

"MY SHEPHERD"

Psalm 23:1

Intro: Anyone who reads the Bible is familiar with shepherds and sheep. "Abel was a keeper of sheep" (Gen. 4:2). Abraham was a shepherd. When he came out of Egypt with Lot, the two of them had so many "flocks, and herds" (Gen. 13:5) that they were not able to stay together. The patriarchs were all shepherds. Joseph took care of sheep. Moses, although raised in the royal family of the Pharaoh in Egypt, became a shepherd when he worked for Jethro, his father-in-law. Many more names could be added to this list. But probably the most famous of all of the shepherds of the Old Testament was David.

Sheep were commonly used for sacrifices in OT times. The animal that was sacrificed for the Passover was a lamb.

As we come into the NT, and read of the ministry of John the Baptist, he called our Lord "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). But our Lord also spoke of Himself as "the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). And after that we have the writers of the NT referring to our Lord as "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20), and as "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25), and as "the chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4).

There are other related passages that we could refer to, but this is sufficient to show us that no person can understand the Bible who does not understand something about sheep and shepherds. Those of us who were raised in the city may have more work to do to familiarize ourselves with shepherds and sheep, but it is worth whatever trouble it takes, especially because our Lord is likened to both shepherds and to sheep.

In our Sunday night services for a few weeks I want to take up some of these passages which speak especially of our Lord as a Shepherd. David was led by the Holy Spirit to describe Him as a Shepherd. And this very fact has made Psalm 23 perhaps the most familiar of all Psalms, and surely high, if not the highest, in the ranks of those Psalms which are dearly loved by the people of God.

We are not going to get through the entire twenty-third Psalm in one service because, in many ways, it is this Psalm which prepares us for the other Scriptures where our Lord is spoken of as a Shepherd.

Our text for tonight is verse 1 of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." The five words at the beginning of the verse contain a wealth of truth which should bring

great blessing to each one of us. In the Hebrew these five words are the translation of two words. The first is "Lord," Jehovah; the second--one word in the Hebrew, "my shepherd."

I. "MY SHEPHERD."

David was here claiming to have a personal relationship with the Lord. It is one thing to say that the Lord is a Shepherd, but a much more wonderful thing to be able to say, and to say truthfully, "The Lord is MY shepherd."

What right did David have to say this? Who established this relationship between the Lord and David?

Let me ask you another question, and even though you may have been raised in a city, I think that you will be able to answer my question correctly. The question is this: Did you ever hear of a sheep who chose its own shepherd? Wouldn't we all answer that we have never heard of that. Shepherds chose their own sheep. Therefore, in this statement I see that behind it was David's understanding that he had not chosen to be one of the Lord's sheep, but that the Lord had chosen him!

Every child of God can make this claim: "The Lord is my shepherd." But we need to understand that it was not we who brought ourselves into God's fold, but God who chose us, Christ who chose us, to be one of His sheep.

Did we not have this truth in our Sunday School lesson this morning? There was no debate in Moses mind as to how Israel became the Lord's people; the Lord chose them. The question that Moses raised was why the Lord would choose them. And the only answer to that question is that the Lord has chosen us because He loved us. See Deut. 7:6, 7.

So, when David said, "The Lord is my shepherd," he was expressing the truth that He was the Lord's by divine choice. David received the Lord just as we do, but he knew that the Lord had chosen him first, and that, if the Lord had not chosen him, he would never have chosen the Lord.

So these words have G-R-A-C-E written all over them. He is our because He first loved us and chose us and brought us to Himself.

David, or whoever wrote the one hundredth Psalm, gave expression to this truth when he wrote in the third verse,

Know ye that the Lord he is God:
it is he that hath made us,
and not we ourselves;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

What joy it should bring to our souls, knowing this, to be able to say, "The Lord is my shepherd"!

But now let us look at the Name that David used here:

~ But what is a shepherd?

A shepherd is the one who cares for the sheep. He feeds them. He leads them so that they will not go astray. He protects them from wild animals. He does everything for them. Sheep could not exist without a shepherd.

This twenty-third Psalm will tell us more about the work of the shepherd, but let me call your attention to a verse in Isaiah's prophecy which speaks of the Lord as our Shepherd. It is Isa. 40:11, and it reads like this:

ALL WITH THE
LITTLE LAMBS
IN WALES.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd:
he shall gather the lambs with his arm,
and carry them in his bosom,
and shall gently lead those that we with young.

This describes our Lord as a good Shepherd. A shepherd by nature, to be a good shepherd, had to be tender, loving, kind. There is no greater shepherd than our Lord. Whatever the sheep need, He is there to provide.

~ "Shepherd" is another word for pastor. And those who have the privilege of being shepherds under the Chief Shepherd can do no better than to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Chief Shepherd.

At this point I could deal with those last four words of our text, but let me save them for a moment. Instead, let us go to the name that our Shepherd has:

II. "THE LORD."

David did not have just any ordinary shepherd; he said, "**The Lord** is my shepherd." The force of this statement is intensified by the fact, as I have mentioned, that it is made up of just two words in the original: "(The) Lord, my Shepherd."

I have described the meaning of this Name many times to you before, but let me take a few moments with it again.

~ This means that David's Shepherd was the Living One--not in the sense that you and I live, because we all were born at some time in the past, and we are going to die at some time in the future, if the Lord tarries. Our Lord is the Living One because He never did have a beginning. As God, He was

never born. And although our Lord died in the flesh here on earth, He will never die again. He will never need to be replaced. He lives forever! In fact, the One Whom David called his Shepherd is exactly the same Person that you and I claim as our Shepherd. In the 3,000 years since David wrote this, the Lord has not changed in any way.

