

The Shepherd King

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[0 : 00] Well, as Steve has said, we come to this psalm that we all know so well. It has thousands of articles written about it.

It has thousands of images on Google. If you want to look at Google for the 23rd Psalm, beautiful pictures with all the words of the psalm that you can download.

Actually, you can buy them. But in any case, you can see that there's many songs that are written about the 23rd Psalm. And it is the number one psalm that is preached at funerals.

It is the most popular psalm, as Steve has mentioned. And so it is because of that, and it is because it is so familiar, I'm going to plead with you today that you put everything you know about this psalm aside.

I want you to put it aside so that you can allow God to speak to you and to speak afresh to you. A psalm that has great richness in it.

[1 : 11] And let's ask the Lord to tell us something new. Okay, so let's pray with me. Or please pray with me. Our Father, we ask that by your Spirit, you will indeed speak to us.

We thank you for this particular psalm. And Father, we ask that each and every one of us, including myself, will see new and fresh things about the Great Shepherd.

Father, open our eyes and our hearts so that we would see you and be changed by you in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, so it is a psalm that is written by David, as Steve has already said.

It's in actual fact a song. I suspect David may have sung it, sitting under a tree. And David, as we know, knew a lot about shepherding because of his history as a shepherd boy.

David knows that the shepherd is the one who watches over the sheep. He's the one who takes care of them. He's the one who protects them. He feeds them.

[2 : 12] He gives them water. And he gives every provision that is necessary for those sheep. And so with the majestic Lord of all that we've been listening to some fabulous sermons these last few weeks, this majestic one that we hold high, this one is given the character of a shepherd.

I personally find that remarkable. I don't find it so remarkable that we are called sheep, but I find it pretty remarkable that the majestic one who is lifted high, that he is called a shepherd.

Now, David compares himself with a sheep. As Steve has said, he's a creature who is weak. He's foolish. He's defenseless. He takes, but in this, he takes God as his provider.

He takes God as his preserver, his director. And indeed, he takes God as his everything. But here's the thing.

You see, I think that many, many people, and I think it's why 23rd Psalm is used in funerals so often, I actually think that everyone thinks that everyone is one of these sheep in this precious paddock where the Lord is the good shepherd.

[3 : 45] And we all know that there's many, many different paddocks out in the farming rural area, and not all the sheep belong to all the same shepherds.

But I think people do think that. I think that we make the mistake of thinking we're all one of these sheep. But only those who can call the shepherd their full, to give the shepherd their ownership, that the shepherd owns them, that there is a total dependence upon this shepherd, only those sheep are the ones that we're talking about today.

And David had this dependence, because he didn't say, I hope that the Lord will be my shepherd one day. He didn't say, the Lord is my shepherd only on a Sunday, and all the rest of the days, I can do it all by myself.

He didn't say that. The Lord is my shepherd. He watches over me. And the word is in the present tense. That meaning that whatever a believer's position is right now, the great Jehovah, even now, is watching over each and every one of us.

And it is because he knows that the great Jehovah is watching over him at all times, he can say, I shall not want.

[5 : 16] The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. When the Lord is over me and caring for me, there is nothing that I want except him alone.

And he will provide all that is needed because his heart is full of love, and therefore, I shall not want. It means that I don't need to be wanting to match the money and the possessions of every other person that I look out and see.

It means that if famine was to strike our land, and certainly in rural country areas, they have had it hard, and we have had a blessed time here in the city, or calamity was to strike our city, or when old age and the limitations that come with old age, when they strike, or the position of a great job is not forthcoming, or the life partner that I dream of doesn't seem to appear, I can even say in every one of those situations very confidently, I shall not want.

And it is because the Lord is my shepherd. And it is only if the Lord is my shepherd. Those who do not know this shepherd, those who do not know the Lord, will always be left wanting.

Always. And yet with this great shepherd, I shall not want. Because everything I need is found in him. He will care, he will provide for those he loves in ways that we cannot even dream of.

[7 : 01] So how dare we even think that something over there is going to be even better. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters.

Now Charles Spurgeon, the great theologian, points out that the Christian life has two elements to it, the contemplative and the active.

Now first the contemplative. He says in this psalm, he makes me lie down in green pastures. Now what are the green pastures exactly?

Well Spurgeon says that the green pastures are the scriptures of truth. It's God's word. Always fresh, always rich, never exhausted.

sweet and full doctrines of the gospel. It's food for souls, just like the green pastures are nutrients for the sheep.

[8 : 06] When by faith we can rest in the promises of God, we are like the sheep who can rest in the pastures, finding peace, finding refreshment, safety, security and deep satisfaction.

You see, a sheep will not lie down, my sheep owning friend told me this, I know nothing about sheep, but apparently, sheep will not lie down if they believe that they are in danger or they suspect that there's potential danger.

