

The Lord is My Shepherd

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[0 : 00] A little to the chapter we read, the first section of our readings, the well-known Psalm, Psalm 23. I'm not going to read it all, but I want us tonight, it's a psalm, we've looked at it before, but I want us in parts, but I want us to look at it in its entirety tonight.

Again, just by way of overview, I'll just read the beginning and the end. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Now, one of the great things about this psalm, and not just this psalm, but about God's word, is that it doesn't matter how often we come to it, that we're always liable to find something new in it.

Because while it was penned years and years ago, hundreds indeed, we can go back thousands of years, we realize that the word of God is ever new, that God's spirit makes the word fresh and real. And the imagery in this psalm really is quite superb. And it's wonderful the way that God uses everyday things. He uses the things of nature, land, sea, the soil, the different things to teach spiritual truths.

[1 : 32] And Jesus was also, he was always doing the same thing. He was using everyday things, like a coin, trees, fish, the cornfields, sheep, different things, whatever, round and about, and he was engaging people with where he was at, just using the everyday things of life.

And he was teaching spiritual truths and using them as examples where he could teach a spiritual truth. And it's very important for us to understand that.

And I believe that God deliberately links all these very physical things of life and teaches spiritual truths through them. Because the physical and the spiritual are so linked together.

We live in such a physical world. We are physical beings. And we're so much governed by the physical that we often tend to forget the spiritual. We have a soul that needs nourishing.

It needs being fed. And that's one of the great things that we have. That's exactly what we're doing just now. We're coming, as it were, to eat spiritually. Because our souls, remember, are never dying.

[2 : 44] And our souls need life. And that's why Jesus came into this world. He came to bring light and life. And so we find that one of the great pictures that the Lord has given to us regarding himself is that of the shepherd.

Now, it's interesting that many of the prominent people in the Bible were shepherds. Abel, the first martyr, was a shepherd. Moses, after he ran away from the palace in Egypt, he spent 40 years as a shepherd in the wilderness.

David, the great shepherd king, he spent many of the early years of his life working as a shepherd. And it's interesting that God himself pictures himself from Genesis right through the Bible as Israel's shepherd.

And Jesus, as he has spoken about, the Messiah, the coming Messiah, one of the descriptions of him is as the shepherd.

And when Jesus himself came, he highlighted that, that he was, we read about that in John, that he was the good shepherd. The good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep.

[4 : 02] That's what he did. He held nothing back. Remember last week we had the Lord's Supper. And that's what we were doing. It's one of the things Jesus has asked us to do, is to remember his death till he comes again.

Just in the same way, you know, how we remember. We have what is termed our Remembrance Sunday. We are called upon to remember those who gave their lives in the war. It would be an awful thing to forget the sacrifice that so many people made in order that we may enjoy freedom.

Lest we forget. We read that. We hear that. And it's so right that these things should be kept before our mind. And similarly, here we have the Lord saying, lest you forget what I have done for you. I want you to remember me in a special way. And that's why we celebrated with the Lord's Supper, taking off the bread and the wine, where we remember the death of the Lord until he comes again. And so Jesus pictures himself as the good shepherd. The good shepherd who has come to seek for his sheep. He has come to seek and to save that which is lost.

[5 : 18] He is a shepherd who he won't lose anyone. It's not a wonderful thought. When you think of all the shepherds and crofters and farmers, there's not one that's ever said at the end of his days, you know, I never lost a sheep.

I never lost a lamb. They all do. But here is one shepherd who will never lose. Never lose one. And he is a great shepherd. And it's a wonderful thing if you tonight have this shepherd as your own to protect you, to keep you, to feed you, to water you, to look after you, and eventually to take you home with himself.

And so David begins this psalm on a great note of assurance. And that's one of the things that the Bible often emphasizes is this assurance, a persuasion, a knowledge that this is actually true. And he begins by saying, the Lord is my shepherd. You could almost underline that word, my. The Lord is my shepherd. Now, as we know, Christianity is primarily about a relationship. We spoke about that this morning. So many people look on Christianity as simply a set of rules of do's and don'ts. But that's missing the point. Christianity is primarily about a relationship of coming into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

[6 : 45] And it is one where we get to know, where it is a knowledge that is built on love. It is a relationship that is built on love. And when love is at work, we should know it.

