

The Lord my Shepherd

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Date: 30 October 2016

Preacher: Colin L Macleod

[0 : 00] Psalm 23. And we'll read this psalm together. And this is the psalm we're going to consider this morning.

Psalm 23. A well-known psalm. A shepherd psalm. 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. And my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

[1 : 02] And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23 is probably the best known psalm in the Bible.

It's probably one of the best known passages in the whole of the Bible. And it is relevant to be used. It is relevant to be read and sung in many, many different situations.

It's something that you'll find is sung often both at funerals and also at weddings. It's one of these scripture songs. It's one of these praise items that just seems to speak into every situation.

And as we gather here this morning to sit at the Lord's table, to remember the Lord's death. There's three things that we tend to do, to be doing when we're doing this.

We use this time to examine ourselves. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, Let a man or a woman examine themselves and so let them eat. So it's a time of examination.

[2 : 06] It's also a time of edification. Sitting at the table and listening to the word of God and observing the sacraments and partaking of the sacraments is something that's meant to teach us as well.

It's not merely experiential. We're meant to learn from this. It's a teaching experience. And also, sitting at the table and being here today is meant to encourage us.

We're meant to be encouraged. Jesus always made it clear that whoever would come to him, he would never, ever drive away. And shame on us if ever we present the gospel in such a way that would suggest that Jesus wants to drive people away.

He wants to encourage us. Encourage us to come to himself and encourage us to sit at the table. And so these three principles, examination and edification and encouragement, I think we have them all in Psalm 23.

As we look through Psalm 23 today, I hope we will be able to examine ourselves. Is there something in what we're seeing here that resonates with me, that assures me I'm a Christian?

[3 : 21] Is there something here that teaches me something new and wonderful, that'll teach me about Jesus and about myself and about the glory of salvation and about the privilege of sitting at the Lord's table?

And I hope, above all, that we will be encouraged. That we will be encouraged to remember this is the Lord's table. The Lord's heart is so full of love and it is wide to embrace the entire world so that anyone who wishes, anyone who wishes, can come and sit and celebrate what Jesus has done for them.

So I do ask, I do pray that today we'll have a time of examination and edification and encouragement as we go through Psalm 23. And really, friends, the whole of this sermon is, I would say, it's fencing the table.

It's setting out who should be here and what a blessing it is to sit at the table. What does this psalm tell us?

There's five movements or five principles, I think, in the psalm, Psalm 23. And they highlight different aspects of who Jesus is and the encouragement and blessing it is for us as Christians.
[4 : 41] First of all, the psalm tells us that Jesus is the good shepherd. And because he's the good shepherd, we can have confidence in Jesus.

Verse 1, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. David says, The Lord, he's my shepherd.

Nobody else is my shepherd except Jesus. In John chapter 10, Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd. He is the shepherd of Psalm 23.

He is the Lord. When we see that word, the Lord, in capital letters, it's not a title, friends. It's the name of God. God's name is Yahweh. And we translated the Lord in capital letters.

And so David is here saying that he has this intimate relationship with this shepherd, this good shepherd, this shepherd who is Jesus. He knows him intimately.

[5 : 41] He knows him by name. And he's got this confidence in this shepherd because he believes he's the only shepherd that can lead us and guide us. He's the only God that is worth worshipping and serving.

When Jesus said in John 10, I am the good shepherd, that one word, good, we would pass it by.

But do you remember in Mark chapter 10, I think it was, where the rich young ruler comes to Jesus and he says, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus said, why do you call me good? Why do you call me good? There is nobody good but God alone. So when Jesus says, I am the good shepherd, you know what he's saying?

I am God. I am the good one. I am the only God. I am the true God. There is no other God besides me. And when David says, the Lord is my shepherd, he is affirming his confidence in Jesus and in Jesus alone as his Lord and as his Savior.

Is that your affirmation today? Psalm 23 affirms Jesus is the good shepherd. Is your confidence in Jesus and in Jesus only?

[6 : 58] We're living in a world of pluralism. We're living in a world of relativism where there's nothing absolute. Where to say there is one way and one way only, to say there is one God, one through God and one through God only is deemed to be arrogant.

But we have to believe that. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father but by me. He is the only way. He is the only good shepherd.

And that might sound arrogant but it's not us that says it. It is Jesus that says it. He alone is the good shepherd.

There is no other shepherd to save us. There is no other shepherd to guide us. There is no other shepherd to lay down his life for us to make us right with God. It doesn't matter what anybody else says.