They need to be on all fours so that they can quickly make haste and get away when the danger comes. But in confidence, these sheep, they're resting in complete security and comfort for they know and understand that the shepherd is nearby and the shepherd is actually going to protect them from every angle.

David has been nourished by God's word and it is that that sustains him. He rests in the comfort that only God himself can satisfy.

Now, spending time in God's word will nourish all of our souls. It will grow you in wisdom and discernment.

[9 : 35] It will correct and rebuke you where needed. It will constantly show you the glory and the majesty that we've been learning about all these weeks and it will cause you to surrender to him because all is already his.

That's what happens when we spend time in God's word. Now, some of you may be distracted from the truth and so remain restless and find it impossible to lie down in those green pastures and if that is you today, I need to say to you, you need to seek the shepherd.

You need to spend time in God's word. You need to be fed and you need to be nourished for that is what will be lacking in your life.

I know personally that when my life goes off on the wrong track, I can immediately look and see how much time I am spending in God's word and I know that there is an absolute direct correlation between the two and I know there is many of you out there who think the same too.

The second element of the Christian life that Spurgeon talks about is gracious activity. Now, we are not only to think but we are to act.

[11 : 04] We are not only to talk but we are to walk the talk. You know what I mean. You see, we have a real danger of just gathering heaps and heaps of head knowledge of the Bible and we do not walk the talk.

Now, what is the point if we can find any verse at the drop of a hat, find all those little letters that we find in the Bible? We can go to them because we know our Bible so well.

What is the point of being able to do that? What is the point of being able to discuss every theological debate and feel that you have come out a winner? What is the point of that if in fact you are not loving people as Christ wishes for you to love them?

What is the point? See, the life we live needs to reflect the truths that we know. Otherwise, we run the risk of being in the pasture not as a sheep but as a wolf dressed as a sheep.

And as you might know, scripture tells us that Jesus will be coming back and he will call his sheep to himself and there will be many who say, Lord, Lord, and Jesus will turn and say, I never knew you.

[12:22] I do not want for any person in this building today to be one of them. I want you to be the sheep that calls out and Jesus welcomes you with open arms.

Now, in our living out this walk, we are slowly being changed to reflect the character of Jesus. Not for our own sake, but for the Lord's and for his glory and for his majesty.

And we're all in a process of change. None of us have arrived and none of us will until heaven, but we're all in a process of change that the Lord will give us.

change. We are to expect change in ourselves and we are to expect change in others. The angry person that comes to the shepherd cannot expect to continue to get away with being angry.

Sure, change doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen when we allow the Holy Spirit to touch our lives, to minister to us, to convict us of sin, and then helps us to become the person God wants us to be.

[13:34] The one with a critical spirit cannot expect to be allowed to continue exercising the negative traits if the Lord is their shepherd. That person would be, on the other hand, be grieved at the criticism and be asking the Lord to help them see all that is right and pure and honourable, all of that that is around them every day, every moment.

The person who says that the Lord is my shepherd and yet is totally self-centred needs to actively seek what the Lord would have them do to be other person centred and to start serving.

But the great news for all of that, and we all have our own little quirks that need changing, they're just a couple of the common ones, but we all have it, me included.

But the great news is that we are not alone. See, the Holy Spirit is there graciously leading all of us by those still waters to minister to us, to change us, to renew us, but he will do it quietly and he will do it gently.

And we cannot change ourselves and we cannot be the one who takes ourselves along the still waters. But with an open and willing heart, we can be led, we can be ministered to and we can be changed.

[15:00] He restores my soul. At some stage in our life, we have all been in the place where our soul needs restoring.

The great news is, when our soul grows sorrowful, he revives it. When it is sinful, he sanctifies it and makes it whole. When it is weak, he strengthens it.

he does it, the shepherd. He restores my soul and so I need to stop and ask you, does your soul need restoring today?

Is your spiritual life at a low ebb? Because if it is, you need to ask the great shepherd to restore it. don't leave here today feeling lost and empty and downtrodden.

And we can confidently ask the great shepherd because as we can see, he is the one who guides us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Now it is the one who can truly say the Lord is my shepherd that will follow the leading that the Lord gives.

[16:16] And we do that because we love the master, we love the shepherd. We cannot pick and choose which parts of the commandments we want to follow.

We cannot ask the Lord to grow us into the people he desires us to be but to say, but please don't touch this part of my life over here because that bit's for me to take control of.

What we come to the shepherd and we ask the shepherd to change absolutely every part of our life to his glory. When the Lord is our shepherd we allow leading to occur because it will lead to righteous living because of God's love for each and every one of us.

And we need changing, we need to be made new, we need a saviour to deal with our sin and we have one and the leading occurs for his name's sake, not for our own.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. This verse has always challenged me because it does not say if you go through the valley of the shadow of death.

