

## THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

### Psalm 23

**Intro:** David, who started out as a shepherd boy, became King David over all Israel. Evidently the Lord considered the work of a shepherd as an excellent place for the training of a King.

David was the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse. His three oldest brothers were in Saul's army. When David went to take provisions to them from their father, and he found Saul's army faced with the daily challenges of Goliath, the Philistine giant. When David offered to fight the giant, his oldest brother ridiculed him by asking him, "With whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?" (1 Sam. 17:28). And even before that, when Samuel came to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king of Israel, he evidently seemed like such an unlikely prospect even to his father that he did not call David in for Samuel to see him until Samuel had seen the seven brothers only to have the Lord tell him that none of them was the man the Lord was looking for. When Jesse called David in, the Lord said to Samuel, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he" (1 Sam. 16:12).

But those many days and nights in which David stood watch over his sheep, guarding them from wild animals, leading them from field to field where they could find adequate pastureland, gave David very valuable time for reflection and meditation. And one day, we don't know when, the Lord enabled David to see that what he was to his sheep, the Lord was to him. And as the Spirit of the Lord guided his thoughts, eventually he penned this masterpiece among the Psalms which has been such a source of comfort and blessing to the people of God down to the present hour.

For us, the busyness of life in a large city militates against finding quiet hours when we can think seriously about God. And yet we all need such times. It needs to be a part of our lives every day. It is as we think about God as He is revealed in the Word, the truths that have become precious to the people of God in past days, become precious to us.

David knew that his sheep could not survive without his constant care. And in the first words of this Psalm, "the Lord is my shepherd," he recognized that he could never survive without the Lord as his Shepherd. He saw in himself the inability to defend himself against his many enemies, his tendency to wander away like sheep are inclined to do. He saw also

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that just as he sought food for his sheep, the Lord was the One Who so faithfully provided for him every day, meeting every need that he had. So he learned many wonderful lessons by thinking of himself as a sheep and the Lord as his Shepherd.

Psalm 23 is one of a trilogy of Psalms. It is the middle Psalm in the trilogy. Psalm 22, 23, and 24 all speak of Christ. Psalm 22 has been spoken of as *the Psalm of the Cross*. Psalm 24 as *the Psalm of the Crown*. And in between them we have *the Psalm of the Crook* – the Shepherd’s Crook.

The Cross is past. The Crown is yet to come. But Psalm 23 has to do with the present, and as such it has been blessed for the comfort and faith of the people of God in every generation since it was written.

It begins with a statement of relationship:

### **I. “THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD” (Psa. 23:1).**

Now shepherd do not usually have one sheep. They have many sheep. The word “sheep” is both singular and plural in our language. We can say that there is a shepherd with a hundred “sheep,” or with one “sheep” which he may be taking back to the flock of sheep. But David expresses himself here as though he were the only sheep that the Lord has. And he did that for a purpose. He was not singling himself out as someone who had a relationship with the Lord which no other child of God has, but, as he thought about the Lord and himself, he knew that the Lord cared for him with the same personal attention that the Lord would care for him if He had no other sheep!

And immediately after saying that the Lord was his Shepherd, David added those familiar words, “I shall not want.” In saying that he was saying that with such a Shepherd he needed no other. David knew that he needed other people and the help that they could give him, but, behind all that people might do for him, he saw the work of the Lord, His Shepherd. What David sought to be to his sheep, he knew that the Lord was the same to him.

And you will notice that the word “LORD” is spelled all in capitals, meaning that it is the translation of the word Jehovah, or as many scholars prefer to say today, Yaweh. We don’t know exactly how it was pronoun-

ced because it was such a sacred Name with the Jews, to keep from taking it in vain, they substituted Adonai. But LORD means *the ever-living One, the never-changing One, the self-existent One, the One Who is the great I am!*

So David would never need to look for another Shepherd. And what he had to say about the Lord's care for him, would never have to be revised because the Lord is "the same, yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

But it is important that we be able to say, like David did, that "the Lord is my Shepherd." And we can say that not because we chose Him first, but because He chose us to be His own.

