

Psalm 23 August 20, 2020 The King of Love My Shepherd Is

The LORD *is* my shepherd;

I shall not want.

²He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the ¹still waters.

³He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

⁴Yea, 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.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup runs over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

All the days of my life;

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD

Forever.

My dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Why is it that certain portions of Holy Scripture have been able to maintain their hold on the Christian imagination throughout history? Why is it that some of God's Word stay with us like glowing embers, always close at hand to provide warmth when our faith grows cool? Psalm 23 is one of these texts. Psalm 23 is one of those portions of our God's Word which many of His people have committed to memory. People want to hear Psalm 23 at the funeral of their loved ones so that they can warm themselves against the cruel reality of death by hearing again of the victory, of knowing that their Lord is the Good Shepherd. Psalm 23 are the words that friends share with each other when they are afraid, not only because they may not know what else to say but also because this is the best anyone can say.

Whenever I hear or read Psalm 23, I often think back to the lives of shut-ins whom I visited over the years and how they never tired of hearing this psalm. Often, they would close their eyes and recite the Psalm quietly with me and I knew that even as their bodies weakened, their faith in Christ was encouraged and strengthened.

Why does Psalm 23 have such a hold on us? Why has it been at the center of our prayer life of Christians throughout the ages? I think it is because in it we see the heart of our Lord most clearly. We see His love most truly. When we recite the Psalm as our confession, we acknowledge that the story of God and David it is a story of Christ and us. We are His sheep. We are His people.

May God the Holy Spirit bless our study of His inspired Word today, we consider Psalm 23. David begins,

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

These words are a confession of a believer. David declares what he has experienced. The psalmist addresses the Lord, the covenant God, who has promised salvation, the God of all grace in all mercy.

The Lord is my Shepherd. The believer says He is my Shepherd. The child of God speaks out of a deep personal experience. In other places in Holy Scripture the Lord is also figuratively presented as a Shepherd.

In Genesis 48; 50 Jacob declares that God all through his life has tended and cared for him as a Shepherd.

In Genesis 49; 24 Jacob expresses the wish to his beloved son, Joseph, that he might be filled with the abundance of the blessings of the Shepherd of Israel.

In in Psalm 80; 1 the God of Israel is addressed in this way; **“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who leads Joseph like a flock.”**

In Psalm 95; 7 the people who consider themselves the handiwork of God, declare of their God; **“For He is our God and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.** They mean to say, God guides and provides for us like a Shepherd.

The term Shepherd is also used in the Old Testament as a specific description for the coming Messiah. In Micah 7, 14 God charges the Messiah, **“Feed Your people with Your rod, the flock of Your heritage...as in the days of old.”**

In Ezekiel 34; 11 the Lord, who comes from heaven, says: **“For thus says the Lord God behold I even I will search my sheep and seek them out.”**

In Zechariah 11; 12 the prophet prophesize that the Good Shepherd is smitten and that the flock is scattered abroad. This happened when Christ was crucified and how His disciples, His followers scattered into the night.

In Luke 15; 3 Christ compares Himself to a Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep.

In John 10; 12 Jesus declares; **I am the Good Shepherd.**

In 1 Peter 5; 24 the apostle calls Christ **“the chief Shepherd.**

Also, in 1 Peter 2; 25 the same apostle reminds Christians that they have been converted by Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

Finally, in Hebrews 13: 20 it is stated; **“Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect.”**

What would Holy Scripture bring home to us by comparing God and Christ, the Messiah, to a Shepherd? All true individual believers together are included in the use of the term flock. Yes, we are people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Thus, every believer of all time is a sheep of God, and is included in this Psalm and joins David and confessing; **“The Lord is my Shepherd.”**

Martin Luther says of this word shepherd, *“In this little word, Shepherd, there are gathered together in one, all the good and comfortable things that we praise in God.”* The point of comparison really lies in this; while the sheep recognize the Lord as their Shepherd, the Shepherd regards the sheep as entirely His own. Therefore, the owner relationship between Christ and His believers is here taught and emphasized. The Lord claims believers as His own, while believers look up to their Lord as their own. In His words, when Jesus speaks about the intimate, close, loving relationship between Himself and His believers, Jesus says; **“I am the Good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and I’m known by them”** (John 10). Jesus thus here recognizes believers as truly belonging to Him.

Furthermore, David would remind us,

The Shepherd Provides for His People

² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.

