

# The Lord Our Shepherd

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[ 0 : 01 ] I want us for a little to turn to the first reading in Psalm 23. Now I know I've preached the whole Psalm, and I've preached verse 1, and I've preached the last verse of it, but tonight I want to look at verse 2 in particular.

And this is a Psalm that you just can't help but go back to again and again and again and again, because it's one of these Psalms that's just so all-encompassing.

I think it's the reason why people sing this Psalm at a wedding, and they also sing this Psalm at a funeral, because it is so all-embracing, and it seems to touch just about every single part of life and deal with all the different kind of experiences that we have in just these few verses.

And I think it's fair to say that for every believer, they would say, I would sooner have the shepherd of this Psalm, and all that he does for me, and all that he gives me, and all that he promises me, rather than all the riches of this world.

Because the shepherd of this Psalm is so absolutely trustworthy, the shepherd of this Psalm is so glorious in all that he does for his people, that there is a tremendous sense of just lying down and resting in the shepherd as you read this Psalm.

[ 1 : 35 ] Now, I'm not going to spend time looking at the first verse, it's the second verse I want to focus on, but I hope that you can say, the Lord is my shepherd.

And all the people who can say that, the Lord is my shepherd, are then able to say the next part, I shall not want. If you can't say tonight, the Lord is my shepherd, then you cannot add the second part, I shall not want.

Because it is having the Lord as your shepherd, that it gives you then the ability to say, I shall not want. And that's what I want us really to look at tonight, is when we have the Lord as our shepherd, and we shall not want, it then tells us some of the things that the shepherd does for us, that he provides for us.

And that's what I want us to see in verse 2. But I want to ask that question before we come to look at it. Is the Lord your shepherd tonight? Because as you journey through this world, I think you're all very aware, I am as well, of just how uncertain, how unsure this world is.

We just, we don't know what, as the word of God says, we don't know what a day or an hour may bring. And it's a most wonderful thing, if you journey with your hand in the shepherd's hand.

[ 3 : 00 ] Because you have somebody who will never leave you, never abandon you. Somebody who's always there to guide you, to protect you. And somebody who is actually working for your good, not only now, but especially eternally.

And that, you can't put a price on that. And if you don't have the shepherd tonight, I would ask you, while you're here, to ask the shepherd to be your shepherd tonight.

Because he's here right now. And that's what he wants you to do. He doesn't want you just to hear about him, but he wants you to speak to him. And he wants you to ask him in, to come in and to sup with you in your own heart.

Now we find here in verse 2, where it says, after some of what the shepherd does for us, it tells us that he makes me lie down in green pastures.

Now, that's the first thing we see that the shepherd does. He makes the sheep to lie down. Now, that's quite a great thing in its own sense, because the one thing that a shepherd can't do is force a sheep to lie down.

[ 4 : 23 ] If you try to get a sheep to lie down, you can't. You can wrestle the sheep to the ground. You can slam it to the ground. You can sit on it and say, I've got this sheep on the ground.

That's it. But the moment you get up, the sheep will get up as well. That's just the way it is. There are many times the shepherd has to put the sheep to the ground.

For instance, if you're going to clip the sheep, if you're going to clip the sheep, the sheep isn't going to say when he sees the shepherd or the crofter or the farmer with the shears, oh, I know what's happening now.

I'll just lie down. Sheep doesn't do that. It's a matter of getting it and turning it over. You have to physically do that. But you cannot get a sheep just to lie down, except really by one way.

And that's exactly what we have here, what the shepherd does. He makes me lie down in green pastures. Because if you take the sheep to rich feeding places, the sheep will eat and they will eat.

[ 5 : 29 ] And then they will lie down because they're content. Contented sheep will lie down. Sheep that aren't content aren't so ready to lie down.

So this is part of this lovely picture that we have here. And as we all know that sheep, after a good spell of grazing, they will lie down and you will see them.

That they're, what we would term, they're chewing their cud. They're chewing away on what they've eaten. And that's just such a, it's often a beautiful scene when you look at a field full of sheep and they're all there.

You can see the contentment. They're lying there and they're chewing away, chewing their cud.

And it's a very contented picture. And that's kind of the picture that we have here. The Lord is giving us this picture of contentment.

Because he is the good shepherd. And it's rich. You notice that he makes me lie down in green pastures. And the feeding place that the Lord gives us is always rich.

[ 6 : 32 ] You know, sometimes when the sheep are out and they're looking, they're maybe taken out for the summer. They're out in the hill. Sometimes they might have difficulty finding a lot of rich grass.

Sometimes they're in amongst the heather and they're looking for grass. Sometimes there is grass. Sometimes there's not all that much. But that's never the case with the Lord's feeding. He always takes us to rich pasture.

