

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Restoring your Soul...with the Good Shepherd
Psalm 23

This morning, we are going to wrap up our summer series on Restoring Your Soul in the Psalms. And it's fitting that our series would conclude with the most well-known Psalm of all, the Psalm that inspired me to do a study on restoring our souls, the twenty-third Psalm.

Psalm 23

A PSALM OF DAVID

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even 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. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

For 3,000 years, this ancient song has brought hope and comfort to people in every conceivable circumstance of life. And I don't pretend to be able to teach all there is to learn here, especially in one sermon. So, my plan is to just cover some of the basics, and I trust the Lord will give you more insight throughout the week as you prayerfully meditate on this great Psalm.

Let's start by getting an overview of what's going on here.

First, Psalm 23 is almost entirely focused on who the Lord is and what He does for His people. And there are two pictures that teach us about Him.

1. The initial image is of the Lord is as a Good Shepherd. You see that in the very first words of *verse 1: The LORD is my shepherd*. Remember, this Psalm is written by King David, whose first job was tending his father's flock of sheep. Unlike most of us, he was deeply familiar with what a good shepherd does for the sheep of his flock. And he spends the first 4 verses unpacking ways the Lord is a good shepherd.
2. Then, the imagery changes. In verse 5, the Lord is now a gracious host who is spreading out a table in front of David while his enemies look on.

Everything about this Psalm flows out of those two pictures of the Lord. He is a Good Shepherd and a Gracious Host. But there's something else going on here.

This Psalm is deeply personal. It's about the Goodness of the Shepherd in the life of David, who is one of His sheep. It's about the Grace of the Host in the life of David, who is one of His guests. Seventeen times in these 6 verses, David uses the first-person pronouns I, me, and my. This Psalm is not simply about who the Lord is and what He does. It's about how our lives are dramatically transformed by who the Lord is and what He does. Let me show you what I mean.

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,
6... and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

So, while there are plenty of other things to learn and observe in this Psalm, the big picture of Psalm 23 focuses on two images of who the Lord is and what the Lord does, and it focuses on three ways that our lives are transformed in response. When you put that together, it gives us our Big Idea for today.

Big Idea: Because the LORD is our Good Shepherd and Gracious Host, we will not want, we need not fear, and we will live with Him forever.

Okay, so let's take that Big Idea a little bit at a time, starting with that first phrase.

The Lord is our Good Shepherd and Gracious Host

Just a minute ago, I said this psalm is deeply personal to the life of David. So, what confidence can we have that the Lord is our Shepherd and not just David's? What right do we have to claim this psalm for ourselves? Listen to the words of Jesus from John 10.

John 10:7-11

So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep... 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. As God in the flesh, He is the Lord that David is referring to. He is also the door into the sheepfold. In other words, you enter the flock of God through the door of Jesus Christ as you trust in Him. That's how you become one of the sheep – through personal faith and trust in Jesus. Notice that Jesus is also showing Himself to be the gracious host. He talks about our enemy, the thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. In the presence of that enemy, Jesus lays out an abundant life for us to enjoy. To use the words of Psalm 23, He causes our cup to overflow and anoints our head with the oil of blessing.

Here's what that means: if you are trusting in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, He is your Good Shepherd and Gracious Host. That means every word of Psalm 23 applies to you in Jesus.

And that brings us to the next part of our Big Idea. Because Jesus is our Good Shepherd and Gracious Host...

1. We Will Not Want

v1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

That word "want" isn't referring to desire, as though we will never want anything. It's more like the word "lack." We will never lack anything we need.

Romans 8:31-32

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

I love the truth and logic here. What price did God pay to make you one of His children? We just saw it in John 10. God gave His only Son to die in your place so that He could provide forgiveness for your sin and restoration to God as your Father. So, if God did not withhold the very life of His own Son, why would He withhold any good thing from you? The answer is that He won't.

Just think about that for a minute. God will never withhold any good thing from you when you trust in Jesus. That truth has so many awesome implications but let me point out one. If there is something God isn't giving you today, there can only be one reason for it, He knows it isn't best for you.