I want to ask you today, do you say that? Do you say that? Do you trust in this Jesus? Do you have confidence in this Jesus, this good shepherd as the one and only saviour of your soul?

[8 : 06] If you do, you can be assured that you have all that you need for the table. You have all that you need for time because if you have Jesus, you have everything.

And you have all that you need for eternity. If you don't, you really have nothing. But if you have him, if your confidence is in him, then you have all that you need.

The good shepherd, we have confidence in Jesus. The second aspect that the psalm draws out for our attention today about him is this. He is the giving shepherd and it focuses on the competence of Jesus.

Verses 2 to 3, 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 even for his own name's sake.

The giving shepherd which affirms the competence of Jesus. Do you know, we're living in a day, I think it's, I guess it's a sign of our age, some of us anyway, where if I go to the doctors or I go to, even if I see the police on the street or even on the news the other day I was watching this woman, an economic advisor and they all look so young.

[9 : 30] These people are looking younger and younger but I don't think it's that people in these positions, doctors, nurses, policemen, economic advisors are getting younger and younger. I think what's happening is that some of us are getting older and older.

It doesn't matter what somebody looks like, it doesn't matter what they look like whether they're young or not, no, what matters is this, can they do the job that they're meant to do? Are they

competent?

And I'm glad to say that most of the folk that I refer to there in my own experience are very competent indeed, despite their youthful looks.

Can they deliver? Can Jesus deliver? Is he competent? He absolutely is. This is what these verses tell us.

He makes me lie down, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul. Jesus is able to meet us at every point of need.

[10 : 32] He is the competent one. He restores my soul. He restores the weary soul, he restores the wandering soul.

So often our souls become weary. Some of us are tired today. Some of us are worn out today. Some of us are maybe nearly burnt out today. Such is life.

Such is life. We can sit here and we're in church and it's good to be in church, but we're all carrying heavy weights. We're all carrying bags and baggage. Emotionally and psychologically and historically for some of us and it weighs us down and we feel tired and we feel weary.

Jesus comes as the competent one and he restores our souls. He refreshes us. He really does. He's able to refresh us and restore us.

Isaiah 40 and 31 says that those that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will have their strength restored. And that is why we trust in this Jesus, this competent Jesus, this giving shepherd.

[11 : 41] He gives us what we need. Not what we want, but what we need. When our souls are weary, he lifts us up. When our souls are heavy, when our lives are heavy, he restores us.

Do you remember the apostle Paul? Paul had a weary soul. Paul had a weary life. We think Paul was a superman, but Paul was far from it.

Paul struggled. And in 2 Corinthians, he says, I pleaded with Jesus. Lord, take this thorn out of my flesh. We don't know what the thorn in the flesh was. Nobody knows.

And you can speculate, but you actually don't know. But we do know it was a thorn in the flesh. And that's why I think it was something physical. It was, it may have been, there may have been spiritual connotations or impacts, but I think it was something he struggled in his life.

Could have been a disability. It could have been something in his, in his family life or his personal life. It was fleshly. And when the Bible uses the word flesh, it's something about our body, our frame, our lives, not the soul.

[12 : 50] He was weary. And he didn't pray to the Lord. He pleaded. Jesus, please, he said, please take this from me. Three times.

And what did the Lord say to him? What did Jesus say to him? The Lord restored his soul. He gave him what he needed. He didn't take away the thorn in the flesh. He says, my grace is sufficient for you.

My strength is made perfect in weakness. Jesus is the giving shepherd. And he'll give us as much as we can cope with. And he won't always take away what we want to be taken away.

He restores our soul. He's competent to do it. Does that resonate with you today? That he's saying to you, my grace is sufficient for you.

Just need to keep going. My grace is sufficient for you. If he's saying that to you, he's restoring your soul. What about the wandering soul? He restores wandering souls.

[13 : 53] That's what the word restore really means. It's got the, it's from the verb to turn back, which we see, it's used in terms of repentance, to turn somebody back. He turns back wandering souls.

He restores wandering souls. Peter, the apostle, did he not in brokenheartedness deny Jesus? Didn't mean he wasn't a Christian, but he denied him three times.

So Jesus comes to him and three times he says to him, Peter, all I'm interested in is this, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?

That's what Jesus only wanted to know. And he restored Peter's soul. He restored him from his, his wandering steps. He had wandered away from the Lord.

And that's part of the beauty of coming to the table today is that Jesus is restoring us, restoring weary souls and restoring wandering souls.

