

The Shepherd's Provision

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 March 2017

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the book of Psalms, and this time to Psalm 23. A couple of weeks ago we looked at verse 2. I'm not going to go through the psalm, but today I want us simply to look at verse 3, but we'll read from the beginning.

Psalm 23 in the book of Psalms. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Then we saw, a couple of weeks ago, two of the things that the shepherd gives us.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. And then today we'll look at this, that he, verse 3, He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. So, last time we saw that the shepherd, there were two things that the shepherd did for us.

That he enabled us to lie down in the green pastures beside still waters. Where he fed us, and where he watered us. And we see that it wasn't just any old pasture land, but it was luscious, it was fertile, it was green, it was beautiful, it was full of nourishment.

[1 : 15] And that's what the Lord does for us. That he gives us richly, out of his good treasure, everything that we need. Sometimes, as Christians, we can limp along.

Sometimes we don't feel too good. Sometimes we lose our way altogether. Sometimes we can drift here and there. It doesn't mean that all the time, that we're feeding and being nourished, as the psalm shows us.

And that we're lying down content, as the psalm shows us. But we see, as I remember last time we saw that, two things where we will always find the sheep lying down contentedly.

One is after they've eaten, and they're satisfied. That's one time that you'll find the sheep lying down, they're satisfied. Another is when there is no fear around.

Because, as we said before, you jump over the fence into a field of sheep, and they're all up. Supposing they're lying down, or a dog comes in, they're up, they're on alert. There's this sense of fear.

[2 : 19] Sheep don't lie down if they're disturbed, or if there's anything that threatens them. And they don't lie down if they're hungry. But this is a picture of the sheep. There's this beautiful scene of contentment, as the shepherd has fed them, and the shepherd has watered them.

And it's him who is doing all this. He makes me. Remember, we highlighted that the shepherd doesn't do it by force. You never see a crofter, or a farmer, or a shepherd putting the sheep down and making them lie down.

The only time they do that is if they were working on them, or shearing them. But you can't get a sheep just to lie down like that. The way for them to lie down is when they're content, when they're satisfied.

And we find that the Lord is the one who leads. And as we saw, this beautiful picture of contentment, this picture of peace. And that's what the Lord wants to give us in this world.

Because we live in a very difficult world, a very uncertain world. A world where there's a lot of things to scare us. Sometimes we think it's only children who get frightened or scared. But we live in the kind of world today where there is so much uncertainty and so much fear about.

[3 : 33] And in the Bible, God is always saying to us, fear not. And the more we look to the shepherd, the more we trust in the shepherd.

The closer we live to the shepherd, the more we will experience in this world his peace and everything that he can give us.

That's why he says, cast your care upon me. He knows we have cares. Cast all your cares upon me. Because I care for you. He would say again, be anxious for nothing. But in everything, by prayer, supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

But here we see in verse 3 that the other two things that the shepherd does. And the first is, he restores my soul. Now if you restore anything, you're going to fix it.

You're going to bring it back to how it once was. There are some people who are really gifted at furniture restoration. They, that's what they have, it's their craft.

[4 : 37] And they're able to restore furniture so that once again, old furniture, it looks like it's, you just say to yourself, wow, that's really good. Other people, they're into restoring old cars.

Again, great skills, great ability, but that's what they're able to do. And it's a wonderful thing to see things being restored. Again, if somebody is ill, somebody is brought back, is restored to health and to strength again.

These are all great things. But here, the restoration, the restoring is with regard to our soul. And only the Lord can do that.

Now, at the very heart of soul restoration, there has to be repentance. And repentance is our part, where we are sorry if we've gone astray.

If we're sorry before the Lord that things have gone wrong for us. And so, our part is repentance. But before there is repentance from us, God begins to work.

[5 : 44] It starts with God. He is the one who begins to restore us. Now, not all restoration, let me say, with regard to the Christian, comes about because we have wandered or backslidden or whatever.

There's loads of things we could talk about, but just to highlight one, for instance. Sometimes, even in Christian work and Christian service, a passion can need to be restored because they're worn out.

And God will do that. Now, that's a different kind of restoration. But there's loads of different ways in which God can restore. Sometimes, people think, if a person is involved in Christian service in any shape or form, then there's not a chance that they will ever burn out or become weary or worn.

Well, you ask one of the greatest saints in the Bible about that, Elijah. Elijah was a man who was utterly and absolutely committed, dedicated, zealous for God, like few others have ever been.

And yet, we find Elijah under a tree. And he's saying to the Lord, take me away. Take away my life. I can't go on anymore.

[7 : 01] I don't want to live anymore. He was burnt out with physical, mental exhaustion. What did the Lord do? Did the Lord say to Elijah, come on, don't be talking like that.