[17 : 32] It actually says when. There is an expectation that there are tough times and that we're going to go through that valley.

That's a given. That's not a surprise. We should never be surprised when tough times come. It's a given. Now many of you actually know, have known fear and many choose to live with fear of going through the tough times, whatever they may be.

But might I say I actually do not believe that for somebody who is saying that they follow the Lord as their shepherd, that indeed living with fear is possible or that it is allowed or that it is correct.

It's not okay because it reflects a lack of trust in the shepherd for all things. Now there's a word in this particular verse that excited me and that word is the word shadow.

This is a new revelation for me. You see, what dawned on me is that a shadow cannot harm you. It says that we go through the valley of the shadow of death and what I also learned is that where there is a shadow, there is always light.

[19 : 06] light. There is light to cast the shadow and I love that. I love knowing that there is light because it is the light of the shepherd that is being cast.

See, a shadow of a dog cannot bite you, a shadow of a sword cannot kill you, and the shadow of death cannot destroy us.

So let us not be afraid. There is light and the light is the one who is with me. That is, I have a perfect comfort and security because the Lord is with me in any and every situation if he is my shepherd.

And now finally we come to the last two verses and we change from a pastoral scene and we go to a banqueting scene. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Now many of us would like to think that we have no enemies. I'd like to think I have no enemies.

[20 : 17] But if we are aligned with Jesus, we have many enemies for the world hates God and the world will hate those who belong to God.

But there is a calmness in front of the enemies here. Nothing is hurried. There is no confusion, no disturbance. The enemy is at the door and yet God is preparing a table and the psalmist sits down and eats as if everything is at perfect peace.

Is this your life? It's a picture of peace. Is your life a picture of peace at this moment in time? Have you ever tried to eat when you're worried or you're sick at heart or you're feeling heavy at heart or you're afraid?

For some reason, food loses its attraction when we're worried and when we're afraid. Our stomachs are taut, our adrenaline sort of goes sky high and the last thing our bodies want to do when we're afraid is to sit down and eat something.

That's why people lose their appetite when danger is present. But the one who has the Lord as their shepherd is at peace in all things.

[21 : 37] You anoint my head with oil and my cup overflows. If only we all lived in this daily enjoyment of this blessing, receiving a fresh anointing for our everyday duties, day by day we all need to go to God to be refreshed by his spirit, to live the day under the Lordship of Jesus, to be refreshed, to be renewed by God alone for we cannot do this in our own strength.

But we are not left alone. we have God's spirit to daily empower us to be who God wants us to be. So can you say your cup overflows, that you are abundantly and lavishly filled with the love, the mercy, the protection, the forgiveness, the renewal of the Lord that the Lord offers you?

Can you say that? Or are you quietly grumbling to yourself on the side that you deserve more, that you deserve things to go your way?

For whoever is discontented in anything whatsoever cannot say, my cup overflows. I'll say it again for you.

Whoever is discontented in anything at all in life cannot say, my cup overflows.

[23 : 17] Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Goodness and love here are like guardian angels that follow every believer everywhere they go, through the dark times and through the bright days.

God is more than a God who provides, he is more than a God who protects, he is a God that makes all of our life, both present and future, a wonderful thing.

He is a God of promise. And Jesus spoke of having and giving an abundant life. He says, I have come so that you may have life and have it more abundantly.

That's what David is describing when he says, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. With God by our side, life is good.

Our lives are fulfilled in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine. Not the fullness of possessions, not the abundance of things, but the abundance of God, God's love, God's peace, God's joy, God's goodness.

[24 : 28] And I can guarantee you, if you have these things and nothing else, you are infinitely more rich than if you had all the material prosperity that the world has to offer.

But there's more to this psalm than this present earthly existence. The shepherd's psalm reminds us that God has prepared for us a marvellous future, an eternal security, a heavenly home.

Now many people have an uncertain hope of eternity. I can tell you for all the people I have asked over the years, many, many people will say, if I ask, are you certain of heaven, they will say, I hope so.

Or maybe. But these words of Psalm 23, they're not a vague expression of uncertainty. They are a declaration of certainty, a confidence that God has provided a glorious future and an eternal home for us.

David doesn't say, I hope to be there. He says, I will be there. And in the New Testament, the reason for our confidence is made clear. Paul said, it is not by works you are saved.

[25 : 47] Lest any man should boast, it is by grace. What is this grace of God? It is God, it is the God who loved the world, who gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

It is through Christ's death on the cross that our sins are forgiven. It is through his resurrection from the grave that we are given an assurance of eternal life.

And it is through faith in what God has done in Jesus Christ that we receive this precious promise. And when we come to God in faith, trusting in his provision, depending on his protection, we know that we can rely upon his promise.

And with the assurance of faith, we can declare our confidence as well. And with this, we can also say the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Amen.