

The LORD is My Shepherd and My Host

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[0:00] Thank you, Bladen.

And I want to thank you, our church family, for all the prayers, cards, meals, yard projects, that you've extended to Susan and I during this time that we've kind of been going through a valley ourselves. It's been much appreciated and we thank you for that.

If you have your Bibles, kindly turn to Psalm 23. Today we have a privilege of going through a tremendous psalm.

Perhaps the most beloved psalm of all 150. Most people have heard of it one way or the other. It's a poem without peer.

[1:05] It's been called the sweetest song that has ever been sung. Oh, sorry.

Sorry. Oh. Sorry. James Montgomery Joyce, a voice in his excellent commentary on Psalms, said this about it.

Millions of people have memorized this psalm, even those who have learned a few other scripture portions. Ministers have used it to comfort people who are going through severe personal trials, suffering illness, or dying.

For some, the words of this psalm have been the last that they have uttered in life. That's true, isn't it? It's a beautiful, powerful, and very familiar psalm.

Unfortunately, because it is so familiar, we can easily kind of slide past some of its rich meaning and depth of meaning as well. And because it was written at a time and a place in a world far away and unfamiliar with us modern Westerners, we can easily miss much of its richness and color.

[2:32] As such, we're going to take some time this morning to kind of just work our way through it phrase by phrase. Taking a look at it from a high elevation, we see that there are two characters, two main characters, really.

There's the shepherd and there's the host. And there are two secondary characters, and that is the sheep and the guest. There are two main ideas.

The Lord is my shepherd. That's in verses 1 to 4. And the Lord is my host, verses 5 and 6. Let's begin by looking at the first main idea. Sorry.

The Lord is my shepherd. You'll notice next to the word, the Lord, the Lord, which is spelled out in all caps, is a translation, an English translation for us, for Yahweh.

Yahweh was the name that was first revealed to Moses back in Exodus chapter 3, when he said, I am who I am. Now, ordinary Israelites, quite frankly, thought that was too holy a name to ever be pronounced on human lips.

[3:51] And so what they did was they substituted another name, namely Adonai, which you'll find in your Bible usually spelled a capital L with a small O-R-D.

Now, while Yahweh is not real easy to define, at the same time, it refers to the fact that God is who he is.

He's unchanging. He inhabits eternity. And yet, this is the name that David chose in the opening verse of his psalm, essentially saying, the great I am is my shepherd.

He's powerful, and yet he's personal. He's a consuming fire, and yet he's my caring shepherd. Not just in a theoretical sense, but in a very personal way for David.

Now, David doesn't mean that this is at the exclusion of other people, but rather, he was just simply indicating the wonderful thing to embrace that truth that the Lord, Yahweh, is my shepherd.

[5:03] Now, one important point that should be noted right now is the fact that David also felt that he needed a shepherd. If you see, the very heart of the psalm is such that it doesn't connect with someone who is self-sufficient.

In fact, Spurgeon once said, before a man can truly say, the Lord is my shepherd, he must first feel himself to be a sheep. In other words, you cannot know that God is your shepherd unless you know that you have sheep-like qualities.

Qualities that put you in a position of needing him. A sheep can be sometimes foolish. He's always very dependent, and sometimes has a kind of a warped will.

And that's what we've got to see ourselves as before God, before this psalm is going to mean anything to us in a personal way. And so we can truly say, the Lord is my shepherd.

But when we do, we find great comfort in knowing that the God of the heavens can be shepherding us day by day along the way. And because of that, because he is my shepherd, we know that he cares for me in a very special way.

[6:38] And there's four things that we see that makes his caring for me very personal. To begin with, his loving care makes me content.

If you look at the second part of the verse there, it tells us that the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. A substitute Sunday school teacher one time had his class, and he asked, how many of you have ever memorized Psalm 23?

And a number of hands went up. But to his surprise, there was this four-year-old girl that had raised her hand as well. And so he asked her to stand up and to recite it before the class.

And she said, the Lord is my shepherd. That's all I want. And where she messed up a little bit on the words, she really got the meaning of this whole psalm.

My friends, if Jesus is your shepherd, quite frankly, everything else is secondary. In Psalm 34.9, we read this, Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.

[7:55] This is really one of the main ideas of this psalm. Since the Lord is our shepherd, all of our needs versus our wants and desires are going to be taken care of.

When someone says, I shall not want, we really ought to take notice, particularly in the day and age that we live, because we live in an age of discontent. Max Licato refers to our discontent as the prison of want.