We can say all of this because our Lord is GOD! As God, He is omniscient--so He never makes a mistake. He always does the best for us. He is omnipotent--so He cannot possibly fail to do what we need. He is omnipresent--so He is not caring for one of his other sheep when we need Him to take care of us. "The Lord is my shepherd." You and I know those words so well, but let us say them over and over until they are written indelibly upon our hearts. Who is my Shepherd? The Lord of heaven and earth is my Shepherd!

This is why David could say, "I shall not want." The NASB gives an alternate reading as, "I do not want." Not only can we say that we never shall be in want, but right now we can say that we are not in want. Oh, we have some very real needs at this moment, and we will have others in the future. But they are needs which our Shepherd is able to take care of, and to use them so that we are benefitted for all eternity by them.

Now let me add one more point:

III. THE SHEEP.

David did not say this in so many words, yet we are to understand that, if the Lord were his Shepherd, than he was a sheep.

When we were in Wales we saw hundreds of sheep. I would not be exaggerating to say, thousands. But I will have to confess that as I looked at those animals I was not reminded of myself. But that is what I am. That is what you are. If we did not have the Lord as our Shepherd, we wouldn't last very long, would we? We need Him to guide us. We need Him to protect us. We need Him to feed us. Sometimes we need Him to carry us in His arms. David could not have presented himself as one who was in continually great need than he did when he said, "The Lord is my shepherd."

Not only does the Lord meet our temporal and physical needs, but, what is even more important, He meets our spiritual needs. We will come to that more in detail later. But I must mention it here. There is no other Shepherd Who can meet our needs before God. Some people have other shepherds, but they are false shepherds. Only the Lord Jesus Christ is

the true Shepherd.

Concl: How much does this statement mean to you tonight?

You and I have known this verse for a long time. We know that David wrote it. We know that the Lord was David's Shepherd. But David wrote this, among other reasons, for us. Paul said that he did in Romans 15:4. Let me close with the Apostle's words:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime
were written for our learning,
that we through patience and comfort
of the scriptures might have hope.

May the Lord enable you and me to make these our testimony tonight, and to draw from them the comfort and hope which the Lord intends for us to have.

GREEN PASTURES AND STILL WATERS

Psalm 23:2

Intro: The Devil is very clever in the ways that he seeks to discourage us from committing ourselves fully to the Lord. One of the suggestions he makes (and we all have sensed this) is, "If you live only for the Lord, think of what you will be missing." Or, as he did with the Lord, he will try to make us think that we can get something better than the Lord will give us if we do things our own way instead of the Lord's way. That was behind the Devil's suggestion that our Lord could get all of the kingdoms of the earth if He would fall down and worship the Devil. He was telling the Lord that He could have the Crown without the Cross, the throne of the Messiah without the tree of the Savior.

Last week we considered David's words in the first verse of this very familiar Psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

"I shall not want" means that I will not be lacking in anything. We can look at this in at least two ways, and both of them are true. The primary meaning is that David would not lack anything that he really needed. We all have to distinguish between what we need and what we want. The Old English word "want" is actually speaking of the lack of things which we need. So to use the word "want" is a little confusing. However, David was saying that he would not lack anything that he really needed. The Lord as his Shepherd would meet those needs.

On the other side David was saying that I will not be lacking anything that I really want, or desire. That is because the Lord changes our desires when we take Him as our Shepherd.

When you think of that verse, Psalm 37:4,

Delight thyself also in the Lord;

and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart, or the petitions of thine heart, we may wonder how the Lord could make such a promise to us. The reason is that when we delight ourselves in the Lord, He changes our desires, He changes our petitions. Likewise, when the Lord is our Shepherd, He gives us different desires. He causes us to desire what He wants us to have, which are our real needs, and we are never lacking in any of these. The satisfaction of our needs, or real needs, is all that it takes to make us truly happy.

In this, as well as in most all other things, we can all say that the Lord has been better to us than we deserve. But we

need to be careful that we do not seek the wrong things because sometimes the Lord gives them, but we suffer from leanness of soul. Cf. Psa. 106:15.

As the time of our Lord's death was drawing near, He asked His disciples in Luke 22:35, "'When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing?' And they said, 'Nothing.'"

The Lord's words in Matthew 6:33 apply here. He told His disciples,

But seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness;
and all these things shall be added unto you.

What things? What they were to eat, what they were to drink, and what they were to wear.

Think also of that great promise in Phil. 4:19:

But my God shall supply all your need
according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

We have David's words also in Psa. 37:25:

I have been young, and now am old;
yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken,
nor his seed begging bread.

These verses do not excuse us from working. We work, or we don't eat. Cf. 2 Thess. 3:10. What we are talking about is God's faithfulness in providing for all of our needs! Not our wants, but our needs--our real needs.

A long time ago I heard a paraphrase of Psalm 23:1 which went like this: The Lord is my shepherd, and I wouldn't want any more if I could have it. I think that also is included in the testimony that David was giving as he started to write Psalm 23. And we will see as we go through this Psalm that David had in mind every need: the physical, the temporal, and the spiritual.

"But," you might say, 'sheep don't work.'" And you are right. They spend their time awake eating, and that, for them, might be considered a form of working. However, the sheep are 100% dependent upon the shepherd, and the Lord has pictured us as His sheep so that we will see that whatever we may do to earn money, we, too, are 100% dependent upon our Shepherd. Every person is dependent upon God, but most people never recognize that at all.

