clear his will in his own time.

And we have to trust the sovereign hand of God and trust him to guide us. Trust his guiding kind of just like a sheep. Trust the guidance of his shepherd and follows wherever he leads.

[12:10] God is this great shepherd. But not only does the shepherd provide us, as David declares, but he also protects. God protects.

God protects. And we see this in verse 4. In this verse, we see the circumstance. We see David's response. And we see the reason why this is David's response.

And so the circumstance is walking through the valley of the shadow of death. And this possibly refers to the dark valleys that there were in the desert, which shepherds had to walk through at the risk of robbers or dangerous animals hiding in the shadows.

And he had to walk through these in order to get to water or to grass. And so some take this to mean troubles and trials of the Christian life.

Another is to mean literally death itself. But again, either or possible because both are circumstances where God is with his sheep. And so they do not need to fear.

[13:10] So the circumstance is danger or death. And yet David's response is that whatever happens, I will fear no evil. In other words, whatever comes my way, I will not fear.

I will not be afraid. And the reason why is because God is with him. He says, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

And then he continues the shepherd imagery and he speaks of his shepherd's rod and staff comforting him. And so the shepherd in those days would have a rod or a club for warding off attackers and dangerous animals.

And he would have a staff, which would be for his own support as he walked, but also to help a sheep get free, say that it got stuck. He would either hook it around his neck or pull it under his belly and help it to get free.

And in the same way that they brought comfort to the sheep, as the rod brought safety and the staff stability and guidance, it was also a reminder of the shepherd's presence as he went on ahead of them.

[14:16] God was with him. And so he didn't need to fear trials or even death itself. King David's saying, just like our sheep is protected by their shepherd, I'm protected by my shepherd.

And therefore, he didn't need to fear. The Victorian pastor, Charles Spurgeon, he highlights the difference that God's presence makes when he shares in his autobiography two people who died when he was called to their side, both in the same morning.

And so one was a man who didn't know God, but had rejected him all of his life and even mocked Spurgeon regularly and called him a hypocrite. Spurgeon records this.

He went to visit the man who was called to his side and he said, I spoke again, for the only consciousness he had was of a foreboding of terror, mingled with the stupor of approaching death. He records that he went on to obviously die more or less straight away. Of course, he died with no hope and no shepherd to guide him home.

[15 : 24] He died a lost sheep. Spurgeon is then called home and he records the death of another believer in the same day. One who could say the Lord is my shepherd.

He writes these words. He concludes with these words.

He says, I never saw more conspicuously in my life than I did that morning. The difference there is between the one who fears God and the one who does not fear him.

And in the same way that David wasn't afraid for God was with him and that woman who Spurgeon visited wasn't afraid of death, neither should we be afraid of what may come because we have no reason to, because God is with us.

Even if we die, God is with us. He is our shepherd. He will guide us through trial. His presence is with us and nothing can separate us from him.

[16 : 46] The apostle Paul writes at the end of Romans 8, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Of course, this is a rhetorical question. He then lists all these circumstances, persecution, tribulation, famine, and so on.

And then he says these words. He says, no, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. We don't need to fear what life may bring because our shepherd is with us, providing for us, guiding us and protecting us.

And so whatever does happen, we can be sure of two things. Whatever happens, whether good or bad, we can be sure of two things. God is with us and God has a plan.

God has a plan in the good and the bad. In the same way that a shepherd would lead his sheep through dangerous territory in order to get to green pasture and still waters.

So God leads us through trials and even death itself. So that good can come. Of course, we all know the well-known passage.

[17 : 54] And we know that all things work together for good. To those that love God. To those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8, verse 28.

And so when we hear the bad news from work or from the bank or from the doctor, we can say, I will fear no evil for you are with me. We just have to trust our great shepherd.

And we know that he loves us. Because remember, Jesus said, I am the good shepherd. I laid down my life for the sheep. So we just have to trust his guiding hand.

And so we see that God is the best shepherd there is. And this shepherd came in the person of Jesus and laid down his life for the sheep.

But we also see that God is the best host. And we see this in the final two verses of our psalm. As King David, he changes the imagery from a shepherd and his sheep to a host and his guest.

[18 : 57] And so in these remaining verses, we really see God's care and goodness. David begins in verse 5 by saying, You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

This signifies that even in the midst of danger, God still provides and cares for those that are his. The picture is that of a host putting on a big spread for his guest, even as his enemies look on in envy.

And the picture continues expressing the sheer generosity and kindness of God. As he writes, You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

This is referring to the Middle Eastern customs where the host would pour oil on the guest's head. And he would fill the cup of the guest to overflowing as a sign of his kindness and his care and his love towards the guest.

And again, this is symbolic of God's care. One author writes, The cup handed at feasts was designed to cheer the guests. The Lord can give gladness in the darkest hour.

[20 : 07] Even though David's enemies surround him and trouble is on every side and the storms are present, still God is good to him and still God cares for him.