His prisoners want something bigger, nicer, faster, thinner. And if our happiness comes from something that we deposit, drink, drive, or digest, then we're living in that age of discontentment. Something that's promoted by everything we listen to on the internet, as well as watch on television as well. They spend billions of dollars to make us discontent.

Let me ask you, just for a little bit of reflection for the moment, are you hoping that a change in your circumstances is what is needed to change your attitude?

[9:12] Because if it is, then you unfortunately are locked up in your cell of discontentment. And I would encourage you today, as we go through this psalm, and you read it when you go home and all the time, you please allow the powerful simplicity of verse 1 to permeate your soul.

Because what we have in our divine shepherd is greater than anything we're ever going to have here in this life.

And we need to ask ourselves, do I believe that? Do I really believe that? You see, we need the purpose to decide that in our heart, and then declare it to ourselves regularly on a day-by-day basis. There's a second way his loving care is displayed for us, and that it nourishes us, and we see that in verse 2.

It says there to begin with, he makes me lie down in green pastures. I want you to note that it says, he makes me lie down in green pastures.

[10:34] Josephus, who was a first century historian, Jewish historian, wrote that sometimes the shepherds had to set aside time to make their sheep lie down, particularly for the ewes that were pregnant or for the frolicking lambs around.

He had to design that for them. I don't know about you, but most folks, if they've lived any length of time, have found that they have been made to lay down.

Whether it's been due to health issues, or whether it's been relational things, or whether it has to do with the loss of a job. When that happens to you, know that your shepherd is laying you aside for the moment.

He's slowing you down for a good reason for you. Rather than fighting it, yield yourself over to your shepherd. Now, while the shepherd wanted to make his sheep lie down, something I ran across with Philip Keller's book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, he points out that unless there are four conditions that are met, the shepherd will not be able to make his sheep lie down.

He says, number one, because, and what are those conditions? Oops, wrong one. What are those conditions? Well, to begin with, he says, because sheep are timid, they'll not lie down if they're afraid.

[12:06] Because they're social animals, they will not lie down if there's friction among them. If there are flies or other pests that are bothering them, they'll not lie down.

And if they're hungry or anxious for food, they'll not lie down. So Keller explains that rest comes when the shepherd takes care of their fear, friction, flies, or hunger.

And that's what the Lord does for us, friends. He wants to deal with our fears. And he tells us to look to him and to trust him, our strong and caring shepherd.

He wants to deal with the friction that we have with others. He says, let me bring about peace to that situation. He wants to drive away the flies that are troubling us, the past.

And finally, he doesn't want us to lie down hungry. He wants us to be filled with all that he can fill us with by being in his presence and his word.

[13:27] So after being fully fed, the sheep are then led to the still waters.

By nature, sheep are afraid of rushing rivers.

They won't go near it. They will not drink from it. And so shepherds usually would go to the river and they would divert some of the water into a nice little pool of refreshment. Then they could rest and they could drink.

Now something about sheep, however, though, is that even when the shepherd was trying to lead them to still waters, they often would stop at any putt along the way and drink and thus take on some parasites as well.

So he had to be mindful of that as he was leading them there. You know, as I thought about it, I thought, we're a lot like that, aren't we? The Lord provides so much for us and yet we drink from things that we ought not to be imbibing from.

[14:38] A third way his loving care is personal to us is that he restores us. Because sheep are careless, inquisitive, grumpy creatures that often need to be restored, he restores my soul, David says.

The word restore means to bring back to a former normal state, even to make new. Sheep can get lost faster than any animal.

And this can be serious for many reasons. One, they can fall and get hurt or a predator may pounce upon them or they may simply tip over.

And become cast down. Now what does that mean?

Well, the term for sheep that's cast down means they're lying on their back with their feet flailing in the air and they're not able to roll themselves back over.

[15:51] See, so often sheep are, that are too fat or have too much wool will lie down in a little depression and then when their center of gravity changes, they roll over on their back and then they can't get back up.

When a sheep is missing, that's one of the first things that comes to the shepherd's mind because you see, if his sheep is cast, they can become easy pickings for buzzards and wolves.

They can become someone's lamb chops. When he finds the cast sheep, he kind of rolls it over, lifts it up, straddles it, and then he begins to gently rub its legs to reignite the circulation there within his legs.

all the while, he's talking to the sheep gently. And I thought about that. I said, what a picture that is of what the Lord does for his straying sheep.

He looks for us when we've wandered and he restores us when we're cast down. I thank God that he is the great God of the second and third chance and then some.

[17:15] I'm thankful that Christianity quite frankly, is a series of new beginnings for us day by day. My friends, if for whatever reason you're here today and you're feeling cast down or you've strayed from the flock, I would encourage you to allow the good shepherd to seek you out and restore your soul.