We shouldn't be left in doubt. We shouldn't be asking the question, I wonder if the Lord really loves me. If we accept the Lord as our Lord, we should know that this is a relationship of love. Because it's love that reached out. It's his love that drew us to himself. We didn't go out searching for him.

He came searching for us. That's what the Bible shows us. The love began with him, not with ourselves. And it's a wonderful thing. That is why it is an all-conquering love.

It is a love that cannot take no for an answer. And it's a powerful love and it's a love that's at the very center of our relationship with him. And so, in a sense, it is strange when we're asking the question, I wonder if he really loves me.

[7 : 55] It's the same way as if I would find it just in any relationship. If I were to be saying to myself, I wonder if my wife loves me.

I wonder if my family loves me. I would find that difficult. Or if they were saying the same thing about me and she was saying, I wonder if he loves me. Or my family were saying, I wonder if he loves me. I would hate that. And yet, that's exactly what so often we do with the Lord. And we're saying, I'm not sure if he loves me. And when you think of what that love did, you see, love expresses itself. Love isn't just talk about. It's easy to write about love. And there are many, many great poems, many, many wonderful songs, and have been right throughout the centuries, right to this day, powerful songs about love.

And in one sense, it's while these songs are moving, and while these songs can move people to tears, and while these songs can bring a tremendous atmosphere into people's hearts and into situations, in one sense, it's easy to write a love song because words can be cheap.

[9 : 12] Love, real love, is discovered by action, by what a person does. That's the measure of love. Love is demonstrative. Love is doing.

And that's God's love. God isn't just saying, I love you. God is demonstrating his love by sending his son, Jesus Christ, into this world.

To die as a sacrifice for sin. To bring us to himself. That is love. And so, to question that love is actually questioning God's whole purpose and all that God has actually done.

Now, when we, David is saying here, the Lord is my shepherd. David knows that the Lord is his. And there's one thing.

You know, when you look at the life of David and his, what he has written, and you look at the life of Paul, you know, there were great similarities. Because both these men wanted to know the Lord more and more.

[10:16] It was David's great hunger. Now, let's remember. Some people think that if you're a Christian and you're wanting to know the Lord more, that your whole life, that's all that you've been involved in.

No. You look at David. David was as busy a man as was in this world. He was a king. He was an administrator. He was a fighter. He was involved in the whole sphere of life.

In all its different activities. In all its different status. Different fields. Involved in all the different things.

And in all the different areas and aspects of life. He still was wanting to know the Lord. You see, it's part and partial of life. Being a Christian, you don't separate yourself and say, well, here's my little slot of Christianity.

I'll keep that for Sunday when I come to church. And I'll keep it for my own quiet devotions. And the rest of the time, well, it's something else. That's not how it works. It should be part and partial of our lives all the way through.

[11:19] That's how it was for David. That's how it was for Paul. And that's how it should be for us and for all who follow the Lord. And so there is this developing, getting to know, wanting to know.

And that's part of what will make heaven the great thing it is. Is that you will be forever in the presence of the Lord that you love.

The Lord that you've come to know. And the Lord that you want to know better. And I believe that throughout an endless eternity, that will be part of it. It's where you will get to know him more and more and more.

And he'll become, in a sense, ever more wonderful. Although, I believe because our knowledge of him will become greater and greater. Is that what you want to know tonight?

Because that will reveal so much of where you are. And so we find, as David says, because the Lord is his shepherd, he will want for nothing.

[12:20] The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters.

What a picture of contentment. Lying down, just picture it, lying down in green pastures beside still waters.

Nothing to disturb. No anxiety within or without or around or about. It is the ultimate picture in a sense of contentment and satisfaction.

Now, when you think of sheep, and we must never lose sight of the sheep in this psalm, one thing we know sheep cannot do is lie down when they're anxious. When sheep are anxious or there is any fear in them at all, they will never lie down.

You come over a fence. There's a flock of sheep. You climb over a fence, and it doesn't matter how quietly you try and climb over that fence and not disturb them.