And then we come to the final of what I believe to be the best or one of the best verses in this psalm. Verse 6. And it says, Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

In this verse we come face to face with God's everlasting love and faithfulness. Notice it begins with the word surely, as if to say because of what's already been said, and has already come to pass, surely God will continue to show his goodness and mercy forever.

However, it's the same logic that the Apostle Paul uses in Romans 8, when he says, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for his all, will he not also freely give us all things?

Because of what God has already done, David can be sure that God's mercy and goodness shall follow him all the days of his life.

[21 : 25] God is unchanging, and God is all-knowing, and therefore if he has shown mercy and goodness to someone, it's because he intends to do so forever.

Forever. God will continue to provide for David, and he will continue to protect David, and he will do this forever. And David will know God's presence always, in this life and in the next.

And this of course is expressed by the final phrase, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Not only would he worship God and know his presence whilst he's on earth, but for all eternity. David will be with his shepherd for all eternity, forever. And there is no doubt that this verse is pointing to a greater reality, one which is reserved for the person who can say, the Lord is my shepherd.

David not only knew God's mercy whilst on earth, but he looked forward to the day when he would be in God's immediate presence, and he would never stop knowing the care and the love and the fellowship of this great shepherd.

[22 : 42] There's a song about looking forward to heaven, and it says these words. It says,

This is the hope and the certain reward of every Christian. Everything that has been said in this song, from God's provision, to his guidance, to his protection, and comfort even through trials, right through to heaven itself.

which of course is shown by this final words, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, right through to heaven itself. We look forward to the world that is to come.

And all of this, all of this can be said for the person who can say, the Lord is my shepherd.

Everything that King David describes is true of the Christian.

We can say, I shall not want, I shall not fear, I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And all these things a Christian can say, because they have God as their shepherd, and he is the best shepherd, and they have God as their host, and he is the best host.

[25 : 04] And so as I finish the message this evening, I would like to finish where I started. And that's with the question, do you know him this evening?

Do you know this great shepherd? Is he your shepherd? If he is, then you are happy, and you are blessed like that lady who died, who died smiling like it was her wedding day.

But if not, then you are in danger, and your worst danger is yet to come. For there is hope. The Bible says, whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, they shall be saved.

And so call out to this shepherd, and ask him to save you. Put your trust in Jesus, the good shepherd who laid down his life to save sin. And the Bible says, whoever calls upon the Lord shall be saved.

The Bible says that the whole of heaven rejoices over one sinner that repents. If we call upon the Lord, and he becomes our shepherd, then all these things are true for us.

[26 : 19] The Lord is my shepherd. I wonder, is he yours this evening? He is the best shepherd we could ever have. And he is the best host we could ever have.

And so I wonder, do we know him this evening? I'll just close in a word of prayer, and then we will sing Psalm 23.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your goodness towards us. We thank you, Father, that you sent your son, the good shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep, who died so that sinners can be reconciled back to yourself, so that we can know your love and your care, your guidance, your protection, so we can have a relationship with you, and spend all eternity with you.

And I just pray, Father, for all of us who can say those words, the Lord is my shepherd. I just pray, Father, that you help us to fully grasp and understand our standing before you, that we are forgiven, that we have you as our shepherd, Lord, that you protect us and guide us.

Help us, Lord, to fully trust in you, even through the bad times. Help us, Lord, to cast all our cares upon you, Father. And I pray for any who may be listening this evening, and as of yet, Lord, they cannot say that you are their shepherd.

[27 : 46] I just pray, Father, that you'll be working, that you'll be convicting people of their sin, and that you'll be drawing them to the Savior, Father. We know there's only a work that you can do, and we just pray, Lord, that you'll be at work this evening, Lord.

We love you, and we thank you. We thank you for bringing us into your fold. Lord, we could never praise you enough. We could never do enough, Father. But I just pray for each of us, who can say,

the Lord is my shepherd.

I pray, Father, that you help us to live lives, that glorify you, and honour you. Lives, Lord, that are worthy of our calling, Father. Do bless our time now, as we sing this final song, and as we go into our new week, Father, may we live lives, that are pleasing to you, Lord.

We love you, and we thank you. In Jesus' name, Amen. So we're going to sing our closing psalm now, Psalm 23.

Psalm 23.

[29 : 18] Psalm 23.

Within the paths of righteousness, In for His own name's sake, Nay, though I walk, For Thou art with me, And Thy rod, And staff me comfort still, My table Thou hast furnished, In presence of my foes, My head, My head, Thou dost with all our anoint, And like the power flows, Goodness and mercy, And mercy all my life, Shall surely follow me, And in the house forevermore, And in the house forevermore, My dwelling place shall be.

Now may the God of peace, Who brought again from the dead, Our Lord Jesus, The great shepherd of the sheep, By the blood of the eternal covenant, Equip you with everything good, And in the house, And in the house, And in the house, Working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, Through Jesus Christ, To whom be glory, For ever and ever.

Amen. Amen.