He'll bring you back and he'll put you back together again if you'll let him. A fourth way his loving care is personal is that he guides us.

We see that in verse 3b. He says, he guides me in paths of righteousness for his namesake. Now the word path is really a well-defined, well-worn trail, which is in some ways just one more evidence of just how dumb sheep really are.

Because you see, even when the path is clearly marked out, they find some way to stray off a bit. And since the shepherd knows the trail, however, he can guide them in the right path.

Now something that's worthwhile thinking about is that, you know, the sheep doesn't need to know where the green pastures are or the still waters are.

[18:45] All he needs to know is where the shepherd is, who will lead them to wherever they need to be. Our dear Lord longs to guide us in paths of righteousness.

I think most of us, if we've been Christians any length of time, know the right path to be on. But because of our selfishness and our sinfulness, we often go astray.

And we need, even now, no matter how many years you've been a Christian, we need a shepherd to guide us onto those right paths. Because as sheep or like sheep, we tend to go astray.

We tend to go our own way. But as we submit to our shepherd, he'll lead us in the paths of righteousness. And he does this for his namesake.

Why? Because his name is Yahweh, the great I am. And he's working all things for his glory. And in this case here, he is specifically guiding us as sheep in such a way that the righteousness that is displayed in our life brings him glory.

[20:12] And this is particularly obvious and noteworthy to the world that we live in when we're going through those dark valleys. When it would be expected for us to be complaining and we're all upset, maybe even shaking our fist at God.

But when God is working our lives and we begin to reflect the righteous behavior and character of our master, that gives him great glory.

the sheep's care is personal and that can be seen from the fact that he provides for us contentment, he provides nourishment, restoration, and guidance.

When we come to verse 4, we notice some changes. In verses 1 to 3, the sheep are in the sunshine. In verse 4, they're in the shadows.

From this we learn that the Lord not only guides us in delightful times, but he comforts us in those dark times as well. And he does so with the gift of the shepherd's presence and protection.

[21:22] We read in verse 4, Yea, 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.

Here we see that even though the shepherd is still at work, we have introduced for the first time in this beautiful song the fact that there is a dark note.

Previously, David was looking at green pastures and still waters and paths of righteousness. Yet when following the Lord, the shepherd, we know, we find that we can learn that we can still walk through valleys of the shadow of death.

And David used this very powerful phrase to speak of something dark and fearful by way of experience. I mean, after all, what could be worse than death?

But I want you to notice here that David says that is the valley of the shadow of death. Why is that not working? Here it is.

[22:35] In one sense, the shadow can be something that seems more ominous than what it represents. And yet, at the same time, the shadow of a dog cannot bite you.

And the shadow of death cannot destroy you. as 1 Corinthians 15, 55 reminds us, Jesus, our shepherd, removed this thing of death when he rose from the dead.

And so now, it's only a shadow that remains. David recognized that as long as he was under the presence of the shepherd, he could walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

This wasn't David's final destination, going through that valley. It was not going to be his dwelling place. It was a place to walk through somewhere else.

And in some ways, David might say that every person throughout their life is walking through the valley of the shadow of death, the shadow of death is over them because at some point along the way, every human being becomes aware of just how fragile life is and how there will be one day that they will be facing death.

[24:05] But for the Christian, for someone whose shepherd is the Lord, it's just a shadow. Just a shadow. And having a conscious presence of the awareness of the presence of the Lord, that shadow can be very, very bearable.

In fact, those words penned by David have proven precious to many people down through the ages. They have comforted, strengthened, and warmed their heart as they thought about how the Lord was going to shepherd them through the valley of the shadow of death.

My friends, this has got application not only for those who are facing death itself, but has application for us even now. I want you to notice the tense of the word walk.

It's not referring to the future. It's in the present tense. It involves the here and now that God can give you assurance now that he will walk you through whatever is feeling overwhelming as you walk through that valley.

And that's why David could say, I will fear no evil. There. I will fear no evil.

[25:36] Why? He tells us that there. He says, for you are with me. That's the key.

Now something I want to point out is that you'll notice that the shepherd's presence does not eliminate the presence of evil. But it eliminates the fear of evil.

Why? Because the Lord is with him. and this emphasizes the very mindful presence of the shepherd that eliminates the fear of evil in our hearts even if it's death.

Please don't miss that phrase in verse 4. For you are with me. Which incidentally sits right in the middle or the heart of the psalm. I counted them up counting the words.

I guess it depends on what translation you're using but that phrase is right in the middle of the psalm. Just an incidental comment. No matter what your present environment might be, friends, if you are like David, you can say, Lord, if you are with me, I will not fear them.

