

“The Lord Is My Shepherd”
Psalm 23
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I’m going to start this study by looking at Psalm 23 from the King James Version of the Bible. Psalm 23:1–6 says [1] *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.* [2] *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.* [3] *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* [4] *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.* [5] *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.* [6] *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved Psalms in the Scriptures. Perhaps it’s the most quoted and the most comforting one. I’ve been teaching through the Psalms for a while and I know how much this Psalm has meant to me. Secondly, it’s the most personal of the Psalms. There are 28 personal pronouns in these six verses. Martin Luther says the heart of Christianity is in the pronouns. We certainly have the heart of Christianity in Psalm 23. Thirdly, as we celebrate communion the Lord is our Shepherd and in the New Testament it says that the Lord is the good Shepherd, the great Shepherd as He laid down His life for His sheep. Ezekiel 34 and John 10 talks about us being His sheep and His sheep hear His voice and recognize Him. As we take communion He is our ultimate Shepherd and it’s very appropriate that we study Psalm 23 as we do this.

We are called to be shepherds. Teaching and ruling elders are called to be shepherds of this congregation, but all of us are shepherds in some way. You may be a shepherd over your employees or your family. We shepherd each other in the body of Christ. We are all called to be shepherds in some way.

Another reason I’m using this passage as we prepare for the Table is because of a book titled [The Lord is My Shepherd](#) by Robert Morgan. He has written two or three books on the hymns of the faith and he has also written a book that has meant a lot to my wife and me titled the [Red Sea Rules](#) in which he gives 10 God-given strategies for difficult times. The book he did on Psalm 23 has meant a lot to me recently due to a friend who I have known for a long time who recently passed away. It was a pretty sudden illness that caused her death and her name was Pam.

Pam was in my Sunday school class and when she was ill I visited her in the hospital. As we were sharing different stories about our lives she asked me if I had read this book by Morgan on Psalm 23. I told her I had read other books by him but not that one. She told me that I ought to read it. The next week I got call from our church bookstore that said ‘Pam had left you this book.’ So before she died she had given me this book. So it will always mean a lot to me because of that great remembrance as we think about people who have lost their lives especially during this Memorial Day weekend and as we remember what Christ did for us. That’s another reason I have chosen this Psalm.

Let’s start with the first verse which says [1] *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.* He is my Shepherd and yours. He is the Person that guides, protects, provides, and goes along

side of us in life. We all need an advocate and Jesus Christ is that for us. Jesus is our Shepherd for He shepherds us.

Remember as Moses was preparing to go into the Promised Land but he didn't get to go because of his arrogance at one point. God told him He would send His angel ahead of him because He couldn't dwell within the midst of a sinful people for He was too holy. Moses told the Lord, 'Unless You go with me, I'm not going.' God is our Shepherd and He is going with us every step of the way.

We shall not want but we want many things, at least I do. It's easy in our society to not be very content. Contentment is a very rare thing. We are not celebrating the things that God has done. I went to Atlanta Thursday and came back Friday and it probably wasn't a wise move to leave Atlanta at 4:30pm to come back to Birmingham because of the traffic. My google maps took me to places I had never been before in Atlanta and I had grown up in Atlanta. Because of the traffic I had to go slow and I noticed houses, estates and things I had never noticed before because I had to be re-routed and rest in where google was taking me and hopefully know where I was going and it did. God wants us to be content where He has us.

In Morgan's book The Lord is My Shepherd he says 'contented people enjoy the symphony of life.' He goes on to say 'What if you knew for certain that every need would be met? What if you knew that the Creator of eternity was your best friend? What if you knew that God guarantees that everything will turn out well in the end? What if you knew you had access to the Creator of the universe 24 hours a day? What if you knew Someone died for you, rose from the grave to give you a life that was more abundant?' We know those things.

We need to take time for prayer and contemplation. We need to reduce our wants, increase our joys and be grateful for what we have. We had some friends come in to visit from Texas and they just talked about the beauty of Birmingham – the rolling hills, the vistas, etc. We can tend to take all that for granted because we live here. We need to learn to be content with what God has given us.

Psalm 23:2 says [2] *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.* If God wants you to stop and smell the roses He is very capable of doing that. Many times this happens at a crisis or in a health situation or when we're moving at a mile a minute and He makes us contemplate, lie down and recognize who He is.

My wife and I have a quest to keep all the orthopedic and physical therapy people in Birmingham in business. I have had a hip and a knee replaced. My wife has had two knee replacements. Since 2014 we have been to an orthopedic and physical therapist every year except 2016 which was our sabbatical. This year my wife broke her ankle just to keep the string going (smile) and what do you do if you've been to physical therapy?

The idea is you do what they tell you to do – you don't do too much and what they tell you not to do – because they know what they are doing. There was a man doing really well at physical therapy and it had only been three weeks since his knee replacement. The next time I was there I asked them where he was and the PT said 'It's not a good story for we found out he was doing way too much when he got home and he started bleeding so they had to send him back to the hospital.'

I can remember when my physical therapist asked me 'Are you doing what we are asking you to do at home?' I said 'I am.' The therapist said 'Here is what I want you to do this weekend. I want you to take the weekend off.' I said 'I can handle that. I can do that.' She knew when I needed to rest and when I didn't.

Philip Keller says that sheep can get into a depression in the ground and their weight can shift to the point that they can't get out. If they don't get out of this depression, this hole in the ground, the gases build up and if they're not rescued they could die just in that hole. So the shepherd has to come and get them out. He has to restore their soul as it says at the beginning of Psalm 23:3. God restores our soul as well. God refreshes our soul and restores our soul when we need to come back to Him in repentance.