So Psalm 23:1 is an expression of David's entire satisfaction with the Lord, and the Lord's provision for him. Notice that the Lord comes first, and then the provision. "The Lord is

my shepherd; I shall not want."

Psalm 23:2 gives us the first two reasons in this Psalm for David's complete satisfaction with the Lord, and with being one of the Lord's sheep.

The first is:

I. "HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES."

Last week I mentioned our recent trip to Wales, and that there we saw those green, rolling hills, covered with sheep. It rains a lot in Wales, and that, I suppose, is one thing that makes it such ideal sheep country. One of the men we got acquainted with over there told us that in that area they had 120 inches of rain each year, or 10 inches per month. That is a lot of rain! But you cannot have green pastures if you don't have rain.

"Green pastures" mean food for sheep, lots of food. The sheep in Wales have more grass than they can eat. We did not see any bare pasture lands while we were there.

We all know that the land of Israel where David was is a land that is especially dependent upon the rain. If the people sinned, the rain was withheld. When the people pleased the Lord, the early and latter rains came on schedule. We have been learning in our study of Deuteronomy that the Lord gave the people flocks. So there were sheep there when they arrived, plus all of the animals that they brought with them.

But when you see sheep lying down in green pastures, you know that they are not hungry. They are content. They are satisfied. But even more than that, Franz Delitzsch, in his commentary on the Psalms, says that this expression speaks not just of a resting place, but of a dwelling place. This is where the Lord's sheep live--in the midst of abundance, all kinds of abundance.

But what did David mean when he said, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."

Think of this in its spiritual significance because that surely was primary in David's mind.

What are the green pastures where the Lord feeds us, where the grass is thick and tall and inexhaustible? It has to be the Word of God. The Word is the food of the Lord's sheep. We not only feed on it, but notice: WE LIE DOWN IN IT! WE REST IN IT. IT NOT ONLY FEEDS US, BUT IT GIVES US REST; IT GIVES US PEACE. And it is the Lord Who makes sure in all of

our lives that we not only feed on the truth, but we rest in the truth. If we don't rest immediately, He works with us until we do. "He maketh me (it is personal) lie down in green pastures."

But the last part of the verse tells us something else:

II. "HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS."

Sheep not only need grass, but they need water. The shepherd knows this, and always keeps this twofold need in mind. All through those hills in Wales there were rivers and streams of water. The rains guaranteed that there would be an abundance of water.

How wonderful it is, when you think of our situation as the Lord's sheep, to realize that we do not have to find the pasture and the water; the Lord knows where both are, and He leads us to them. This is not guidance in some great crisis in life, but guidance in the supply of our daily needs. The Lord guides us, guides us continually.

Using another figure of speech Isaiah the prophet spoke of the Lord's guidance in our lives in this way:

And the Lord shall guide thee continually,
and satisfy thy soul in drought,
and make fat thy bones:
and thou shall be like a watered garden,
and like a spring of water,
whose waters fail not (Isa. 58:11).

What are "still waters"? They are quiet, restful waters. In Israel the heat of the sun was often a problem, and so the shepherd found places where the sheep could feed and where they could be refreshed by the cool, quiet, restful waters of some river, or possibly an oasis.

Do you remember what the Lord told the Samaritan woman at the well? Let me read to you our Lord's words which He spoke to the woman:

Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:
But whosoever drinketh of the water
that I shall give him shall never thirst;
but the water that I shall give him
shall be in him a well of water springing up
into everlasting life (John 4:13b, 14).

And the invitation of Rev. 22:17 is this:

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.
And let him that heareth say, Come.
And let him that is athirst come.

And whosoever will let him come and take
the water of life freely.

The rest-giving, quiet waters of the Word, that Word which speaks to us in so many ways of our Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, gives us refreshing peace--and again, it is in abundant supply.

Concl: We have just had two verses in Psalm 23 thus far, and both of them speak in three ways of contentment, satisfaction, of peace--real peace!

One thing is certain: David was perfectly satisfied with his Shepherd. He was perfectly content to belong to the Lord. He did not yearn for some other shepherd, nor for some other pasture. His Shepherd was the greatest and the best.

He has more than this to say, as we shall see in the remaining verses of this Psalm.

Illus: The gathering of people who heard an actor and an old pastor quote the 23rd Psalm. The people were thrilled with the actor's recital. They were moved to tears when the pastor quoted it. Afterwards the actor told the pastor, "I know the Psalm of the Shepherd; you know the Shepherd of the Psalm.

Do you know the Shepherd of the Psalm, or just the Psalm of the Shepherd? There is a great difference. If you know the Shepherd, you shall not want. And you will know what it is to lie down in green pastures, and to be led beside the still waters.

Peace, contentment, satisfaction, because of our Shepherd and what He does for us, is probably the primary marking of those who are the Lord's sheep.

THE RESTORER OF SOULS

Psalm 23:3

Intro: We have been considering a very precious relationship which the Lord maintains with His people. He is their Shepherd; they are His sheep. David said that the Lord was completely sufficient for him as a Shepherd. With the Lord as His Shepherd, there was no need that he could have which would go unsatisfied. The idea of abundance is carried over into verse 2 he pictured himself as lying down in the presence of abundance, fully satisfied. And the Lord not only met his need for food, but he led David to quiet, refreshing waters. The main emphasis in all of this is upon David's spiritual needs.

In verse 3 we come to another idea.