[26:57] it's the conscious knowledge and acknowledgement of his presence right there who promised never to leave you or forsake you that will keep you and give you that strength and not fear the evil.

David continues and says, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Now the rod was a club that used to hang at the belt of the shepherd and he used it to protect the sheep from predators that would come.

The staff was a long slender pole that had like a crook on the end of it and he would often use it to hook under the leg of the sheep to pull them up from danger and the like.

It was also used sometimes to just guide them along the path or sometimes even discipline them. But I want you to note that not once in this psalm or any psalm do you ever read about a sheep carrying a rod or staff.

They had to rely on their shepherd for safety and direction and assimilate we need to learn to rely on the Lord for all that we need.

[28:23] as well as to find comfort in his power and corrective discipline. In America we're taught from an early age to pull yourself up by the bootstraps and just be self-sufficient and that just runs totally contrary to what our heart's desire needs our heart's attitude needs to be before the Lord.

You see when we're self-sufficient as I mentioned earlier this psalm doesn't apply to us we don't need a shepherd. We do but we don't know it and so we need to acknowledge that along the way.

but for the sheep when he saw the rod and he saw the staff he knew that he was protected and could walk through those dark valleys.

Also before we leave verse 4 did you notice the pronoun change? In the first half of the psalm David's extolling the virtues of his shepherd.

Using words like he and his but as we come to the second half of the psalm we find him speaking directly to the shepherd directly using words like you and yours you are with me your rod and your staff in verse 5 you prepare and you anoint something has happened and what we find here is when times are tough God can become very personal to us have you ever experienced that?

[30:12] life is not going well and you have nothing left to do some people say I've tried everything but prayer I might as well try that when we get together with God he becomes very personal we're not just talking about him in the third person he'll meet you where you are he's the promise keeping God who's promised never to leave us forsake us he's ever going to be present and he'll be with us through those tough times now we're going to pause here for a moment at the end of verse 4 because of a nuance that many people don't usually think about in Psalm 23 I mentioned that God is presented as with two great images the first image of course is the Lord is my shepherd but in verses 5 and 6 I believe there's a different image that's introduced here and that is next one

I guess the Lord is my host someone who has graciously invited us into the hospitality of his home he says you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies you anoint my head with oil my cup runs over I find it interesting without departing from the picture of the shadow of death there through that valley we find that David begins to speak about experiencing the Lord's provision there in the presence of his enemies enemies the Lord has provided for him a great great provision and he's invited David to a rich table prepared for him it's almost like as if he's still in the valley of the shadow of death and yet the Lord comes along and says be still and he lays out this big table filled with all of his provisions for David what a beautiful picture that is he says you prepare a table for me now a table represents bounty this is not a bag of lunch that God's giving him on the run as he's running through the valley it's almost like as if he's still there in the shadow of death and God says come here let me prepare for you something of great value great bounty there's so much food and provision here it needs to have a table spread out by the way the word prepare suggests foresight and care this wasn't something that

God just thoroughly put together no it's been prepared for David for me and David is at the table full of God's bounty that's been prepared for him now you'll notice it's been prepared in the presence of my enemies again I find that as a striking picture because here the Lord is pictured as preparing a table right there as David is surrounded with these enemies something again I'd have us note is that while the host has great care and concern for his guest he doesn't eliminate the presence of our enemies rather the Lord enables David in the midst of his enemies to experience his goodness and his bounty

I wonder if we really understand that it's not like the Lord shows us his goodness by removing our enemies he will do that one day but by here he's saying you can still experience my presence my love my care my bounty to you even in the midst of your enemies here we have a picture of oh the enemy is at the door and yet God prepares a table and the child of God sits down and dines in perfect peace regardless of what's going on around him that's the mindset that God wants for his sheep when David comes to the table he says you anoint my head with oil now it was common in those days that when a host would receive his or her guests that they would anoint the head of the one who was coming in it felt good it smelled good it was cooling in that day was also a sign of rejoicing as well and so if you were anointed with oil it was like you got a splash of joy or celebration from the host have a part of that in my life and then