When we first come to know Him, we have to repent and recognize that He is our Savior but He also refreshes us physically. This is a part of what the Shepherd does. He brings us back. Psalm 23:3 goes on to say *[3] He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

There is a lot in the Psalms that talks about not putting God to shame. I don't want to desecrate His name. God not only leads us in the right paths but He leads us in the paths that will lead to righteousness and you will be more sanctified as you follow His lead. If you have a friend or an employee that you know will get work done will you give them more work to do? Absolutely, if you know you can trust them. God is saying if you follow My lead you will become more like Me. You will not put Him to shame and you will give His name the glory and recognition it deserves.

There is a story about Alexander the Great that every once in a while he would take a day to judge the nation. People would bring him others that were accused of different things and many times it meant their life would be taken because of what crime they committed against him or the state. It was late in the day and a 16 year old Greek man was brought to him who was very good looking and before Alexander knew what his crime was he immediately had compassion toward him. His crime was desertion. He had deserted the army, but Alexander already in his mind was going to give him leniency. He said 'What's your name son?' The 16 year old responded 'Alexander, sir.' He leaned back and again said 'What's your name son?' He repeated his same answer again. Alexander got in his face and said 'You either change your conduct or change your name for you cannot bear my name and be a deserter.' We bear Christ's name and He leads us in the paths of righteousness for that.

He goes onto say in Psalm 23:4, *[4] 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.* Again, we see from this verse that He is personally involved with our life. Psalm 23 is talking about our deepest sorrows, our deepest fears, the things that really affect us the most. We see here that we don't have to fear because Christ has taken that death on Himself. The wrath of God was poured out on Him so we don't have to fear.

We get the results of sin many times because we live in a broken world. We are broken people, fallen people, but the final result is that we will be restored. We will be with Him and so it's a shadow of what could have happened to us because Christ has taken it on Himself. His rod is for our protection and His staff is for our guidance. These comfort us.

Some of you may be familiar with Cameron Cole. He is the youth director at the Church of the Advent. His son died at the age of 3. There is a bench at Overton Park that bears his name because he played there quite a bit. His son's name was also Cameron Cole. Cameron Cole wrote about his son's death in a book titled Therefore I Have Hope. He talks about the worst that could happen. He says 'The Gospel is not just an evangelistic principle, it's a message that gets you out of bed in the morning. The sovereignty of God is not some debatable proposition but it is the assurance that your child's death is not a meaningless accident. Grace is not simply a word in a hymn but it's the thing you rely on when you are so bereaved you cannot

image living another day. Faith is not just a cliché term but it's the thing that picks you up off the carpet when you have been crying for over an hour. My intent is that God's Word will offer you the most essential thing you need in the face of your worst – hope.' And so the name of his book. We have hope because of what Christ has done for us.

For the last two verses different commentators have debated about this move from sheep to human worth and if it is referring to us or is it still talking about sheep. I think you can apply it to both. Psalm 23:5–6 says [5] *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.* [6] *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Certainly we can say that in this country, this city and this church that our cup overflows with blessing. If we compare ourselves to the rest of the world we are extremely blessed with what He has done in our life. I think of the Lord's Prayer where He says 'Give us this day our daily bread...' and prepares this Table before us. When I think of 'anointing my head' I think of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus and wiping that precious ointment on them with her hair.

This also can apply to sheep because their noses are very sensitive, wet and have a keen sense of smell. Their ears are keener than their noses but if they're not careful that nose can get infected by flies and infected even to the point that sheep can become blind. Many times the shepherd will anoint that nose with oil that will prevent flies and other pestilence from getting in that nose to protect from infection and blindness that can come.

So I think these two verses can be applied to both us and sheep. God is protecting us from whatever might be coming our way. We don't know all the things that God takes care of before it gets to us in the unseen world, but the things He allows to come in our life He is still preparing that table before us. He is still anointing us with oil to prevent anything that would not be good for us, perfect us and bring Him glory. What a reassurance!

In Psalm 23:6, the idea of goodness and mercy following us should be enough but when you read it, it really means that goodness and mercy are pursuing us. God is chasing us as you would hunt an animal. God's goodness and mercy is pursuing us and not just following behind, so that He can strongly support those whose heart is completely His. He is pursuing us so that we would experience His fellowship, the abundant life He talks about in John 10.

John 10:7–11 says [7] *So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. [8] All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. [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."* He came to give us life that abundant, full and meaningful.

When you think about the Lord being our Shepherd, Morgan in his book, The Lord is My Shepherd, says "It depends where you put the 'but.'" You could say 'The Lord is my Shepherd *but* I don't sense His presence. Or the Lord is my Shepherd *but* He doesn't seem to be in control right now. Or the Lord is my Shepherd *but* He doesn't seem to be hearing my prayers, where are you God?

Or you could put the 'but' a different way. I don't seem to be close to God or He doesn't seem to hear me *but* I know the Lord is my Shepherd. Circumstances don't look good right now *but* the Lord is my Shepherd. My prayers seem to be bouncing off the ceiling *but* the Lord is my Shepherd for He is with me.

One of things we would recognize at the end of this Psalm are the first words of eternity when it ends by saying 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.' This is the end of the

Psalm but it's the beginning of eternity. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You for your faithfulness, Your presence and for Your love for us. Lord, I thank You that You are my Shepherd. For each one that knows You they can say 'You're my Shepherd' and You shepherd Your sheep. You tend Your lambs. You care for Your sheep. Lord, as we stop and recognize that You make us rest sometimes so that we see who You are, we are so grateful. As we come to this Table may we remember what You have done for us, in Jesus' Name, Amen.