



THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

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A PSALM OF DAVID

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's
sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine
enemies:
Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days
of my life:
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalms 23 KJV

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THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

A while back I received a letter from friends who live in Jerusalem. They testified of the renewed cycle of violence taking place around them. I was intrigued by their description of a local shepherd and how he calmed his little flock:

On Saturday morning, for the first time in three years, we had a major conflict on our street...six Israeli jeeps of soldiers were protecting our street as we headed out to our Sabbath Meeting. The soldiers responded [to Palestinian rioters] by firing tear gas canisters at regular intervals.

In the midst of all this, the Lord showed me something very touching. His ways are not our ways. While all this was going on, just below our fence in our yard, an elderly Moslem shepherd had gathered his sheep around him during all the commotion. I went to the edge of our fence and saw him there. We greeted each other in Arabic. Every time the guns fired tear gas, the sheep jumped and were afraid. The shepherd never stopped talking softly to his sheep. He reached out with his staff, constantly touching each sheep very gently. Several of the other sheep a few meters away ran to the shepherd when the guns fired. The shepherd was talking to me in Arabic, but was totally unaffected by what was going on just 200 meters down the way. This picture of God's dealing encouraged us amidst all of our conflicts and difficulties. Just like it is written in Psalm 23, He truly is an oasis of calm and rest when evil men and problems surround us.¹

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This contemporary glimpse of pastoral care reminds us of King David's famous Shepherd's Psalm. As a young man, David tended his father's flock. We can imagine the many days and nights he tended those sheep. This occupation gave him natural opportunities to grow in wisdom, stature, bravery, and spiritual vitality. Imagine his composing psalms and serenading his flock as he praised the LORD.

David wrote,

The LORD is my shepherd [to feed, guide, and shield me]... (v.1 Amplified).

The Bible repeatedly compares God's personal, faithful care of His people to a shepherd tending his flock. In the Old Testament we read,

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock... (Psalm 80:1).

He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; he gently leads those that have young (Isaiah 40:11 NIV).

In the New Testament, Christ uniquely fulfills this role. Jesus declared,

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own (John 10:14).

The writer of Hebrews called Him,

that great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13:20),

and Peter affirmed,

For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd...of your souls (1 Peter 2:25).

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Does this mean that God is the shepherd of everyone? No. Notice that David personalized this testimony: “The LORD is MY Shepherd”. We were all born into this fallen world alienated from God and in need of His redemption (Romans 3:23;5:17). Isaiah compared us to erring sheep:

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him [Jesus the Messiah] the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

Therefore, we are summoned to receive Christ as our Savior and Lord:

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:9,10).

Only those who have been reconciled to God by grace through faith truly know God as their Shepherd (Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21; John 14:6).

Christ described the characteristics of those who have put their faith in Him. They recognize His voice, enter the fold through Him, know Him, and follow Him (John 10:4,9,14,27). What blessings are given to His people! Jesus promised,

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand (John 10:28,29).

Notice the cause and effect relationship in Psalm 23:1. It is BECAUSE the LORD is my Shepherd, that I shall NOT want. The Hebrew word translated *want* is *chacer*, meaning, *to lack, be*

without, decrease, be lacking, have a need. It does not mean that we are guaranteed ideal circumstances. Rather, that God will provide for ALL of our ESSENTIAL needs. Paul likewise taught,

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

Charles Spurgeon expounded on this text:

I might want [lack] otherwise, but when the Lord is my Shepherd He is able to supply my needs, and He is certainly willing to do so, for His heart is full of love, and therefore 'I shall not want'. I shall not lack for temporal things. Does He not feed the ravens, and cause the lilies to grow? How, then, can He leave His children to starve? I shall not want for spirituals, I know that His grace will be sufficient for me [2 Corinthians 12:9]. Resting in Him He will say to me, 'As thy day so shall thy strength be' [Deuteronomy 33:25]. I may not possess all that I wish for, but 'I shall not want'. Others, far wealthier and wiser than I, may want, but 'I shall not'" (Cf. 1 Timothy 6:6)²

The story is told of a devout Quaker who leaned on his fence one day, and watched a new neighbor move in next door. After all kinds of modern appliances, electronic gadgets, plush furniture, and costly wall hangings had been carried in, the onlooker called over, "If you find you're lacking anything, neighbor, let me know and I'll show you how to live without it". With our hearts in sweet fellowship with the Good Shepherd, there are many things we can live without! The rest of this wonderful 23rd Psalm is a pastoral tribute to the ways that God faithfully meets the needs of His people.