There's always plenty. And that's what the Lord does with us in the gospel. He doesn't say, right, here I am and I've brought you feeding.

But there's not an awful lot. The Lord provides for us far more than we will ever need. And if we are hungry, if we are not being satisfied by the Lord and by the word, then the problem is not with the shepherd and it's not with the food that the shepherd has.

The problem lies with ourselves. And so here we have the word and it's rich, it's plentiful, it's satisfying. And it's one of the many new things to a certain extent that the believer has.

[ 7 : 41 ] When we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, we come to appreciate the word in a way that we never did before. Before I was a Christian, you know, I used to read the Bible every year.

It used to be one of these. First, it was a challenge to see if I could. But many, sometimes I read it purely to satisfy my conscience. Sometimes I read it because it was a challenge to me.

Sometimes I read it for differing reasons. But often what I read went, I just skimmed over it. And I would say, right, I read a chapter. I read two chapters.

But it wasn't going in. It wasn't affecting me. It wasn't touching my heart. It wasn't going in deep.

And sometimes you can read God's word like that. Or other times you can read it and you say, wow, you know, that's really good.

That's a great way to live. You sometimes read the life of Jesus and you say to yourself, wow, he really was an amazing person. And very often he turned things upside down and he challenged people in the most amazing ways.

[ 8 : 43 ] And he lived a life that was exemplary. Nobody ever lived a life like that. So many people will read the Bible and they'll be so impressed. They will come maybe to the Psalms and they will read their such rich, deep experiences.

And they say to themselves, wow, this really is, you know, this is getting just where I am. That's one of the reasons why the Psalms are so incredibly precious to God's people.

Is that it doesn't matter how deep your experience, how often painful your experience might be. You dig down into the Psalms and you'll say, wow, the Psalmist was there before me.

And of course this is, this is of course God's word. And that's why it is so rich. It's so powerful. It's so meaningful. And so, but the thing is that once you become a believer, the word takes on a new meaning, a new relevance to your life.

You don't just read it to satisfy conscience. You don't just read it as a challenge. You read it because you want to. You read it because you have come to know the person whose book this is. [ 9 : 56 ] If you get a letter or an email or a message from somebody you love, you'll read that message. And you won't just read it once. You'll read it again. Because it's come from somebody you love.

And this is God's love letter to us. And that's why we love reading it. And you know, very often as you come to read it, the word goes down in deep. And it affects you.

It does something to you. And that's why we read in the Psalms and read in different parts of the word where you find it saying that it's more precious than gold.

That it is sweeter than honey. That this word is just, it's an amazing word that touches you and fills you and thrills you and excites you and challenges you.

And so that's one of the wonderful things when a person becomes a believer. The word of God becomes central to their lives.

[ 10 : 58 ] And so we find here that he makes me lie down in green pasture. So we have the picture of the sheep lying down and they're chewing their cud. And I think the great picture that we have here is that of meditating upon the truth.

And that is something in this busy world, and I've said it often before, and I say to myself, try and make time every day to meditate upon God's word. And when you meditate upon the truth, when you meditate upon the word, it's like that you chew over.

It is literally muttering to oneself. It is where you take God's word, just a little bit of it, not a huge section, but a little bit, and say, what exactly is being said here?

And when you ask the Lord, you pray to the Lord and say, Lord, open my mind, open my understanding. Help me to see just what it is that you're saying here. Because God is speaking to you passionately about what he's doing in your own life.

He's speaking to you passionately in his word about himself. He's speaking to you in the word about what he's doing in this world. All the time he's speaking to us. So it's so important that we meditate, we take time to think this.

[ 12 : 16 ] And that's how the word will go down in deep, much more than just reading it. Because so often when we read, we can be distracted. And that's why I would say, try and make a little time every day to do a little of this reflecting, meditating.

What is the word actually saying to me, for me? How does this apply to my life? And you know, the meditating Christian will always be a growing Christian.

The word of God tells us that. That as we meditate upon the truth that we will grow. We mentioned before when Israel were going to cross the Jordan. And they were going to enter the land of promise.

And God said to Joshua, right, here's the key for your success. And this is what I want you to do. It tells us that in the book of Joshua, chapter 1.

And he says, If you really want to know the way to go, this is what you do.

[ 13 : 43 ] You get the law. You get my word. You chew upon it. It goes in deep day and night. And if you do that, the more you take my word on board, the more you will obey me.

And the more you live in that way, the more I will prosper you and make your way successful. And this is what God is saying to us.

And this is the way God works within us. And God will, as we apply that to ourselves today, God will help us to make the right choices. You know, life is full of choices.