It would be wonderful if we as sheep always followed our Shepherd, but the grim fact with all of us is that we do not always follow Him. And so the first statement to come before us in verse 3 is:

I. "HE RESTORETH MY SOUL."

If we were always obedient, following our Shepherd, satisfied with Him and the provision that He makes for us, we would save ourselves a lot of trouble. It is true that we are new creatures in Christ, but it is also true that we still have an old nature, a sin nature, a nature which is not subject to the Word of God, nor can it be brought into subjection to His Word. There is in every child of God the heart of a rebel. And that rebellion manifests itself in a variety of ways.

When David spoke of his restoration, he said that it was his soul that the Lord restored. His soul is himself. David was distinguishing between his body and his soul. His soul is the inner man. His soul is the person that you cannot see; you can only see how he lives, what he does. And by referring to his soul, David was indicating that whenever you see a child of God behaving in a rebellious manner, that rebellion was going on inwardly before others began to see it outwardly. Therefore, if the rebellion is to be changed, it must take place in the soul, in the heart, in the inner man. And the only One Who can do that is the Lord! The soul needs to be brought out of its rebellion; it needs to be restored.

To change the figure of speech, a rebellious soul is like a bird that has flown away. The person that you thought was there, is not there any more. He needs to be brought back. He needs to come to himself again--like the prodigal son. He needs a fresh impartation of the new life that he has in

Christ. (The ideas here are taken from Delitzsch, I, 330.)
But, again, we are speaking of that which only our Shepherd can do.

When David said that his Shepherd restores his soul, he was saying that just as our spiritual troubles begin inwardly before they are seen outwardly, so the solution also is an inward solution. It is the soul that is in trouble. It is the soul that needs help. To be sure, the outward life will be characterized by many strange and wicked things, but these can be changed without changing the soul. And so it is only a matter of time until the outward behavior goes wrong. As Paul told the Philippian church, "...it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

We have another illustration of the ways of the Lord in the Lord's words to Samuel when Samuel was about to anoint Eliab, David's oldest brother, because he was tall, probably dark, and very handsome. This is what the Lord said, and the words are recorded in 1 Sam. 15:7:

Look not on his countenance,
or on the height of his stature;
because I have refused him:
for the Lord seeth not as man seeth;
for man looketh on the outward appearance,
but the Lord looketh on the heart.

The outward appearance is importance. The Word makes this very clear. But it is the heart, the soul, that we need to be concerned about.

Solomon understood this, and so he wrote in Prov. 4:23,
Keep thy heart with all diligence;
for out of it are the issues of life.

What causes us to get rebellious, and to decide to run our own lives? Several things can do it.

- 1) Peer pressure. This exposes our weaknesses.
- 2) Impatience. Prayer is not answered. It looks as though God is not working. And so we "fly off" on our own.
- 3) "Fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Cf. 1 Pet. 2:11. Sin can often be made to look so good.
- 4) Pride is always involved in one way or another.
- 5) When troubles seem to multiply in our lives.
- 6) The way other people affect us, provoking the wrong reaction.
- 7) Neglect of the Word and prayer.

I am sure that there are many other things. Perhaps I have not hit on your problem, but you know what it is.

The Lord restores when we get out of the way, BUT HOW DOES HE

DO IT? In answering this question I want you to turn to Psalm 19, and look with me at verse 7. We read:

The law of the Lord is perfect,
converting the soul....

"Converting" is our word, "restoreth."

I have often said, and I really believe it is true, that NO ONE IS EVER SAVED APART FROM THE WORD OF GOD.

And I have also said many times that NO CHRISTIAN CAN GROW AS A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT THE WORD OF GOD.

Let me add a third statement tonight, and I hope that you and I will never forget it. It is this: NO ONE WHO IS AWAY FROM THE LORD EVER COMES BACK UNLESS HE IS RESTORED BY THE WORD OF GOD.

In Psalm 19 we have a variety of names given to the Word of God. In connection with restoring it is called "the law of the Lord." The emphasis upon this term, "the law," is not just the Mosaic law, but the necessity of OBEYING the Word of God. Every departure from the Lord gets its start through disobedience; every remedy is brought about through, not only a return to the Word, but a return to OBEYING THE WORD.

And David called "the law of the Lord...perfect" because the Lord uses His Word, and nothing else is necessary. We do not need human psychology plus the Word; we only need the Word of God by itself.

If that sounds a little narrow to you, then take what the Scriptures say here instead of relying on your own feelings. God's Word saves. God's Word sanctifies. God's Word draws the wayward sheep back to the Shepherd, and to the fold.

But now look at the second statement of verse 3:

II. "...HE (the Lord, my Shepherd) LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE."

Delitzsch explains this part of the verse with these words:

The poet glories that Jahve leads him carefully
and without risk or wandering in...straight paths
and leading to the right goal, and this...(for
His Name's sake) (I, 330).

Isaiah 53:6 applies here. Sometimes the Lord's sheep act for a time like lost sheep, like they did before they were saved. If such behavior continues, we have to be suspicious that one who appeared to be the Lord's sheep was not actually the Lord's. But it is possible for a child of God to get far

away from the Lord, like David himself did. And let us remember that when we turn to our own ways, we are turning away from God's ways--and so we are in the wrong way, doing the wrong things, headed in the wrong direction.

But it is the Lord Who brings us back, and through His Word puts our feet again into "the paths of righteousness," God's ways, so adequately described in the Word of God.

But why does He do this? Because we deserve it? No; we do not deserve it. We have "flown away" time and time again. The Lord would be perfectly just in forsaking us altogether if it were not for His promises which He has given to us. No, He does not do it for our sake's, but "for his name's sake."

Our badness does not keep him from being a Good Shepherd. Our guilt does not exhaust His grace. He has the name of Shepherd, and He will fulfill that role for His sheep even though their departure may grieve Him more than we can ever realize.