The neighboring psalms further expand on the reasons for the Shepherd's sufficiency. Psalm 22 foretells the Shepherd's sacrificial death:

The Lord is My Shepherd

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me...My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots (Psalm 22:1,15-18).

This was fulfilled when Christ suffered and died on the cross for us (Cf. Matthew 27:35-46). Christ Himself declared,

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Psalm 24 heralds the triumphant return of the Great Shepherd:

Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory (Psalm 24:9-10).

This is the hope that we have in Christ!

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away (1 Peter 5:4).

Can we not fully depend upon this Shepherd who loves us so much and faithfully sustains us? Hymn writer Charles Price Jones commends to us this life of spiritual contentment: 3

ALL I NEED

Jesus Christ is made to me,
All I need, all I need,
He alone is all my plea,
He is all I need.

Jesus is my all in all,
All I need, all I need,
While He keeps I cannot fall,
He is all I need.

He redeemed me when He died,
All I need, all I need,
I with Him was crucified,
He is all I need.

Glory, glory to the Lamb,
All I need, all I need,
By His Spirit sealed I am,
He is all I need.

Refrain:

Wisdom, righteousness, and pow'r,
Holiness forevermore,
My redemption full and sure,
He is all I need.

Psalm 23 describes how God meets the ultimate needs of His people. His care is described through the imagery of the Shepherd's roles—a provider, a leader, and a protector.

The Good Shepherd is your faithful PROVIDER! He promises to provide for your needed rest and refreshment:

The Lord is My Shepherd

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

C. W. Slemming notes in his book, *He Leadeth Me*, that the Shepherd MAKES his sheep lie down:

Why a rest when apparently the sheep do not want one? The reason is that the shepherd can see much farther ahead than the sheep, and he has noticed a very long steep climb along a narrow and dangerous path to a mountain height." The rest, therefore, will reinvigorate, and so enable the sheep to go right through the strenuous climb. "...We are living in an age of rush and turmoil. Life is very hectic and its demands are very severe, we are much too busy to rest...We feel sometimes that we are indispensable and oft times, becoming exhausted, we 'fall beside the way and faint'. Even as the physical body must have periods of rest if it is to continue in a really energetic condition, so must the soul find its repose in the Lord. ⁴

Another description of provision is found in verse 5:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

Some commentators see a shift in the symbolism from a shepherd's care to a host's hospitality. Others interpret this verse as a continuation of the imagery of the shepherd and his sheep. Note that: His provision is SECURE—the enemies are held at bay.

His provision is REFRESHING—the olive oil soothed and protected the anointed one. And His provision is SUPER-ABUNDANT—the "cup runs over"! Our cup "runs over" because we are

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more than conquerors through Him who loved us He is able to do exceeding abundantly ABOVE all we ask or think! (Romans 8:37; Ephesians 3:20).

No wonder the believer testifies,

He restores my soul (v.3).

Second, the Good Shepherd is your faithful LEADER.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake (v.3).

Notice that the paths are consistent with God's righteousness and holiness. We are led this way, not just for our interests, but for His name's sake. The sheep's well being is a byproduct of keeping the Shepherd first!

It is significant that the shepherd LEADS his sheep; he does not DRIVE them.

An English guide who was conducting a party of tourists through the Holy Land had made known to them the fact that shepherds always lead their sheep, when one day one of the party called the guide's attention to a flock of sheep being driven, remarking: 'I thought you said it was never done'. 'That is so' said the guide, 'I think we ought to inquire'. Going across to the man, he said, 'Excuse me, Mr. Shepherd, why are you driving your sheep? I thought it was never done?' The man looked at him, then said, 'Shepherd? I'm not a shepherd—I'm a butcher!' So the exception proved the rule!"⁵

The legalist sees God driving him; the grace-oriented believer sees the Shepherd LEADING him.

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Love for God means obedience to His commands; and His commands are not irksome (1 John 5:3, Weymouth).

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5,6).