But if we live dependent upon the truth, meditating upon the truth, chewing upon the word, seeking the Lord in that, God will direct our way. Remember what it says, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths. Isn't that wonderful? God will help you to make the right choices.

[ 14 : 47 ] God will help you to overcome. God will be a defense and a refuge to you. He will protect you in so many different situations. So it's so important that we follow the shepherd into the green pasture.

But of course we know that another thing that keeps sheep from lying down is fear. If you, supposing you see a dog run into a field full of sheep, and if the sheep are all lying down, one of the things they'll do right away is get up.

They're all on high alert. Sometimes they start running. Same, you just jump over a fence into a field full of sheep. And the sheep around you, they'll get up.

Because all of a sudden they're afraid. They're quite timid as animals. And so when there's fear, you can't lie down contented.

And again, fear is something that entered this world in the fall. When God made Adam and Eve at the very beginning, there was no fear.

[ 15 : 55 ] Imagine a world with no fear. Imagine you living your life here every day with no fear, no anxiety, no cares, no upsets. Can't imagine it.

Well, that is a world of Eden pre-fall. But the moment that Adam and Eve sinned, one of the consequences of sin was fear.

Because we find that Adam and Eve run away. That's one of the first things they did. They were afraid. When God went after Adam and said, Adam, where are you?

And Adam was brought forth, brought out before God. And he said, I was afraid. That's what he said. I was afraid. It was an experience he had never experienced before.

Fear. Oh, what is this? This is awful. And that's what fear does. Fear causes us to run away from God.

[ 16 : 54 ] And that is why today so many people are building walls, building their own refuges, building places to shelter themselves and to try and hide from God.

The whole atheistic movement, the whole secular movement of society, the whole humanist movement is nothing but building walls where people are trying to hide from God because they're afraid.

Now, if you sat down with some of the atheists and some of the agnostics and sat down with humanists and secularists and said, you know why you're so angry against God?

It's why you're making all this vehement effort to try and deny the existence of God. It's because you're afraid. They would say, not at all.

I'm not afraid. I don't even believe in him. The thing is that they've built a wall to try and hide from God. They don't realize it, but that's what they're doing.

[ 18 : 04 ] Because facing us all around is a clear fact that God is. The heavens declare the glory of God. Every day we see the sunrise and the sunset and we see the stars at night and the moon.

Every day we see the sun shining there. We know that it was God who said at the very beginning, into the emptiness, the void. He said, let there be light. Let there be. He commanded. He brought into being.

Into the nothingness that was there, he brought into being. And we're told in Romans that the creation speaks to us about the eternity and the power of God.

So for people to deny the existence of God, there has to be an incredible amount of suppressing of the truth.

And that's what they do. They suppress the truth because it's more comfortable. That they feel, if we get God out of the equation, then I can do what I want. I'm not answerable to anybody but to myself.

[ 19 : 10 ] But you know, the thing is, it doesn't matter what a person may think in their heart. It doesn't matter what a person may do. They cannot get rid of God. And there's going to come a day when God is going to give a summons to everybody to appear before him.

Do you know, it would be easier for me to go with a bucket to Dalmore tomorrow and try and empty the Atlantic Ocean and then to empty the Pacific Ocean. I would have more chance of doing that than trying to hide from God.

There's not one person in this universe who can hide from God. And one day, God is going to call time on your life and my life. He alone knows when that is.

And he's going to summon us into his presence. And nobody is going to be able to resist. And nobody can then run away.

And nobody then can bring any humanist or secular or worldly argument. Because we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And we must all give an account for what we did in this world, whether it is good or bad.

[ 20 : 20 ] It's a solemn and a sobering thought. Fear causes us to run away. And that's why Jesus came into this world to deal with that fear.

To deal with our running away. Because we couldn't deal with it ourselves. That is part of the great work. And so, this is what he does.

He is the great shepherd of the sheep. And he's in the business of restoring. And you know, this is one of the wonderful things. When you become a Christian, instead of running away, you run to God.

And sometimes you don't know that you're running away. I didn't know I was running away. For years, I didn't know I was running away from God. But I was. And I was building up loads of barriers and loads of things.

And making excuses and justifying my actions. And all these things. Until there was a time that God said, enough is enough. And that's, it's, this is what happens then.

[ 21 : 25 ] Instead of running away, you run to him. And even when you do wrong, you run to him. You would think that if you've come to the Lord and he is this great God.

And he has so much power. Because we've got to remember that he is the God who created this world. He is the governor of this universe. As we said, he is the God who is going to call time on this, on the very world itself.