Spurgeon said that "all this is done out of pure free grace" (Treasury of David, I, 355). And so, when the Lord's sheep are brought from out of the way back into the way, it is all to the glory of our great Shepherd's holy and wonderful Name.

Concl: This verse could really be called, Fellowship Restored. And it is significant that, in view of the picture that David has painted here of a shepherd with his sheep, that it is our Shepherd Who seeks us when we are out of the way, not the sheep who seek and come back to the Shepherd.

This morning at the close of my message I encouraged you to make a personal survey of your life like Nehemiah did among the ruins of the city of Jerusalem. Our verse tonight is suggesting the same thing. As I look at you tonight, and as you look at me tonight, we cannot tell what is going on in each other's hearts. Your body is here, but your heart may be some place else.

And this leads me to suggest that there may be those whose bodies are not here because their hearts have turned away from the Lord.

The Lord brought a stinging indictment against the people of Judah when He directed Jeremiah to write the words which we find in Jer. 2:13,

For my people have committed two evils;
they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters,

and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns,
that can hold no water.

If you are concerned about things in your life that are not pleasing to the Lord, you can be sure that your Shepherd is far more concerned than you are, that He is seeking you, and intends to bring you back. Do not leave the full sufficiency described in verse 2 for the emptiness and nothingness of a life away from the Lord. Take that needed survey of your life, and by God's grace recognize that your Shepherd is seeking you, to bring you back to Himself, and to the fellowship of the fold.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH
Psalm 23:4

Intro: In the first three verses David has been speaking about the Lord; in verses 4 and 5 he spoke to the Lord. And in verse 6 he spoke about the Lord again. We can see this in the change from "the Lord" and "he" in verses 1 through 3 to the "thou" and "thy" in verse 4. In verses 1 through 3 David explained the Lord's work for him, and in verse 4 we have the Lord's walk with Him. It is the Lord's provision in verses 1 through 3, and the Lord's presence and protection in verse 4.

David had been speaking of his relationship with the Lord as his Shepherd as though everything were peaceful and quiet, with never any trouble. But we know that life is not like that, and we know that David's life was not like that. His life was full of trials. He faced dangers continually. He had many enemies who would gladly have destroyed him at any time. He continually faced death and sorrow.

I doubt if anyone can fully explain all that was in the heart of David and of the Holy Spirit as David wrote these words. Was he speaking of the end of his earthly sojourn when he would die, or was he describing all of his life in this world where he was confronted with death from day to day? Probably the latter since he used that family Hebrew word for living, "Yea, though I walk through..." But the statement would certainly apply when the child of God faces death. It is the deepest, darkest valley through which we can go. Some have suggested that to be in a valley signifies being under the dominion of death. The word in the Hebrew does not indicate death, but darkness and gloom--so that most commentators have no problem with saying that David was thinking of death.

The message of this verse has been captured by Bickersteth in the hymn, Peace, Perfect Peace. One of the verses reads like this:

Peace, perfect peace, death shad'wing us and ours?
Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.

This is where we live. This is where we walk. Death is at the end of the road for every one of us. We do not know when it will come, but we know that it will come unless the Lord comes first. It is our enemy, the last enemy to be destroyed. In heaven there will be no death, but we have to cope with it here. And the Lord never intended for people to even try to cope with it alone. We live in "the valley of the shadow of death."

This is the greatest test that can be put upon the Shepherd

in this life. If He is sufficient for life, but not for death, then we have need for another shepherd. But David wanted us to know that the Shepherd is sufficient for all of the experiences of life, including death!

But let us look at the verse.

Let me first of all put those two statements together:

I. "I WALK...I WILL FEAR NO EVIL...."

We have no choice with respect to our walk. This is where we are, and this is where we live. It makes no difference where we might be on the face of the earth, the situation is the same.

The word for "evil" suggests a breaking. It even suggests a complete destruction. David was declaring that with the possibility of death all around, he could still live and die in perfect peace. It was not that there would be no tears. He was not living in a dream world. But he had found that the Lord was sufficient for the worst experience he could have whenever it would come, and however it would come.

How could David say such a thing? This is an amazing testimony of the Lord's grace and sufficiency.

II. "FOR THOU ART WITH ME."

Now put together the first statement of this Psalm with this statement. "The Lord is my shepherd...for **thou** art with me...."

"Thou" and "me" joined by the word "with."

Many times have we spoken of the meaning of that little preposition, "with." It has two very important meanings for the child of God, for each one of us:

1) It means that the Lord is on our side. We never need to worry about that.

We may have grieved Him over and over again. We may have failed Him with a thousand falls. But the Lord will always take our part. We never need to give that a second thought, except to draw all of the comfort out of it that we possibly can.

But there is another meaning, the idea that we get usually first of all:

2) It means that the Lord will never depart from us. Nobody can ever pluck us out of His hand. See John 10:28, 29. He will never leave us, nor forsake us. See Heb. 13:5.

He told His disciples, "...and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20b)--or all the days, even to the consummation of the age.

Remember what David said in Psalm 139:7-12. (Read.) What comfort there is in these words.

We can never go any place at any time in any part of the world but what the Lord is there.

There is a sense in which, when we walk through the final part of the valley, we must walk alone. Our family cannot go with us. Nor can our friends. And yet we are never alone; the Lord is always with us. That is why we need to enjoy the presence of the Lord NOW so that we can draw comfort from Him THEN.