No, he allowed Elijah to sleep and to sleep and to sleep. And then he sent an angel that woke Elijah and said, take, eat. Eat and drink.

The angel had brought food and drink. Elijah took the food and drink and went back to sleep. And the Lord left Elijah sleeping for ages again. And then again, the angel came, again with more food and drink, and said, arise, eat, for the journey is too great for you.

And sometimes that's how it is for the Christian. Sometimes the journey, parts of the journey are too great. And the Lord has his ways like that of dealing just as he did with Elijah.

So that's one form of restoration. And Elijah then went on and again went back into service. The Lord Jesus said to his disciples on one occasion, he said, look, he said, we must go into the desert.

[8 : 09] Rest and come apart and rest for a while. And as someone very wisely said, if we don't take our times of coming apart, we will come apart.

Because it is important for these times. But what the main focus of this verse really is, is about people who have wandered.

They've gone away from the Lord in whatever way. Sometimes it's just for a little time. Sometimes it might be a very subtle thing. You know this, sometimes we can wander away from the Lord in our heart without even realizing it.

Sometimes it's just not, we're not right with the Lord. And sometimes we don't even know it. You would think that if we're not right with the Lord that we would know it. But that's not always the case. Sometimes we don't know. So, the Lord is the one who will show us. A classic example of that is David. David, after he committed adultery and then murder, where he had Uriah killed.

[9 : 13] David went on in his kingship. And David's heart was dead. Although he didn't realize, he probably realized to a certain extent things weren't the way they were.

But he had no idea how far away he was from the Lord. Until God sent Nathan the prophet to David. Do you remember Nathan told David a wee story?

That was about a man who had, a very rich man who had loads of sheep. He had great flocks of sheep. And next door to him there was a poor man who had only one little sheep. And it was a pet sheep. The family, it was almost like part of the family. The sheep had become a real pet in that home. A visitor came to visit the rich man. And the rich man, rather than taking one of his own sheep, jumped over the fence, or whatever it was then, and took the pet sheep belonging to the poor man and killed it and used that to feed the visitor.

[10:16] When David heard that story, he was so angry. And he said, you know this, that man will die. He was so mad when he heard that story.

It hit right into him. And he said, what an awful thing to do. You see, David was so far from the Lord at that particular time. He couldn't see.

The story Nathan was telling him was a story about himself. Because at that moment, David was self-righteous. And you know, when a person is self-righteous, they don't see the sin within their own life.

They see the sins in other people. These sins are, oh, they're very, very obvious in other people. But they don't see them in themselves. That's what's the problem of the Pharisees. Jesus was always condemning the Pharisees.

And he says, you know this, you are so full of sin yourselves. But you can't see it. But you're seeing everybody else's sin. Remember how Jesus used it about the beam.

[11:20] It was the most exaggerated language he's using. But he's saying to them, look, you're seeing a little speck in somebody else's eye. And you're saying, oh, look at that.

Look at that speck in the eye. But you don't realize you've got that beam. It's like a whole log in your own eye. It's quite extreme, the illustration that Jesus uses.

But he's pointing out that when we're filled with self-righteousness, that's the way we are. We're all right, but look at these other people. And that's where David was. But then Nathan, when he finished the story, and David was so incensed about it, Nathan said to David, actually, David, you're that man.

And when Nathan said that, an arrow from the Lord, the Spirit of God in convicting power went into David's heart.

And then David realized the enormity of what he had done. We sang Psalm 51. That psalm came from this episode.

[12:27] It was part of David's great sorrow before God of what he had done. But the point we're making here is that God was in the business of restoring David's soul.

And the initiative began with God. This whole process of restoration. It was the same with Peter. You remember when Peter had been so proud and arrogant before Jesus' arrest.

And he was saying, look, he said, supposing everybody forsakes you. There's one person, Jesus, you can count on. That is me. Jesus said, no, he said.

If you could only see behind the scenes, Peter, Satan is out to get you. And he's going to sift you like wheat. But I'm praying for you that your faith won't fail.

But he said, I'm going to tell you something before the cock crows tonight. You are going to deny me three times. Peter thought impossible. But that's exactly what happened.

[13:30] Remember in that room. And they were asking because Peter was a worried man at this particular stage. And Jesus was being tried. Kind of a kangaroo court, we would say today.

And he was being tried very unjustly. And people started saying to Peter, hey, you're one of them. You're one who was with Jesus. Oh, he was denying. No, no, you're the wrong man, not me.

But he didn't just say it like that. He was saying it with oaths and with curses. He was denying Jesus in the most awful way. And he did it three times.

And then the cock crowed. And it tells us, Jesus, he didn't say anything. He just turned and he looked at Peter. And that look melted Peter's heart.