And you'd think that we would be terrified of him when we've done wrong. But the amazing thing is we go to him. This is, this is an evidence of having become one with him.

It's that we go to him and we say, oh Lord, I'm so sorry. That's really what confession of sin is.

We're just going and saying, Lord, I'm really, really sorry.

Will you forgive me my sin? And you know, the wonderful thing is he is so faithful. And he is so just that he will, he'll forgive us our sin.

[ 22 : 29 ] He delights to forgive sin. The worst thing you can do is to run away and pretend you didn't sin. Because you can't hide from God. We've got to go to him.

And be frank and be honest and just tell him how it is. So, once we've come to know the shepherd and to live with the shepherd, he takes us into the pasture land.

He feeds us in the green pastures. And he removes the fear from us. Now, that doesn't mean that the sheep, the Lord's flock are never restless.

Because we're still sinners. And you know, if we listen to the empty promises of this world. If we listen to the temptations of Satan.

If we get drawn aside. We will lose the peace and the rest that we once experienced. And we'll begin to get restless. And we'll begin to get a little afraid.

[ 23 : 33 ] And that's why it's so important that we get back to the shepherd. But the thing is, the shepherd is always there. At a human level, there's never a shepherd who can watch his sheep 24-7.

The Lord watches his sheep 24-7. There is not a day, not an hour, when he's not there. He never becomes weary or tired. There's never a point where the shepherd says, Oh, I have too many sheep now.

I can't give my attention. There's some of these sheep. I'm going to have to, I'm sorry, I'm just going to have to leave them for a good while. Because I have to focus on the know. Every single sheep. Every one of the Lord's people. Gets his full attention all the time. And he cares for his sheep all the time. It's quite extraordinary.

But then we see, again, that the, not only does he, just for a moment, the time is going, He makes me lie down in green pastures.

[ 24 : 38 ] He leads me beside still waters. Again, we have this beautiful picture. But I think that it's almost, if an artist would, who has great ability, could paint a beautiful picture of the sheep beside the still waters lying in their lush pastures.

It's just such a beautiful picture of contentment. But we're told here, again, just as the shepherd makes his sheep lie down in the green pastures, so here the shepherd leads beside the still waters. He leads us. And you know this, and I come back to what I was saying earlier on. So, is the Lord leading you through life?

Because before you will give your sort of trust to somebody, you have to actually really believe in that person.

I remember when I was in school for quite a long time, in Portree School, and we had a climbing club, and quite a few of us eventually went into the mountain rescue. And I remember there was one of the teachers who was a superb climber.

[ 25 : 52 ] He had been an alpine climber, an alger, and he was the one who always led us. And I remember as a youngster, sometimes we obviously were roped up, and some of the climbs were quite tricky.

But one of the things I always remember was I really trusted this guy because of his ability. He was an amazing climber, and he instilled confidence.

And you knew, it was incredible just the way you trusted him because you saw what he could do. You knew what he had done. And before you can really trust somebody, you have to actually believe that this person is trustworthy.

Now, as we go through life, we're always trusting. You might not realize it, but we're always trusting somebody. Very often it's ourselves. We're trusting ourselves to do the right thing, to make the right decision.

You believe in yourself to be who you are and sort of say, well. But very often we trust other people's advice, or we trust a system, or we trust particular principles of life.

[ 26 : 57 ] But we've got to trust somebody, and we are trusting somebody or something all the time, whether we realize it or not.

There is nobody that we could trust more than the Lord. Because he alone knows the way. He came down from heaven to make a way for us.

Nobody else knows the way to heaven except the Lord. Nobody else has come from earth, made the way, and gone back to heaven except the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he's saying to you, look, I came from heaven for you. I have gone to make a way for you.

That's what he did on the cross. I have gone back to heaven, and I'll come back to take you with me when the time comes.

Are you prepared to say, you know, I don't want to trust you? I don't think you're... Because, you know, when you reject Jesus, what you're actually saying is, Lord, I don't think you're trustworthy.

[ 27 : 58 ] And that's an awful thing. Because that's actually what you're saying. I would rather trust myself than you. Maybe you're saying, you're saying, oh, I'm not exactly saying it that way.

Well, that's actually what you're doing, whether you realize it or not. But you're saying, I would sooner trust myself than you. Well, let me say, you might go through life, and you may say to yourself, you know, I've got on all right myself.

I handled all the situations. It doesn't matter how difficult they were. I coped. Well, I'll tell you one situation you won't cope with. That's death. You can't. You have to face death all on your own. You can have all the support you want in this world. And you can have all the support that you want right up to death. But death, nobody else can go through it with you but yourself.