God is so committed to your well-being that He will never withhold anything good for you if you are willing to trust in Him. As a matter of fact, I believe that's one of the reasons God often calls us to wait for Him before He gives us certain good gifts. As we wait patiently for the Lord, what we are saying is that we trust Him and trust that He knows best.

So, what would it look like if you really believed that God only gives you exactly what is best for you and does not withhold any good things? Let's keep moving. David doesn't just say we will not lack. He says there are several things the Lord provides for us that meet our deepest needs.

- The Lord provides Rest and Refreshment

v2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

We talked about this a couple of different ways in this series on the Psalms. In Psalm 1, we saw that the Lord renews us in His word. He plants us like trees next to streams of water so that our souls can be strengthened. In Psalm 121, we saw that He watches over us and never sleeps so that we can rest while He works. We may talk more about this next week.

So, for this morning, let me just encourage those of you who are weary and tired. Come to Jesus. Bring your burden to Him by believing He cares for you and will give you rest.

- The Lord provides Spiritual Restoration

v3 He restores my soul.

The word "restoration" has a couple of meanings in Scripture. Sometimes, it refers to the kind of renewal that comes through rest. It might be that David is just extending the idea of rest from the previous verse. But there's another way that word is used. It sometimes refers to the way the Lord restores our lives from a place of sin. When we stray, He is faithful to restore us.

Isaiah 49:5

And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him— for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—

In the original language of the Old Testament, the phrase "to bring back to Him" is the same Hebrew word as "restore" in Psalm 23. Jesus comes after His straying sheep and restores them to the life He has for them.

I saw a touching video of a shepherd rescuing a straying sheep. It moved me when I saw it because it powerfully illustrates what Jesus has done in my own life. Let me share it with you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLZW-kWr1F4>

Is that us, or what? Jesus pulls us from the ditch, and we go about two steps down the road and find ourselves right back in it.

1 Timothy 1:16

But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost [sinner], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Do you ever wonder if God is running out of patience with your weakness and sin? Well, let this truth wash over you today: Jesus never tires of saving His sheep and He has the perfect amount of patience just for you. If you need grace today, I have good news for you: Your Good Shepherd has more than enough. You will never lack the grace you need to be restored to fellowship with God. Look to Jesus.

- The Lord provides Paths of Righteousness

v3 ...He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

This is another phrase that has multiple meanings. On one hand, it means that God will guide you on the right path. He does that through His Spirit and His word. His ways are always right and best. When He tells you how to live, He is telling you the way that is best for you.

But this phrase also has another meaning. It means He will make a way for us to walk in righteousness. You see, we need more than just a road sign that tells us the way we should go. We need the desire and ability to actually walk that road. And that's what the Lord does for those who are trusting in Him. He not only tells us how to live, He makes us able to actually walk down that road.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

When we come to trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, He places His Spirit within us. He makes us able to live a life of complete righteousness because He actually lives within us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Friend, you can live the exact life that God desires you to live. You can be the exact kind of husband or wife that God desires you to be. You can be the exact kind of parent or child or friend God desires you to be. There is no command of the Bible that you can't fully obey. You can lay aside every sin that has you bound, not by your own power but by the power of Christ in you.

So, what would it look like in your life today if you lived like you really believed that is true? How would you step into obedience through confidence in Christ?

Trust Him today. Your Good Shepherd will do it. Verse 3 says it's for His name's sake. In other words, God's name is on the line here. He's the One who will do the work so He's the One who will get the glory.

Jesus is your Good Shepherd, and you will never want. He will provide everything you need by His power in your life.

2. We Need Not Fear

v4 Even 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.

These words are some of the most familiar words of this Psalm. They have comforted generations of people who are coping with death. But the phrase “valley of the shadow of death” is not just limited to death itself. A more literal translation is “deep darkness.” Oftentimes, that is talking about death. So that is a good translation. In many ways, there is no greater darkness than the fear we have of dying or the grief we bear when a loved one dies. But that’s not the only place of deep darkness. Our world is filled with things that fall into that category.