Third, the Good Shepherd is your faithful PROTECTOR. Since the sheep are basically defenseless, they depend upon the shepherd's protection from wild animals such as the lion, bear, or snake. The shepherd's equipment illustrates his resources for protecting the sheep. The SLING, for example, was often made by the shepherd himself. It is familiar to us from the story of David slaying Goliath (1 Samuel 17). The sling was a simple device made of a leather pouch with two long chords. It was swung in a circle over the head. When great speed was reached, one chord was released and the stone went flying. [Imagine the skill needed for the technique, timing, and aim of the sling! At least the shepherd in Israel would have had plenty of spare time and stones to develop his skill.] This weapon was also used by soldiers, such as the

seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss (Judges 20:16).

The sling was an effective weapon to strike a distant enemy.

When the danger was too close for the sling, the ROD was used:

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me (v.4).

This club-like weapon was potentially lethal. Thankfully for the flock, the rod was not used against the sheep; it was used to fight off enemies. Likewise, we can trust in God's protection from our spiritual foes. The world, the flesh, and the devil are no match for the Good Shepherd.

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The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1).

The STAFF, however, was used on the sheep. This long, walking stick had a crook on one end. This was useful for guiding the sheep and rescuing wayward lambs. As followers of Christ, we need His ongoing guidance and correction. The hymn writer lamented, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love". The remedy? Submit to the "staff" of God's Word and Spirit with a surrendered heart: "Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it; seal it for Thy courts above".

If we stray into the self-life, false teaching, or worldly values, the Good Shepherd faithfully corrects us:

For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? (Hebrews 12:6-9).

So His staff, indeed, comforts us.

The Shepherd's protection is especially important when we are faced with high-risk situations:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil (v.4).

How reassuring to know that even the threat of death cannot deter God's purpose for us. Paul had this confidence and so can we. As Paul testified,

The Lord is My Shepherd

For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day (2 Timothy 1:12).

Notice that the path includes the valley of the SHADOW of death. Spurgeon observed,

*The valley of the shadow of death', for death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Some one has said that when there is a shadow there must be light somewhere, and so there is. Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path; let us then rejoice that there is a light beyond. Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not, therefore, be afraid.*⁶

How can we have peace when faced with such peril? Recognize that God is always with us!

He (God) Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not...in any degree leave you helpless, nor forsake nor let you down, [relax My hold on you] - Assuredly not! (Hebrews 13:5, Amplified).

So, with David, we find security knowing,

For You [God] are with me.

In light of New Testament truth, God's sufficiency for us is even more intimate. We are not only members of His flock, but spiritually united with the Shepherd (1 Corinthians 6:17).

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Each verse of this Shepherd's psalm exudes the blessed assurance of our Savior's provision, leadership, and protection.

These blessings from our Good Shepherd are not limited to our earthly life. We can claim,

For this is God, Our God forever and ever; He will be our guide Even to death (Psalm 48:14).

When one of our older church members went to be with the Lord, the bulletin at the funeral home contained Psalm 23. Verse 6 had been fulfilled in her experience:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

Through personal faith in Christ, you can testify with King David,

The Lord is MY Shepherd; I shall not want.

Look to Him daily as the provider for all your essential needs!

NOTES:

¹ Letter of David Schmidt

² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*

³ *All I Need*, by Charles Price Jones (1865-1949).

⁴ C. W. Slemming, *He Leadeth Me*, (CLC, 1942), 35-36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, on Psalm 23.

The Lord is My Shepherd

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD
Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
His beloved sheep am I. (Ps 100:3b)
My every need He knows;
He hears my deepest sigh.
I shall never, ever want;
He knows my every cry.
His shepherd heart so tender—
With love He draws me nigh.

He promised green pastures
In which I can rest;
He leads by still waters
With peace I am blessed.
He restoreth my soul
From the hurts of the past—
Makes me His righteousness; (2 Cor 5:21)
My sin's gone at last!

He leads in paths of righteousness
For the sake of His dear name;
Though my way be marked with fears,
He, Himself, removes the blame. (Jude 24)
When through the valleys I must go
In the domain of His will,
Come cloud, come rain, come certain pain,
His grace is sufficient still! (2 Cor 12:9)

In the shadow of death's valley
No evil will I fear;
The comfort of thy rod and staff
And Thou art ever near.

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A table of bounteous blessing
Prepared by Thine own hand;
Sealed in the Blood of Thy dear Son,
The Enemy can not remand.

My head anointed with oil,
The cup of my joy o'erflows;
Goodness and mercy, twin blessings,
Which all my life He bestows.
My work on Earth being ended
Nothing from His love can sever; (Rom 8:39)
I shall see Him face to face
And dwell in His house forever!

(Dedicated to Loretta Naslund)

Charles R. Solomon
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