And if you don't have the Lord, you have to go through it all alone. If Jesus is with you, you're not on your own. That's the most wonderful thing. And it's so simple.

[ 29 : 07 ] And I believe, let me say this, I believe there's an awful lot more people in heaven than maybe we think. An awful lot of people have come to trust the Lord Jesus.

Maybe quietly. Nobody else maybe knows. But the Lord has a hold of them. And there's no better, there's nothing greater in death than Jesus having a hold of you.

And that's why it is so essential that you go to this shepherd and that you will have him look after you and take you and lead you and bring you home eventually with himself.

So there's this picture of leading beside still waters. The sheep like to drink from the still waters.

And again we have a lovely picture here of, well Jesus himself is the water of life.

Jesus said to the woman at the well of Samaria, remember, the water he said that I'll give you will bring you so that you'll never thirst again. And of course he was speaking about himself.

[ 30 : 07 ] And again we have a picture in the Bible of the Holy Spirit. It's also a picture, we have the picture of water as pointing to the Holy Spirit. Where the Lord says, I will be like the Jew unto Israel.

I will flood the dry and thirsty grounds with floods of water. There's a picture of the Holy Spirit pouring out the Lord Jesus upon us.

I've got to ask you again. Do you know this Jesus as your own? Because you will be always wanting in this world.

You will always be thirsty in this world. This world cannot, cannot, it wasn't made to satisfy you. We live in this world. And we have many wonderful things in this world.

But this world was not made to ultimately satisfy us. We were made for something and someone much deeper than the world. And the wonderful thing is we can enjoy living in the world far more

once we have the Lord Jesus.

[ 31 : 13 ] So I would ask you that you would put your trust in him. I'm going to sum this up. There was a commentator a long, many, many, many years ago. Who kind of summed up kind of verse 1 and 2 in this way.

With me, he said, was poverty and emptiness. But with him there was riches and abundance. My poverty once made him poor.

But now his riches have made me rich. And I will never want again. I was often weary. But he is always strong.

Once my weariness made him weary. But now his strength makes me strong. I knew only the rough and noisy places.

But he knows the quiet and soft places. Once he came into the rough and noisy places for me. But now I dwell in the pastures of tender grass.

[ 32 : 15 ] Beside the waters of quietness with him. I was hungry and thirsty in a desert place. But he is all the fullness of God. Once he became hungry and thirsty for me.

And now he has brought me into the land of plenty. And refreshes my soul continually. That is what this commentator was saying.

About what Jesus has done. Kind of as it is summed up in these verses. Can you say that tonight? That he has done all these things. That he has come into the noisy and the rough places for you. That he has come into the hungry and the thirsty places for you. That he has come into the weary places for you. Because if he has.

Then the shepherd is yours. And you will never again want. Let us pray. Lord our God we pray to bless us tonight. We give thanks for these words.

[ 33 : 23 ] And for how precious they are to our soul. We pray that we may know the reality of the shepherd within our heart. Within our soul.

That we will all be able to say tonight. The Lord is my shepherd. And if we can say that. Then we will also be able to say. I shall not want.

Lord bless us. Bless our homes. Bless our families. Bless all whom we love. Bless those who are ill and laid aside. We commit them to your care. Do us good. And take us to our home safely.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen. I'm going to conclude singing. And sing psalms. This psalm. Psalm 23. Psalm 23.

It's on page 28. The Lord is my shepherd. No want shall I know. He makes me lie down where the green pastures grow. He leads me to rest. He leads me to rest. With a calm waters flow.

[ 34 : 28 ] My wandering steps he brings back to his way. In straight paths of righteousness making me stay. And this he has done his great name to display. Though I walk in death's valley where darkness is near.

Because you're with me no evil I'll fear. Your rod and your staff bring me comfort and cheer. In the sight of my enemies a table you spread. The oil of rejoicing you pour on my head.

My cup overflows and I'm graciously fed. So surely your covenant mercy and grace will follow me closely in all of my ways. I will dwell in the house of the Lord all my days.

Psalm 23. The whole psalm. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. No want shall I know.

He makes me lie down where the green pastures grow. He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow.

[ 35 : 34 ] My wandering steps he brings back to his way. In straight paths of righteousness making me stay.

And this he has done his great name to display. Though I walk in death's valley where darkness is near.

Because you are with me no evil I'll fear. Your rod and your staff bring me comfort and cheer.

In the sight of my enemies a table you spread. The oil of rejoicing you pour on my head.

My cup overflows and I'm graciously fed. So surely earth, covenant mercy and grace will follow me closely in all of my ways.

[ 36 : 57 ] I will dwell in the house of the Lord all my days. Now may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore.

Amen.