The last part of this verse is one of the strongest reasons I have for believing that David was speaking of this world as "the valley of the shadow of death." He spoke of:

III. "THY ROD AND THY STAFF."

David drew comfort from the fact that the Lord has a "rod" and He has a "staff." What did he want us to learn from this statement?

Derek Kidner in his excellent but brief commentary on the Psalms says that the rod was a cudjel, a short heavy club, worn at his belt. The staff is the long pole with the hook in the neck. And then Kidner explained that the rod was for defence; the staff for control.

All through life the Lord defends us, and all through life the Lord controls us--turning us around when we are headed in the wrong direction, always making sure that we are in the way.

And David said that this was his comfort. It was a comfort to know that the Lord was always with him. It was a comfort to know that the Lord was always His Protector. It was a comfort to know that the Lord was His Guide. This is not only up to death, but through death. As I have mentioned, and as you all know, only the Lord can go with us when the time comes for us to die.

Concl: As I close, let me comment on David's statement here, "Yea, thou I walk **through** the valley of the shadow of death..."

We are not going to be here forever. We are passing "through

the valley of the shadow of death." We are headed for a place where there is no death!

Let me read to you from Revelation, chapter 21, verses 1-5.

~ We are not taught in Scripture to look forward to death. We are to know that it is coming, that life is short when it is the longest. But we need not fear it.

However, we are told to be looking forward to the coming of the Lord, and to heaven and all that that will mean to us, and to the Lord. He is leading us "through." He is with us, and will never leave us. He is our Guardian, our Protector, all along the way, so that no evil thing can destroy us, or even harm us. And He carefully guides us on earth until the time when He receives us up into heaven—either through death, or when He comes again.

Are these truths a comfort to you? They should be if you are a child of God. If you are not a child of God, let me urge you to trust the Savior, and make preparation for the Journey into heaven with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Make sure that He is your Shepherd.

~

~

DINING AT THE LORD'S TABLE

Psalm 23:5

Intro: It seems that, as we come to verse 5, the figure of speech changes from sheep and the shepherd to one who is a special friend. In the Middle East, especially in Bible times, there can be no greater honor conferred upon a person than to be invited into a home where a meal is served. This was the case when the three men visited Abraham in Genesis 18. Kings honored their subjects by making a place for them at the royal table. This was David's honor at Saul's table. It was also the honor conferred by David upon Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son who "did eat continually at the king's table" (2 Sam. 9:13).

The Lord is our Shepherd, and He deals with us as His sheep, caring for us, protecting us, guiding us, feeding us. But our relationship with Him rises above that of Shepherd and sheep. As unbelievable as it may seem, we as the Lord's people have the special privilege of being the Lord's special friends. Cf. John 15:14, 15. And so the picture here is of a feast prepared by the Lord for His people, a daily privilege of the most intimate fellowship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is the Lord Himself Who has made this preparation for us, not just once in a while, nor even just once a day, but this is a continual feast that He has prepared especially for us.

We experience this in the Lord's daily provision for our food. When we sit down to eat at our tables, we bow our heads to thank the Lord for the provision which is set before us. We may have worked to have the money to buy the food, and our wives work hard preparing meals for us, but we who know the Lord look upon our money, the food, and the ability to prepare it as all a provision that the Lord makes for us. As David said in Psa. 145:16, the Lord opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing.

However, this is more than that. People who do not know the Lord enjoy the same provision, although they never give the Lord thanks for His care over them. The Lord makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. But this is more than that. This is an especially prepared meal which the Lord makes for His people who are also His sheep.

It seems that the main idea that David had in mind here was the spiritual provision that the Lord makes for us His people. That provision is made by Christ, and is served to us by Christ. And it has to do especially with the spiritual feasting that we do at the Word of God. How wonderful it is

to think that the Lord is always busy every day and throughout each day preparing our spiritual food for us. After all, did He not tell His disciples in John 16:12-15,

I have yet many things to say unto you,
but ye cannot bear them now.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come,
he will guide you into all truth:
for he shall not speak of himself;
but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak:
and he will shew you things to come.

He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine,
and shall shew it unto you.

All things that the Father hath are mine:
therefore said I, that he shall take of mine
and shall shew it unto you.

We are coming to the table of the Lord as we come to the Word. The Lord Jesus has prepared the meal. It is served to us by the Holy Spirit. We read. We think. We compare Scripture with Scripture. But it is the Lord Who shows us through the Holy Spirit's work what He wants us to see, and Who teaches us what He wants us to know. If this were not the case, we would never get anything out of our Bibles. The Holy Spirit through the Word takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us. When we are learning of Christ, we are enjoying the richest of all feasts.

The next time you get your Bible out to read, or even now as you sit and listen to the Word, let these words encourage you: "Thou preparest a table before me." The Lord has invited us to a spiritual feast. He has prepared the meal. We may be more conscious of blessing at some times than we are at others, but it will help to believe that the Lord has prepared a meal for us.

When you are invited to someone's home for dinner, it is not your responsibility to bring the meal. In the same way, the Lord comes to our homes with the meal prepared, the table spread, and He only asks that we eat what is set before us. He knows what we need and when we need it, so let us come to the feast each day which He has prepared for us.

Now, with this in mind, let us look at what David said in the rest of the verse. We began our relationship with the Lord by feeding upon Him; we continue and deepen and strengthen our relationship with the Lord by continuing to feed upon Him. This is the glorious truth that is set before us in the Lord's Supper which we observed this morning.

David said three things about this feast:

1) Where it is served: "in the presence of mine enemies."

2) He anoints our heads with oil.

3) Our cup runs over.

What should we understand about these three expressions?