But we can't separate the first part of verse 1 from the second part – the words, "I shall not want." By this David meant what he went on to say in the remainder of the Psalm. The word "want" means *to lack something*. Undoubtedly David was speaking here from his own personal experience. This does not mean that David never wandered away. It certainly did not mean that his life was without its problems and troubles. But it did mean that it was impossible for any need to arise for which the Lord would not be sufficient. This is the truth that we have in the NT in verses like Rom. 8:28; Phil. 4:6-7 and 19; Eph. 3:20-21; and many others. And the Lord cares for us just like you were the only person who could say that, or I was the only one who could say that. What a unique and precious relationship each one of us has with the Lord, our Shepherd, my Shepherd. He belongs to us because we belong to Him.

As we move on to verse 2 and the following verses, we come to a series of statements which I like to call "He and me statements." They are not "He and I statements" because that would imply that He does some things for me and I do certain things for Him. But that is not the case. He does not need me, but I need Him. And I need Him, and you need Him, just as much today as we did yesterday, and all of the yesterdays before that. We never outgrow our need for the Lord.

Let me read the remainder of the Psalm to you with the emphasis that David made when under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he penned these words for us. This is a pastoral scene. (Read vv. 2-6.)

## **II. THE WORK OF OUR SHEPHERD (Psa. 23:2-5).**

**A. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures (v. 2a).**

This is a picture of absolute security, of abundant provision, and of rest. It makes no difference what dangers might be near, we are safe in the Shepherd’s care. And “He maketh me” is one of several expressions in the Psalm to show how constant is the Lord’s leading in our lives. And you will remember what the Lord Jesus said about a shepherd in John 10:3b-4:

3b And he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.  
4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

**B. “He leadeth me beside still waters” (v. 2b).**

I have heard that sheep do not like to drink from rushing, turbulent water. These are lit. *waters of rest*. It suggests what the Lord said in Matt. 11:28-30. The Lord often took the disciples away from the crowds where they could enjoy resting.

It is sad that there is a verse division here because the next statement is the result of what we have just seen. Why does He lead us beside still waters? It is because He intends to minister to us as we read in the first part of verse 3.

**C. “He restoreth my soul” (v. 3a).**

How often this is what we need – the restoration of our souls, which places the emphasis upon the inner man, the spiritual in contrast with the physical.

**D. “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (v. 3b).**

Cf. Jas. 1:13, “Let no man say when he is tempted . . .” The Lord’s leading is always into more righteousness, greater holiness, never in the other direction.

“For His Name’s sake” means that it is for His glory and for the display of His grace.

**E. “Yea, though I walk . . .” (v. 4a).**

Even when we walk through the deep gloom of death, our Shepherd will never leave us – and that means never! We can say, “I will fear no evil” because we can also say “for Thou art with me.”

**F. “Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me” (v. 4b).**

This is what we can call this *the Psalm of the Crook*. The Shepherd’s rod was to defend the sheep from wild animals; his staff was to rescue the sheep when they wandered away, and perhaps got themselves into a situation from which they could not get out.

**G. “Thou preparest a table . . .” (v. 5a).**

**H. “Thou anointest my head with oil” (v. 5m).**

Cf. Luke 7:46. This speaks of special honor which the Lord bestows upon His sheep.

**I. “My cup runneth over” (v. 5b).**

This is the climax of all that has gone before.

Up to this point David has been speaking in the present, that which the Lord constantly did for him as his Shepherd. But in the last verse he spoke of the future.

**III. THE PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE (Psa. 23:6).**

The language here speaks, not of our seeking the blessing of the Lord (although we need to do that), but that the Lord will pursue us with His blessings.

**Concl:** Look at the three NT passages which speak of the Lord has our Shepherd: John 10:11, 14; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Heb. 13:20-21.