³ He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name’s sake

As the Good Shepherd, the Lord guides His sheep, feeds His sheep, and gives them rest. He leads them to His Word, where they find nourishment and rest for their souls. He guides them in the paths of righteousness, which lead to eternal life. The paths of righteousness are not formed by our own righteousness and good works, but the way to eternal life is opened by Christ’s righteousness, who by His holy, perfect life and His innocent suffering and death secured salvation for us.

When the Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep, He opened the path to righteousness for us. In fact, He provided righteousness for us. His righteousness is credited to us. The Good Shepherd also guides us in the path of godly living-of sanctification- when He gives us guidance and strength to live Christian lives which are pleasing to Him, which glorify His holy name. The Good Shepherd also protects His sheep from the wolves that would destroy them.

Our Good Shepherd nourishes and refreshes our bodies with wholesome food and refreshing drink. The “*green pastures*” and “*quiet waters*” in this passage in the Word of God, are the truths of the Gospel which give spiritual life and peace to our souls. The comparison of God’s Word to food and drink occurs in all parts of Holy Scripture.

The Good Shepherd gives His people rest when He delivers them from the burden of sin and the futile efforts to save themselves by their own works. Our Lord say, “**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest**” (Matthew 11:28) His Word revives our souls; the assurance of sins forgiven brings peace and joy to our hearts. He gives us rest from their enemies and finally give them perfect rest in heaven.

The Lord does it all for His name’s sake. The Good Shepherd has revealed Himself as a gracious and merciful God, and as such He will prove Himself faithful in the guiding of His flock. The Lord lives up to His name and promises. Believers can expect such kindness and care because they have a Good Shepherd, a gracious God, who loves them in spite of their unworthiness. In short, believers find rest, nourishment, peace, contentment, confidence and hope in their gracious God and His Gospel Word of grace.

David also reminds us that,
The Shepherd Protects His People

“For though I walk through the valley of death, I shall fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff comfort me.

A good shepherd does more than feed his sheep. He must also protect them from wild animals and rustlers. Since the “valley of the shadow of death” may also be translated “the darkest valley,” this verse comforts us in all dangers and afflictions of body and soul which all Christians face, not only those at the hour of death, but throughout all the days of our earthly pilgrimage. Indeed, our whole life from beginning to end are “walks through the valley of the shadow of death. A hymn reminds us, *we walk in danger all the way*, but God’s presence provides every kind of protection we need. Above all else, we need deliverance from these three archenemies: Satan, sin, and eternal death.

For as a Christian there can be no greater expression of confidence than the words as David reminds us, “**You are with me.**” Even in heaven our greatest joy will be in the presence of God Himself (Revelation 21:2). When we are confident of our Shepherd’s presence, when we are assured that He is with us, we need not fear. For does not St. Paul, the apostle of our Lord remind us of this wondrous truth as he wrote to fellow Christians in Rome. (Romans 8:35–39)

³⁵**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?**

³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And finally, David reminds us,

The Royal Host Provides for His People and Protects Them Eternally (v5-6)

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

In this portion of the Psalm David’s illustration of God’s care for His people shifts from the picture of a shepherd to that of a king—the host of a great banquet. This is an easy transition because in near East at the time of David, kings were often called the shepherds of their people. A king invited his most honored associates to live in his palace. Such a king would spread out rich banquet tables at which the members of his court could feast. His guests were anointed with perfumed oil as an expression of the honor and joy of being in the royal court. All of these scenes were common in royal courts of the ancient near East.

But in this psalm, psalm 23, the banquet hall is in heaven and the feasting and the celebrating represents the joys of eternal life. In heaven we will feast in safely forever because we are secure from Satan and all our enemies. No one will be able to deprive us of the joys of eternal life which can never be interrupted or lost. There we will dwell in the presence of our Good Shepherd forever.

The last book of Holy Scripture, the book of Revelation, reminds us of this.

“Therefore, they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7: 15-17).

My dear friends in Christ Jesus, Psalm 23 the psalm of David is probably one of the best-known portions of God’s Word and has been committed to memory by many of His children.

This psalm since it was written some 3,000 years ago, under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, has brought comfort, peace, and joy in the Good Shepherd, to His own throughout all generations.

And may the words of the hymnwriter become our prayer and our most ardent desire,

And so, through all the length of days,

Thy goodness faileth never.

Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise

Within Thy house forever. (hymn: The King of Love My Shepherd Is. V.6)

And may God grant this for Jesus' sake. Amen.