[13:25] The moment they see you, they're up and they're looking. Do I know this person or not? And although we tend to think of sheep as often being very stupid, I think they're a lot smarter than we give them credit for.

If they know you, it might be different. But if they don't, they're looking, they will run away. That's the way sheep are. And this picture that we have here, it's like the shepherd with the sheep, and it's this picture of absolute contentment.

No anxiety. No fear. And of course, that's a wonderful picture of what the Lord does for us, because anxiety and fear is part and partial of life.

Fear came when man sinned at the very beginning. We read about it, remember, in Genesis chapter 3. When man sinned against God, what was the first thing that Adam did?

He ran away. When he heard God, he ran away. And we've been running ever since. Because if you've wronged somebody, you don't want to meet that person.

[14:37] I remember, I shouldn't say that, but when we were kids, you know how you're always sometimes, when you're kids, you do things you shouldn't do. And sometimes you would get into a bit of mischief.

And I remember this one particular person, who had done something I shouldn't have done. Well, you know this, for a long time, I avoided that man.

Anytime I saw him, if I was walking towards him, I would just turn around, walk the other way. I would go into a shop. Guilty conscience. I didn't want to see him. Didn't want him to see me, rather.

And that's a picture exactly of how we are. And that's why we want to push God away. Because we don't realize it naturally. There's an inbuilt fear.

And we want God out of the picture. We don't want God. Because the moment we begin to think about that, we come to think about our own responsibility and our own accountability.

[15 : 34] And so fear is part of what's there. Often we don't realize it. I know at times myself, as I look back over my life, before I came to know the Lord, there was a fear.

And I didn't understand it. That's what the Lord has come to deal with. It is I. Be not afraid. Because it says that there is no fear in love.

Now, that doesn't mean that when a person becomes a Christian, that they'll never be scared again in life. It doesn't mean that they will never have bouts of anxiety or trouble or fears. Of course we are. We're human.

We're not. It's natural. But this is this fear, this deep-rooted fear, this deep-rooted anxiety about things being not right.

And so that's one of the things that Jesus has come to deal with. And so we have that picture here of the contentment. The fear has gone. Love has overcome.

[16 : 32] And there's a lying down, being satisfied. The green pastures. And that's where, again, a picture of the satisfaction that is brought about through eating.

These are fields that are so green. Beautiful grass. The satisfaction that is found from the sheep eating and then lying down after they have eaten.

That's another thing about sheep. You won't find hungry sheep lying down. The sheep will lie down after it has eaten and it's satisfied.

Then you'll see it lying down. Start chewing its cud and all that sort of stuff. But the hungry sheep won't lie down. And so here is a picture of someone, the picture of the sheep who have eaten and they're satisfied and they're lying down.

And again, what a spiritual picture that is, where we get our nourishment from the Lord. He says, I'm the bread of life. Jesus is saying in the Bible, I am the one you need.

[17 : 35] Yes, there's so much to satisfy us physically in this life. There's so much to stimulate us mentally in this life. And these are great blessings, good things.

Let's enjoy them. But let's not forget our soul. Our soul needs nourishment. Our soul needs.

And Jesus says, look, I've come to deal with that. I am the bread of life in the same way as he is also the water of life. Giving us that nourishment. Giving us that to what we need for our life.

And then he says, he restores, he leads me in paths of righteousness. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. See, sometimes we wander off.

I'm sure everybody in here has wondered a wee bit at one time or another. You know, sheep are very prone to strain. It's one thing about sheep. They're always on the wander. They're always moving.

[18 : 39] That's why shepherds need dogs. And they need to gather them up. Because the sheep are always, they're prone to wandering. And so are we. We're prone to wandering.

And we kid ourselves if we think we aren't. And I doubt there's anybody in here. It doesn't matter how long you've been following the Lord. But that you wandered a wee bit. And this is what the shepherd does.

A good shepherd will go after the wandering sheep. And he'll bring them back. Bring them back on track. Onto the path of righteousness. That path, the path of righteousness, is Jesus' own path.

And it's a path that leads to himself. And so he restores us. That's what he does. He restores my soul. Brings it back. Leads me in the path of righteousness.

Why? For his name's sake. For his glory's sake. That's what it's all about. About him. Everything he does. All this shepherding.