[14 : 52] I think the Lord's table is a great place for fresh repentance. For, for, for a time for, for acknowledging we've wandered from him and he's bringing us back.

It focuses the mind. It focuses our lives on what it's really all about. On committing our lives to him who loved us and gave himself for us. This giving shepherd emphasizes the competence of Jesus as we come to the table.

Does that make sense to you today? Is that what Jesus is to you today? He's the good shepherd. He's the giving shepherd. Thirdly, he's the guiding shepherd, Psalm 23 tells us.

He's the guiding shepherd and this affirms that we have courage through Jesus. In verse 4, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because you're with me. You're rod and your staff, they comfort me. He guides us. He guides us in straight paths of righteousness, we're told in verse 3, but he also guides us in dark paths of difficulty.

[16:03] Do you know, just note this, friends, the dark paths are as much the paths of righteousness as the other paths, as the easy paths, if you like. Jesus is the guiding shepherd and because he guides us, we can have courage through him because his presence is with us.

Even though I pass through these dark valleys, you're with me, David says to Jesus. You're with me. These times of despair, these times of distress, and ultimately the darkest valley is the time of death.

That's the darkest valley of all. But we know that whatever dark valley or dark path we're walking on, he is with us.

He is not going to abandon us. Why? Because he's told us here, Psalm 27 tells us, the Lord is my light and my saving health.

Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. And you know this, friends, sometimes, well, it's not sometimes, in fact, it's all the times.

[17:19] The darker the background, the brighter the light. Am I right? The darker the background, the brighter a light shines. You look at the stars in the evening, when the night seems so dark, don't the stars seem to twinkle so much more brightly and clearer?

It's not that they are any brighter. It's just that sometimes the sky seems so dark. And the deeper our darkness and the darker our path, the brighter the light shines, the brighter Jesus shines for us. We need just to look to him. It's the only hope that we have. You know what it's like if you're ever in a really dark place. When you see a chink of light, when you just see a slither of light, immediately your attention is drawn to it.

A light behind a door, a light under a door, a light in a distance. You're thankful that at least there's light. And this is what Jesus is saying to us as our guiding shepherd.

We can have courage today to go through the darkest experiences because he is the light with us. And he's promised that that light will never be extinguished.

[18:32] And he's promised that that light will never be withdrawn. He's promised to stick by us and alongside us whatever the dark circumstances that we have might be.

And it's odd that at a time of communion, at a time of sitting at the Lord's table, we can be often plunged into darkness.

Do you know that? We can often find ourselves as if we're in darkness. And that is because spiritual forces of darkness in the heavenly realms are rousing their forces.

They're rousing an attack. They want to put people off coming to the table. They want to put people off professing faith in Jesus. So maybe today you've been wrestling maybe this morning with darkness.

Maybe you've had real struggles coming to church today. Maybe you've even thought I don't know if I'm going to sit at the table. And especially can I say to those of you who are sitting at the table the first time something in you will be saying I hope I have a brilliant experience.

[19:38] And if you don't have a great experience you might go away thinking maybe I'm not saved after all. Maybe it's all wrong. Don't listen to that voice. Because you know that the reason you're at the table is because you've seen the light literally.

You've seen the light you've seen Jesus and you're following him. And that's all you need to do.

Jesus this guiding shepherd this light gives us courage because his presence is always with us. and his protection has afforded us. Your rod and your staff they comfort me. I want us to think of this today we often think of shepherds as we think of them in whimsical ways.

We have these idyllic views of shepherds as being pleasant and gentle and lovely and nice. Friends Jesus here talking about having a rod and a staff to pick shepherds were tough tough guys.

Shepherds were hardened men because they had to fight off lions and bears. Did David not say that to Saul? Now who of us would ever take on a lion?

[20 : 57] Who of us would ever take on a bear? Shepherds were hard they were strong they were tough they were guys to be feared. This is the irony that when Jesus was born his birth was announced to shepherds.

They weren't even allowed into the church in their days. They were filthy they were unclean they were thugs and yet Jesus' birth is announced to the shepherd because Jesus himself is the epitome of what a shepherd is.

He's the strong one I don't worship a saviour today who is who is who is whimsical or or soft I worship a shepherd saviour today who is strong and who is mighty and who can defeat all my foes and all your foes today and we need to embrace that and believe that.