His arrogance and everything that was in him, it just crumbled. And it tells us he went outside and he wept bitterly. He was a broken hearted man.

[14:32] You see, it was the Lord who started the process. It was that look. Just as the same way as the words of Nathan the prophet came to David.

And so the thing is that the Lord loves us too much to allow us to go, just to go on and to go on and to go on. And there are times that we do wander.

And there are times that we don't listen to his word. Because when we come under the word, God speaks to us. But sometimes we're deaf to it. But the thing is that he will get our attention one way or another.

And if we don't listen to the word, then we'll have to listen to the rod. That's the way that he works. But as we said, the repentance begins when we realize that the Lord is looking at us.

And we see again within here, it tells us that he restores our soul.

[15 : 35] And you know, when he does that, we go to the Lord and we just say to the Lord, you know, it's an amazing thing that our times, it's happened to me and I'm sure it happens to you loads of times.

The Lord convicts you about something. It might be the way an attitude you have. It might be the way that you're living. It might be things that you're doing. And it's not troubling you.

And then one day, it really begins to bother you. Maybe your attitude. Maybe the way you're speaking to a certain person or to people. Maybe a particular aspect of your lifestyle.

And it just goes in and you say to the Lord, Lord, I'm really sorry, I never really saw that before. Or maybe you have seen it before. Or maybe it has been dealt with before, but you're back into it.

And the Lord is convicting you. But you know, when you go to the Lord and you're saying, Lord, forgive me. Create within me a clean heart, like David said. It's amazing the sense of peace that comes back.

[16 : 38] The heart again becomes tender. And you're saying, Lord, keep me like this. Help me so that I won't be straying. So we're told here he restores her soul.

And then it tells us, and he leads me in the paths of righteousness. And I love this. Again, it's back to the leading. And again, I have to ask the question, is the Lord leading you?

Because if the Lord is leading you, then you, as a consequence, are following him. That's what happens. If you today are following the Lord, it is because the Lord is leading you.

And I hope you're following the Lord close. Because you know you can follow the Lord far away.

Maybe you're here today and that's how it is with you. You're following the Lord, but you're following far away.

The Lord is in the distance. And when that happens, you know, you can come to church, but it's just a duty. You come to church and it's like where you clock in at work and you clock out and say, well, that's another one done.

[17 : 45] When you're close to the Lord, you don't think like that. Because when you come to God's house, you come hoping to meet with him, to hear something anew. You're wanting that your heart will, like the disciples said, did not our hearts burn within us?

And that was because Jesus was walking with them. And surely that's what we pray, that when we come to God's house, we say, oh Lord, will you speak personally to me? Will you touch my heart? May I know you today, maybe better than I've ever known you before. So that is not just an exercise or an academic exercise. We don't just come, as we say, out of duty, although there is an element of duty in it.

We come in order that we may meet with the Lord. But if we're following far off, we can come into God's house. We can come under the word. We can sing the word.

We can go back out. Somebody will say to you, what were you singing today? Oh, I can't remember. But what was the reading? I can't know. I know some people, and this is not what I mean.

[18 : 48] Some people do not have a retentive memory. And I'm not in any way thinking of that. But what I'm trying to say is people can go in and out and be totally unmoved, unchanged, unaffected in any shape or form by the word.

They've heard the preaching, but it's just been a sound in the distance. All these things, nothing registers. They go in and out and not affected. And you can still be following the Lord.

That, again, was part of the problem with Peter. Because before Peter fell, you know what it tells us? Peter followed Jesus afar off.

Thankfully, he was following, but he was following at a distance. And, you know, that's where the problems happen. Because the further away we are from Jesus, the more things we allow into our lives.

The more things that can get in our way. The closer we are with Jesus, the safer we are, the more we enjoy him, his fellowship, his presence, his nearness.

[19 : 58] So this is what he's telling us. He leads me in the paths of righteousness. Or it could be in the right paths. Now this word leads is a present verb, which means it's something that the shepherd always does.

He's always leading. Isn't that wonderful? Today he's leading you. Even although you may be far off, he's still leading you. Jesus never, ever, ever any day says, you know this?

I have spent so many years leading that person. They're not making much of it. You know this? I'm going to give up. I'm going to take a day off from leading.

You know this? You know this? You know this? Jesus never, ever, ever, ever does that. All the time. Even when we forget him, he never forgets us.

He's always, always, always, always leading us. And he leads us on paths of righteousness, on the right path. Sometimes we take detours.

[21 : 02] Sometimes we'll go off the path, but he'll take us back onto it. And you'll notice it's paths, not paths. It's paths of righteousness. So that all the paths are leading in the one direction.

They are all leading to glory. And the paths the Lord has for your life might be quite different to the paths that the person beside you is on.

Because our experiences are all different. Often we share common experiences. And we'll go through one thing, or a person will go through something, and you might go through that experience later on.