David exclaims my cup runs over this was a common way to tell guests they could stay as long as they wanted on the other hand when the cup sat empty it was the host hinting it was time to leave but here the host is indicating that he's really enjoying the presence of his guests and as such he fills the cup overflowing hence we can know from the psalm that God enjoys hosting us at his table and that there will always be bounty there for us now despite being surrounded by his enemies David experienced his host bountiful goodness he had his head refreshed by having it anointed with oil and there his cup was overflowing which brings us to verse 6 truly goodness and mercy will

follow me all the days of my life

[37:21] I love that line don't you the host care brought the goodness of God to David and he lived in faithful expectation of it continuing how long all the days of his life I want you to notice that he also says God's goodness and mercy will follow me the word follow literally means to pursue for those who put their faith in Jesus we've been given much more than we deserve and certainly more than we need that's his goodness to us we are Christians we are also recipients of his mercy by not receiving what we do deserve you see if

God were to give us what we deserve then we would be punished for our disobedience and our wandering but because of Jesus we can have confidence of his mercy and his mercy and his goodness because it was his goodness and mercy that led Jesus to the cross of Calvary where he suffered and died for your sins and mine why did he do that for us scriptures scriptures have a lot of different reasons God demonstrated his love for us and that while we got sinners Christ died for us it was his grace it was also that he takes great pleasure as his hosts even in providing! for those sheep like people that are in need of him notice the word follow I have indicated can literally be translated pursues God is pursuing each of you right now in order to give you more than you need and certainly more than you deserve and then the final beautiful expression of confidence comes in where he says I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever think about that if you would think of the guest who has been invited into someone's home that's the idea in verses 5 and 6 how long can he stay well you'll notice there he says I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever the psalm ends with the calm assurance that David will enjoy the Lord's presence forever both in his days now on earth as well as beyond some concluding thoughts as we've made our way through the psalms this summer it's been fantastic to hear from different brothers from the congregation here see how the Lord was speaking through them but in each case they endeavored to portray for us how the psalm that they were working on pointed to Jesus and so the question is how does psalm 23 point to Jesus well the shepherd's motif is striking here especially especially because of how Jesus is described in the New Testament we find for instance in John 10 verses 11 to 14 that Jesus spoke of himself as the good shepherd the good shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep the good shepherd that knew his sheep and his sheep knew him in Hebrews 13 20 it speaks of

Jesus as the great shepherd of the sheep in 1 Peter 2 25 Peter calls him the shepherd and overseer of our souls and then 1 Peter 5 4 calls him the chief shepherd so he's had that label very much throughout the New Testament and so I want to encourage you dear child of God today that as you've worked through this in the message here that you would go home and you'd read it and reread it and begin to look more and more as to ways in which you see Jesus in that psalm to be sure he's going to come back to you as the shepherd he is the great shepherd but I don't want you to forget that he's also our gracious host who delights in preparing a lavish banqueting table for you even in this lifetime speaking of the great host you may remember that when

[42:58] Jesus returned to heaven he said he was going up to heaven and to prepare a place for you and for me we read that in John 14 verses 1 to 3 where he says let not your hearts be troubled you believe in God believe also in me in my father's house are many mansions if it were not so I would have told you I go to prepare a place for you and if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am there you may be also if you're a child of God that's been born again by the spirit of God because you repented of your sins and you put your trust in God's son Jesus then Jesus on his own word is saying right now he is preparing a place for you there up in heaven just like the great host that he truly is on the other hand if you've not acknowledged your need for Jesus to be your savior and thus you've never put your trust or faith in him may this be the day that you acknowledge your need for something beyond yourself you acknowledge your need for Jesus my friends to become a child of God is probably the greatest thing you will ever do and yet at the same time to go off into a

Christless eternity would be the greatest tragedy of your existence so in Jesus name I want to beseech you today if you've never done that come to him today and he speak to me pastor Mike whoever many of the people hereafter can lead you in a path to know that you are a sinner that needs to confess those sins before God and to put your trust in the one who died for you so you wouldn't have to now if you're a child of God remember he doesn't just start taking care of you and preparing a place for you when we get to heaven he takes good care of you even now but there is going to be an ultimate destination for us to where we will eventually enter into heaven where we will dwell in the house of the

Lord forever let's pray thank God for this beautiful hymn our dear Lord in heaven how we thank you for being our shepherd as well as our host we are so blessed to daily receive your shepherd's loving care and guidance as well as the benefit from your gracious hospitality even excuse me in the midst of danger we thank we thank you for the warm hearted love and concern you manifested to us through wonderful psalms like this we pray that this psalm will continue to meet our deepest soul needs and that of others and Lord if there's anyone here today that has never acknowledged their need for Jesus to be their savior may this be that wonderful day when they see themselves as a sheep in need of a blessed shepherd and host who would love them and lay down his life for them we love you Lord and we praise you in Jesus name amen

Dave thank you so much for that word praise the Lord for sustaining Dave's voice throughout that sermon so we now get to partake of the Lord's supper together kids are doing an awesome day