Psalms 24 it speaks about you gates lift up your heads on high you doors that last foray so the king of glory might come and who is this king of glory this is Jesus how is he described the Lord almighty strong in battle that's who it is our saviour Jesus this shepherd is strong and mighty and he can defeat and will defeat and does defeat all our foes and all our enemies and that is why we can have courage with him that is why we can have courage through him because he said he's never ever going to leave us Paul Paul says in Romans 8 if God is for us who can be against us did you know that encouragement today if Christ the shepherd is with you who can be against you who's going to stop you from going from strength to strength as a believer who is going to nothing and nobody is if we remain focused and trusting in this

Jesus this Jesus who is the good shepherd and the giving shepherd and the guiding shepherd Jesus is fourthly a gracious shepherd and through this we have communion with Jesus in verse five you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies you anoint my head with oil and my cup over flows the emphasis on this psalm is not on us ultimately it's on you or him who is the you or him it is the Lord himself it's the Lord who makes David lie down in green pastures it's the Lord who leads him beside still waters it's the Lord who restores his soul it's the Lord who prepares the table and this emphasizes that what we do today is all of grace it's all of the

[23 : 59] Lord's goodness to us it's not of us it's not of our doing not of our worth or of our merit even the emphasis is on Jesus as the gracious shepherd who prepares a table for us and we're going to sit at the table soon and there's three things I want to say about this gracious shepherd and there's three things I want to say about sitting at this table for us to ponder just as we move to sit at the table first of all it's this this table is leisurely prepared verse 5 says you prepare a table it's not something that's happened quickly when you prepare something it takes a while and the table is leisurely prepared you know your place at the table today was prepared from all eternity do you know that you're sitting at the

Lord's table remembering the Lord's death celebrating and it is a celebration friends it's far more a celebration than anything celebrating what Jesus has done for you is something prepared long past way before Genesis 3 and 15 when the promise of the son was to come way before that in the councils of eternity the Bible tells us we were in his mind we were in his heart he had written in his book all our days and written in his book was that we should sit at the Lord's table and celebrate what he had done for us it's leisurely prepared this table is lovingly provided you anoint my head with oil what does that mean you anoint my head with oil in the love in the broad scope of scripture anointing becomes associated with the holy spirit of God the holy spirit of God is poured out the holy spirit of God is the anointing that comes on all of God's people and as such as we sit at the table and let's really ponder this it reminds us as we sit at the table of the

Lord's affection for us we're sitting here because he loves us he loves you the fruit of the spirit is love and joy and peace but primarily it's love he loves you and that's why you're here in Luke chapter 7 Jesus was anointed by a sinful woman and Jesus rebukes Simon Simon the Pharisee and he says Simon why are you grumbling about this woman who's who's washing my feet with her tears and her hair he says you didn't put oil on my head but she's poured perfume on my feet it was something courteous in those days to anoint somebody with oil it was a mark of affection and love and so today as we sit at the Lord's table remember this anointing that we receive is a sign of the Lord's love for us he loves us and did not hold back anything from us it's a sign of agreement as well an anointing is often a sign of unity

Psalms 133 behold how good a thing it is and how becoming well when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity it's like the oil that's poured over Aaron's head that flows down his beard and to the

corner of his skirts there's this wonderful picture of unity and so when we sit at the table we've been anointed by Jesus and we're because we're united together we're in agreement it's a blessing to be here today knock and point together at the Lord's table what a blessing that is what a sign of unity that is what a sign of oneness to the community that is and to the church that is you have no idea friends today how far and wide people are celebrating and applauding and giving thanks to God that this is happening it's a wonderful sign of gospel unity and as we sit together let's remember we're in agreement with one another this

Jesus who loved us is bringing us in unity together and so we come we come today and we focus on this Psalm 23 which highlights to us Jesus this good shepherd this giving shepherd this guiding shepherd and this gracious shepherd and may we be encouraged to rejoice and be glad that he is all of these things to us and much much more and may we celebrate what Jesus is to us as we take bread and wine together amen let us pray our father in heaven we thank you today for the gospel of your grace we thank you for the good shepherd Jesus who you gave that we might have life in all its fullness we thank you for being able to gather united around the Lord's table and we pray today that as we prepare to break bread and to share wine as a symbol of what Jesus has done for us we would know a binding together as brothers and sisters in Jesus us

[30 : 02] Lord Jesus from heaven your holy dwelling place will you pour out your spirit upon us from heaven your holy dwelling place will you cause us to be further united around this table as we celebrate your wonderful and glorious name in Jesus name we pray amen