But the fact of the matter is that where you are today is personal and individual to you. And the Lord is your shepherd, and he's dealing with you personally.

He has never stopped dealing personally with you. And he's taking you along the right paths. And how do we know the right path? Well, the right path is here for us in the guidebook that God has given us.

[22 : 06] His word. And we will know if we're on the right path if we are following him according to his word. And you know, every time we come to church, we come to a place where the Lord again speaks to us.

And you know, even today, supposing you're saying to yourself, you know, I don't really know where I am. I don't know whether I've started following the Lord or not.

Sometimes people are in that they don't know. Well, I would say to you, ask the Lord. Here is the shepherd. And today, right now, you are in the presence of the shepherd.

And you say to the shepherd, Lord, will you please lead me in the right way? Because I'm actually not too sure about the way to go myself.

I remember speaking personally, that was one of the things that came into my own life. Because for a good number of years, you were going on on your own.

[23 : 06] And you thought you were, I knew I wasn't making the best job. In fact, often I knew I was making quite a bad job of my own life. But I still thought, yeah, I'm okay. Then there came this time when I realized, I just couldn't do it.

I couldn't walk. I couldn't go right without the Lord. Again, it was him who worked that. It was him who did that within my heart.

He showed me that I was completely on wrong paths. And I had to get on to the right path. The paths of righteousness. And you know, this is something that he loves to do. That's why he came into the world.

To take people who are on the wrong path onto the right path. To people who are on a broad road, to take them onto a narrow road. That's why Jesus came.

He came to give light and life and hope and to direct us in the right way. And to take us home. To be with himself at the end of the day.

[24 : 06] Because the beauty of these, I think we've said this often enough before. I love the last verse of this psalm. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Remember, it's Douglas Macmillan. I've said it often enough before. He was the shepherd for years and years before he became a minister. And he wrote that book, The Lord of Shepherd.

If you don't have it, get it. It's a wonderful book. It's the best, I think the best exposition I've ever seen of this psalm. But he likened the goodness and mercy, remember, to two sheepdogs.

All the time he is looking, it's the sheep and the shepherd. All the way through he's seeing the sheep and the shepherd. And could there be two more wonderful sheepdogs, if we keep the picture of the sheep and the shepherd.

Following you every single day. Goodness and mercy. Accompanying you every step along these paths of righteousness.

[25 : 06] Until all the days of my life. And if that is how it is, if you're being led by the shepherd with goodness and mercy following you all the days of your life.

Then you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. End of story. Wonderful. And that's as we said a couple of weeks ago.

This is why this particular psalm is such a favorite. Sung at weddings. Sung at funerals. It encompasses all life. And I hope today that this shepherd is your shepherd.

And that he is leading you along these paths of righteousness. To dwell with him. In his home forever and ever. Let's pray. Oh Lord, our gracious God.

We give you thanks again for your word. And the challenge it is. The inspiration it is. The encouragement it is. Oh Lord, we pray that you will be our shield and our shelter.

[26 : 04] And that you will truly lead us in the paths of righteousness. That you will have goodness and mercy following us all the days of our life. And you will bring us to dwell in your house forevermore.

Take away from us in our sin. Take us all home safely, we pray. And forgive us in Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. We are going to conclude singing in this psalm.

Psalm 23. And this is from the Scottish Psalter. The tune is Amazing Grace. Psalm 23 from the Scottish Psalter. Which is on page 229. Psalm 23.

Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. I will not want. He makes me down to lie in pasture green. He leadeth me the quiet waters by. My soul he doth restore again.

And me to walk doth make within the paths of righteousness. Even for his own name's sake. Be though I walk in death's dark veil. Yet will I fear none ill.

[27 : 09] For thou art with me. And thy rod and staff may comfort still. My table thou hast furnished. In presence of my foes. My head thou dost with oil anoint. And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me. And in God's house forevermore. My dwelling place shall be. Psalm 23. The Lord's my shepherd. The Lord's my shepherd.

I will not want. He makes me down to lie.

In pasture stream. He leadeth me.

The quiet waters high. My soul he doth restore again.

[28 : 26] And me to walk doth lay. Within the paths of righteousness.

He intended who would always say. He knows I fall sidx bottom pow.

May that star-bill Yet will I be not ill For thou art with me on thy road I'm stopping comfort still My table love has perished In presence of my foes My head thou dost with oil anoint

Unlike a polar ghost Goodness and mercy all my life Shall truly follow thee And in God's earth forevermore My dwelling place shall be 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.

Just one word I forgot my glasses today Which happens quite often The pair I have They're excellent They're silver They're lost property So I'll leave them I will leave them at the front door when I go out If you've left glasses That's where they are So thank you very much Thank you very much