I. "IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES" -- THE PLACE WHERE THE MEAL IS SERVED.

It seems that there are two different ideas that expositors of the Scriptures have taken of this expression:

- 1) Some feel that this is a victorious feast, that the enemies have been defeated and taken captive, and that this is a meal served with them looking on.
- 2) Others feel (and this is the view that I am inclined to take) that David was surrounded by his enemies, knowing that they were there, but not knowing what they were about to do, and yet he was sitting at the Lord's table in perfect peace, enjoying the Lord and what the Lord had set before him.

This, it seems to me, is the correct view. As we learned this morning, the battle with the enemy is not over until we get to heaven.

We all have a very real, a living, a wise and crafty Enemy: the Devil. He is continually doing all that he can to discourage us and to defeat us. Peter and James made that very clear in their epistles. Even our Lord was not spared the attacks of Satan.

In addition to this, the Devil uses circumstances, and he uses people. We are never safe. We always have to be careful. Even our own hearts are responsive to the temptations which he places before us. We have every cause for alarm. If we had to wait until we are perfectly safe, we would never feast at the Lord's table. But right in the presence of our enemies, the Lord spreads the table, and there is nothing that the enemy can do to interrupt that meal!

The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 119:165,

Great peace have they which love thy law:
and nothing shall offend them.

"Offend" means to cause to stumble. So the picture given to us here is one of peace, peace at the Lord's table, peace that comes from the Word of God as the Holy Spirit guides us into the truth and into the things of Christ.

II. "THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL."

What shall we make of this?

Please turn to Psalm 133. (Read and explain.) This speaks of the oneness of fellowship that we have with the Lord.

The anointing which we have received from the Lord speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit to each of us as believers, and surely the Holy Spirit has to be included in this statement just as much as in the preceding. But it seems that the main idea in this expression is to show us how the Lord delights in our fellowship. You would think that it would say that we anoint His head, but instead it says that He anoints our heads. You and I will never know until we get to heaven how much the Lord enjoys our fellowship! And to express that joy He anoints us--and if our spiritual senses are sharp, you and I will be able to detect the fragrance of the anointing oil.

But we have one more expression:

III. "MY CUP RUNNING OVER."

In Psalm 16:5 David wrote,
 The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance
and of my cup:
 thou maintainest my lot.

The Lord's cup was that which the Father had appointed for Him to do. It was His death on the Cross. We may also be called upon to experience suffering for our relationship to the Lord, but this cup is a cup of joy. In Psalm 116:13 we read,

I will take the cup of salvation,
 and call upon the name of the Lord.

To have a cup that is running over is an expression of a joy that is so great that it is impossible to contain it all. And it is then that prayer takes on new joy, not for what we can get from the Lord, nor what we can get the Lord to do for us, but just simply for the joy that we have in our fellowship with Him.

When we are saved, we all take the cup of salvation. Whether or not it is full and running over depends upon the time we spend at the Lord's table. It was when David realized that the Lord was His Shepherd, and that he was one of the Lord's sheep, but he took the place of dependence upon the Lord which is such a delight to the Lord. He was no longer thinking primarily of what He could do for the Lord as much as he was thinking of how much he needed the Lord to provide for Him. As sheep we should know this; as people we need to take advantage of the Lord's provision for us. *cf. Psa. 16:11.*

Concl: Perhaps all of us have a lot to learn along this line. Let us learn to think, not just of what the Lord means to us, but of what we mean to Him, and how He delights in our fellowship with Him, not when it is spasmodic, but when it is constant.

THINGS TO COME

Psalm 23:6

Intro: There is one thing that is better than being a guest at the Lord's table; that is being a member of His family, and living in His house.

I have pointed out to you before that in verses 1-3 David was speaking about the Lord, in verses 4 and 5 he was speaking to the Lord, and here in verse 6 he again was speaking about the Lord.

Also, in the preceding verses (vv. 1-5) David had been speaking in the present tense. The only two exceptions are:

- 1) Verse 1 -- "I shall not want."
- 2) Verse 4 -- "I will fear no evil."

In verse 6 he again wrote in the future:

- 1) "Surely goodness and mercy **shall follow** me all the days of my life."
- 2) "And **I will** dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Those four statements concerning the future are statements, with all of those in the present, which should fill our hearts with peace. To be able to say all of these, including the fact that "the Lord is **my** shepherd," and that He is always **with** us--these are more than we could ever hope to have if it were left up to us to ask.

So we are speaking about that which causes more fear in the hearts of people than anything else: the future. There is nothing about the past in Psalm 23. The past is over and gone for all of us. What we have is the present and the future, and that is all taken care of if we can say, "The Lord is my shepherd."

David was concerned in this last verse of Psalm 23 about THINGS TO COME:

- 1) Throughout the rest of his life.
- 2) Throughout eternity.

Let us consider, first of all,

I. THINGS TO COME -- THROUGHOUT THE REST OF HIS LIFE (Psa. 23:6a).

There is nothing in the Psalm that would help us to decide when this Psalm was written. The first four verses show David's familiarity with the responsibilities of a shepherd and the needs of the sheep. Probably his first personal experiences with enemies did not come until after he began

— serving King Saul. Throughout the rest of his life he was well aware of the dangers he faced because of his enemies. It would seem that the entire Psalm gives us a good panorama of David's life from the time he first knew the Lord as his Shepherd until, as he could visualize it in the future, he would be "in the house of the Lord for ever."

Although in many of David's Psalms he spoke prophetically of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in that sense was able to know something about the future, yet regarding his own future it was no different from our situation. However, whatever the future might hold for him of glory or of defeat, there was two things that he could be sure of:

- 1) God's goodness.
- 2) God's mercy.