[19 : 38] His feeding. His guiding. His protecting. His restoring. His comforting. It's all for his name's sake. For his glory's sake. But the shepherding doesn't stop throughout life.

It even goes on into death. We read about that in verse 4. Just move through this very briefly. 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. Death. That's a word we don't like. We recoil from it. It's that enemy that comes in. It disturbs.

It destroys. It robs. Every home that has been hit by death. It's a home that is hurting. We hate it.

And there's some. Nobody looks forward to death. It's something we recoil from. And scripture itself. Itself talks about it. As an enemy. However.

[20 : 38] The Lord says. Even. Or the psalmist says. You're talking about the Lord's dealing. The shepherding doesn't stop. The Lord isn't just a shepherd for life. He is the shepherd.

Going into death. Even though I walk through the valley. Of the shadow of death. Now you'll notice. The word says. Even though I walk. Through the valley.

It's not. Even though. I enter. The valley. And that you're stuck there. It's you're going through it. In other words. It's not somewhere where you're stopping.

And that's how it is. For the believer. Here's death. But we're going to go down into it. And up the other side. There is going to be the light. At the end of the tunnel. And so the shepherd.

Will be with us. All the way. That's what it says. At the end of the psalm. I shall dwell. In the house of the Lord. I shall. Forever. That is.

[21 : 35] The heavenly mansion. And so that. Terror of death. Is not something that. We are to be filled. With fear about.

Now. It's all very well. Talking about that. Just now. And you say. Ah. That's all right. You're in health and strength. We're all in a reasonable measure. Of health and strength. It's a different thing. When you come to face death.

Well. You know. One of the things. That I've seen. Over the years. I have been with a lot of people. As they're facing up to death. And you know.

I would love to bring people. Into that. To see. The. See. Christians. As they face death. See. Their courage. See. Their faith. In the face. Of this great enemy. That's where you see. The reality of faith. It's all very well. Talking about faith. It's where you see it. In practice.

[22 : 28] Where you. See people. Face to face. With death. And you see. Faith. Faith. Soaring. Fully. Persuaded. Of the Lord.

In whom they believe. It's a wonderful thing. To see. Well. It talks here. Of the shadow. Of death. Now. You cannot have a shadow. Without light. Light. That's what brings.

Shadows. And somebody has described it. In that way. Here is death. Standing. It's black. Dark. But there is light. Behind.

The light of the Lord. And he is there. So that. All that you have. Is that the. Actual shadow. Of death. That is. There. Thrown over you. And the reason.

Why this death. Will not devour you. While this death. Will not destroy you. Is because. The one who is the light. Has already destroyed.

[23 : 24] That death. He met it. Through his own death. And that is why. You're able to say. Oh death. Where is. Your sting. Oh grave.

Where is. Your victory. And one last thing. We say here is. It is the shadow. Of death. It's Spurgeon himself. He used to say. The shadow. Of a dog.

Can't bite you. The shadow. Of a sword. Can't kill you. And likewise. The shadow. Of death. Cannot destroy you. When you are in. Jesus Christ.

For you are with me. Your rod. And your staff. They comfort me. Again. You're seeing the shepherd. The shepherd's crook. And the shepherd. Will use his crook. The rod. The staff. He'll use it.

To poke. To push. The sheep on. You know how often. You have to. Maybe if you're at a fan.

You're pushing them. Giving them a wee. We whack behind it. A wee prod.

[24 : 18] And sometimes. He will use the crook. The head of it. To put round. The neck. Around the horn. And to draw. To yourself. And that's again. A picture of what the Lord is doing. Sometimes.

It's a rod of discipline. Other times. He is. Using it. To draw us. To himself. We are like little children. We are like sheep. And we are needing.

The Lord dealing with us. In all the different ways. And then he says. You prepare a table before me. In the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

And the one picture that you have here. Is a lavish spread from the Lord. You know. At the beginning. It says. Not want. Well here it is.

Of course there is no want. In fact. It's the very opposite. Everything is. Is there provided. And if we are struggling. If we are going along.

[25 : 13] Like limping Christians. If we are going along. And saying. You know. I've got nothing. I'm empty. I'm flat. You've got to say.