- The place of spiritual turmoil that we talked about in Psalms 42-43 is a place of deep darkness.
- The place of relational conflict is a place of deep darkness.
- The growing wickedness and instability of our world is a place of deep darkness.

Right now, most of us have something in our lives that is casting a dark shadow over us. In our home. With our children. At our work. In our world. We all have places of great darkness that make us fearful. Even more, the forces of darkness are closing in around us and threatening us in a myriad of ways. We can feel the enemy closing in on us, on our kids and on our nation. And we can identify with the images of Psalm 23. We are walking through a place of deep darkness.

But we have no reason to fear. Why? Because we are never alone. Our Good Shepherd is always by our side. Listen, you are not alone.

When I was a kid, I was very afraid of the dark. I struggled to sleep at night because I feared what might be lurking in the darkness. There might be a boogie man in the closet. I didn’t even know what a boogie man actually was but there was no way in the world I wanted to find out. But there was something that always made me feel better. I shared a room with two of my brothers, Tate and Travis. I slept on the top bunk and Travis slept on the bottom. Tate slept on a bed that pulled out from under Travis’ bed. I can’t tell you how much comfort I got from knowing I wasn’t alone. My brothers were always there. If a boogie man did jump out from the closet, he would have to get through Tate and Travis before he got to me and surely that would buy me enough time to make a run for it! I didn’t have to outrun a boogie man, I just had to outrun Tate.

And there’s a similar thing happening here in our text. Not that we will ever have to make a run for it, but that anything that threatens us will have to get through Jesus to get to us. He is always with us.

v5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Jesus doesn’t just protect us from the deep darkness of death and the devil, He prepares a feast for us and blesses us in the process.

Some scholars believe David wrote this Psalm as a reflection over the period of time when his son, Absalom, tried to take over David’s kingdom. David had to flee his home and live in the wilderness as the armies of his own son tried to destroy him. During that time, God used three men to bring a feast to David to renew his strength and encourage Him. You can read about it in 2 Samuel 17. God prepared a table for him in the presence of his enemies.

But there’s something else I believe is going on here. In ancient times, when a king would come back from a battle, he would bring back the captives and throw a victory feast. The conquered enemies would have to look on while the king and his army ate a feast in celebration. And, for us in Christ, the battle is already won.

Jesus entered into death itself and arose victorious on the other side. And, as we trust in Jesus, we share in His victory. Everything that would threaten to destroy us has already been defeated by Jesus.

So, no matter what you are facing today, you can be confident of this: Jesus has already won the battle for you. No weapon formed against you will prosper. No scheme of the devil and no power of hell can get to you. Jesus has already won the war.

So, what thing in your life is casting a shadow over you today? What is tempting you to fear? What would it look like if you really believed that Jesus has already gone where you most fear to go and has secured a victory just for you?

Friend, all is well and all will be well. Enjoy the feast in the presence of Jesus because the battle is already won. In Christ, we need not fear anything.

3. We Will Live With Him Forever

v6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Time will not permit me to linger here, so let me cut to the chase. In Christ, your future is secure. The end of your story has already been written. Heaven is your home and no matter what this life holds for you, no matter what trials you may face, and no matter what darkness comes your way, you will live forever in the house of the Lord. He will bring you home with Him.

And every step along the way, God will surround you with goodness and mercy. When David says goodness and mercy will follow me, the word “follow” doesn’t mean they will lag behind. The word “follow” is a word that means “to rigorously pursue or to chase.” In other words, you will never outrun God’s goodness and mercy. Every day, every step, every circumstance, Your Shepherd will be there with goodness and mercy. He will not let you go. He will not let you be overcome. He will not allow you to be defeated or lost. He will bring you home to live with Him.

So, rejoice and be glad. Renew your soul today. Jesus is your Good Shepherd and your gracious Host, you will not want, you need not fear, you will live with Him forever! Glory to His name.