Whether the word "surely" should be translated that way, or as "only," the meaning is not changed. Come what may, David knew that His relationship to his Shepherd guaranteed for him an unceasing supply of God's "goodness" and His "mercy."

Let us try to distinguish between the two.

A. "Goodness."

— We are often told in Scripture that the Lord is good. He is a good God. He does good things.

The word "goodness" has a wide variety of meanings. It speaks of that which is desirable, pleasant, useful, right, best, designed to make us happy, glorious. It speaks of that which serves a particular purpose, of that which is sufficient, of that which prospers.

It would be easy for us to put a purely human interpretation on this word and conclude that God will give me everything that I want, make me rich, give me great possessions, and cause everyone to honor me the way I feel that I ought to be honored.

This was NOT the meaning that David was putting on this word.

— What David was saying is that his God was such a great God that He would always have David's greatest good in view. God would always seek David's highest good, was unceasingly aiming at David's greatest happiness. It means that David would never find the Lord falling short of what needed to be done. It meant that David would always come out of his trials a better man, a holier man. And, what sometimes appears the most unlikely, David meant that he would always be able to see (usually afterwards) that God's way was best,

and that he could not improve upon the will of God.

Probably the best NT verse to show what David had in mind is Romans 8:28.

But David added another word:

B. "Mercy."

This is another OT word which is rich in meaning. It combines the ideas of mercy, love, pity, compassion, kindness, grace. It excludes any idea of merit or reward. Included are the ideas of zeal and jealousy. God is jealous for the trust of His people. He is zealous in His intent to be with us, to help us, regardless of what the need might be.

This is a word which does away with any idea that God is reluctant to help His people. He wants to help. He delights to help us. And He does not want us to trust in ourselves, nor in what others may be able to do for us.

The Bible not only tells us that God is good, but it also tells us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16).

I hope that you have been making some notes, at least mental notes of what I have been saying. We all need to spend much time meditating on these two words. We are like David. As we look ahead to the future, we can be assured that over all of our experiences, whatever they may be, are the goodness of God and the mercy of God.

But before I leave this part of the verse, let me direct your attention to the words,

C. "Shall follow me."

The statement is good enough the way it stands, but it is better when you see what it really means.

The word really means to pursue. So it means to follow eagerly with the idea of overtaking. What David was saying was that we do not have to look for God's "goodness" and God's "mercy." They are looking for us! And since God is never separated from His attributes, this means that God is always in pursuit of us to meet our needs, to care for us, to do for us whatever needs to be done, so that His purposes are fulfilled, His glory is realized, and we get the blessing!

What could we ask for that would be more than this? The picture we have, especially in our trials, is that we have to start looking for the Lord. If you do, you do not have to

look far because He is there! As David has already told us in verse 4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley...."

These really are words filled with heavenly comfort for our souls.

But let us look at the last part of the verse.

II. THINGS TO COME -- IN ETERNITY (Psa. 23:6b).

Here he said, "...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

He could have been speaking of the Lord's house here on earth, but that seems unlikely when he had just referred to "all the days of my life." David was speaking of heaven. And he knew that if he were dwelling "in the house of the Lord," he would be dwelling with the Lord.

David went there by way of death—the end of "the valley of the shadow of death." And I am sure that he knew what Paul would write much later, that "to be absent from the body" is to be "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). I am equally sure that he knew that to be where the Lord is, is "far better" (Phil. 1:23).

We would assume from what David wrote in this 23rd Psalm, as well as in some of his other Psalms, that the life that he lived was, in many respects, a foretaste of heaven. He knew something about heaven by his fellowship with the Lord here on earth. However, as good as his fellowship was here, it could not compare with actually being in heaven, and being with the Lord!

When the Lord was with His disciples in the Upper Room, He gave them those words which we find in John 14:1-3. (Quote them.)

How did the Lord speak of heaven? "...that where I am, there ye may be also." It is "a place." It is where He is, and that ought to be enough to satisfy every single one of us.

When Paul spoke of our going to heaven in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, he concluded what he had to say about the Lord's coming with these words: "...and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17b). And then he added, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18).

We don't need to be worried about where heaven is as long as we know that the Lord is there! It is a prepared place for His prepared people, AND HE WILL BE THERE! AND WE WILL BE

THERE WITH HIM! That is really all that we need to know.

How long will we be there? "For ever." That is a very long time. John Newton tried to help us understand how long that is when he wrote that last verse to his hymn, "Amazing Grace." I know you remember the words:

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise,
Than when we've first begun.

Concl: What a conclusion to a great Psalm! The Spirit of God did not let David overlook a thing. David began by speaking of the present, and then launched into the farthest reaches of eternity. When the Lord claimed David as one of His sheep, a relationship was established which would never come to an end.

Why was it that David did not speak of the past, of the time in his life when he was lost in sin, without a Shepherd? And why do you think that he spoke of his relationship with the Lord as though it had been a perfect relationship? I think that there is one answer. It is because he was speaking of his relationship with the Lord from the Lord's point-of-view. David's record as one of the Lord's sheep was not perfect, any more than ours is. But God's record is perfect. We fail Him, but He never fails us. And so when we would go astray, He brings us back. When we get ourselves into trouble, He brings us out. When we get hungry, He feeds us. When we get lost, He finds us. When we die, He takes us to heaven. Or if we live until He comes, then He will receive us to Himself.

I hope that this wonderful Psalm will always be more wonderful to us because of the time we have spent together seeking to understand it better than we have ever understood it before.