

Psalm 23 The Good Shepherd
by Pastor Roy Hogan

Psalm 23 is one of the most loved Scriptures in the Bible. It is not certain at what time David wrote this Psalm. Perhaps it was written while he watched over his father's sheep on the hills of Judea. Or, it may have been in his older age for he speaks of the valley of death perhaps referring to the end of his life. Christians around the world have had their heart warmed by this precious passage.

23:1

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

A happy life is not a matter of chance. God's children are saved by grace, yet we are stuck on a sinful planet in a sinful body. Seems the odds are against happiness rather than for it. There are wars to be concerned with. There is disease and famine. Poverty is remnant on planet earth. Financial challenges are commonplace. So, what hope have we for a happy life? *The Lord is my shepherd.* Lord, as used here, speaks of Jehovah. Jehovah is the name used in the word of God to describe God as a covenant maker, that is, one who is bound by his being to take care of his own.

To say the Lord is my Shepherd is to speak of ownership. I certainly do not own God nor does anyone. However, we are bound to one another by a spiritual relationship. He is *my* shepherd. He has always been the good shepherd, but he became mine on April 11, 1965 at 12 noon. We once sang a song entitled "I am his and He is Mine." How true this is. Yet, our relationship has been one-sided for he has been far better to me than I have been to him. Is the Lord your shepherd?

I do not want. I have many desires and wishes, but my every need is fulfilled by my shepherd. How is it possible that I do not have to ask him over-and-over for what I need? This is because he lives

with me. Imagine having to pray for every breath of air, every drink of water and every bite of food. Because he lives with me, he knows my needs before I ask. I have never been hungry or naked. I have never slept a night or walked a single mile alone. I recommend the Jehovah to every creature on planet earth.

23:2

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Sheep have tender stomachs. A goat may eat a stick or tin can, but not so with a sheep. Green grass is the tender grass. We see in winter the grass turns brown and become dormant. A sheep cannot eat this. The Lord cares so much about me and you, his children, that he is concerned that we have the right diet. He leads the flock where there is proper and fit food to meet their needs. Aside from the terrible conditions of war and drought, I doubt one of God's children has ever starved to death. There were millions who marched in the wilderness journey of 40 years. There were many graves in the wilderness, but not a single death from starvation.

God let manna fall in the wilderness for the children of Israel. God sent ravens to feed Elijah. When the brook dried up, Elijah went to house of a widow. Her meal barrel was empty save enough grain for one more meal for her and her son. God intervened and daily supplied enough meal for the widow, her son, and the man of God.

God cares not only about providing for me, but my safety is important to him. *He leadeth me beside the still waters.* Sheep are not the smartest of animals. I do not think I have ever seen a trained sheep in, for instance, a circus. They are prone to wander. If not guided, they may get too close to rushing, deep water. We know sheep are covered in wool. Wool absorbs water. Test have been made that prove wool can absorb water equivalent to 40 percent of its weight. It is said wool can absorb 30 percent of its weight without feeling wet. Imagine how much weight a wooly

sheep would take on if it fell in water. It is hard enough to swim scantily clad. Therefore, keep your sheep away from rushing water.

23:3

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Sheep tend to wander. When a sheep gets lost, it likely will not find its way back home. The world is a big place. One of Satan's jobs is to make the grass look greener on the other side of the fence. Sodom and Gomorrah looked mighty fine to Lot. As one of the Good Shepherd's sheep, have you ever wandered away from the fold. A song contains the words: "there is nothing in all creation that a soul in isolation, away from the master's own fold." God loves all his sheep. His very delight is not another planet or universe, but the sheep of his fold. The Lord gave us this great parable in Matthew 18:12-14 *How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? Mt 18:13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Mt 18:14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.* God is a great shepherd for no one can restore a soul like he can. He does so in love. Oh, how much he cares for me!

As has been written above, sheep are not known to be *smart*. Commonly, they are thought of as being *dumb*. I wish my every act glorified God. I wish was every step pleased him. However, in this sinful world trapped in this sinful body a child of God needs help in knowing the right path. *He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* God guides his sheep. If you will let him, he will direct your path through life. It is when we get smarter than God or when we get secure in self that we make mistakes.

Note the reason God cares so much for our pathway. He does so because it is for his name sake. The Devil wants me to be a drunkard. He wants you to be a thief or robber. Your neighbor may not care if you do the right thing in life. Your friends may not want your kids to make the honor roll. God wants what is right for his children. We have seen in this chapter that we, as his sheep, are fed by him, protected by him and restored by him when we wander off. He cares. His only, begotten Son died for us. God has a lot invested in his flock. His flock is the very apple of his eye. His desire is that we walk in paths of righteous. Would you like for your son to turn out like a son of the Devil?

One of the worst mistakes a sheep can make is to try and figure life by itself.

23:4

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.

God feeds his sheep. He protects his sheep. He retrieves lost sheep. He guides his sheep in the right path. All these things speak of our walk in this life. What about the inevitable, the hour of death? Can your spouse die with you? Can your doctor die with you? The answer to these questions is “no,” but there is one who can hold your hand every step of the way in the journey of death.

David describes the process of death as a *walk*. Only God can turn death into a walk. Have you every taken a stroll on a nice day? Death is not a race. It need not be a crisis for a child of God. It is not a crash into a deep hole. It is a walk, thanks to the good Shepherd.

The place of death is described as a valley. David describes death as a *valley*. I guess that makes life a hill. Some of the sweetest, most peaceful places are known as valleys. Death is not a rugged forest nor a hot, burning dessert. Death takes place in a valley.

David describes death as a *shadow*. The shadow of a lion cannot bite, a shadow of a gun cannot kill, and the shadow of death cannot harm a child of God. If there is a shadow, there must be a light involved in death. That light must be Jehovah God. The sinner dies in darkness and alone. The sinner passes from death's darkness into the darkest corridor of all- hell.

Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. The rod and staff are often thought of as instruments used to correct and guide the sheep. It is said a shepherd may use to crook of the staff to jerk the wayward sheep back on course. The rod of the shepherd may strike the disobedient sheep. So, why does David see the rod and staff in the death journey? Moses raised his rod and the waters of the Red Sea opened to allow the children of Israel to cross when chased by Pharaoh's army. Then, when safely across, Moses waved the rod and the sea closed collapsing on the enemy army. The rod seen in the valley of death is not for the friend, but for the foe. How dare anyone or anything interrupt one of God's children as he passes through the valley of death! Moses had a staff. His staff was for his aid in crossing the dry bed of the sea which was likely rough ground. With staff and rod in the hand of the good Shepherd, David had no fear making his journey through death.

23:5

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Are you enjoying or enduring your trip to Heaven? We certainly have enemies. The sheep of God are outnumbered by ravening wolves. David had an army of enemies. It seems trouble followed him in the form of angry and evil men seeking to kill him. He once hid in a cave seeking safety. Once, he went to the priests seeking safety. He was hunted in the fashion a game animal is hunted. Yet, in the midst of adversity God made a way. He always has, and always will, make a way for the sheep. David sat at the table of God's protection and enjoyed fine meals while his enemy looked

on. God carpeted the wilderness floor with manna while the children walked through. We do not have to dread this journey to Heaven.

23:6

*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.*

Thank God for the “A” team- goodness and mercy. I once heard a man explain his salvation in this fashion- he said he was in a horrible pit of sin. Along came two men, mercy and grace (goodness). Grace said to mercy “you jump into the pit and tie this rope around him, and I will hoist him out.” Thank God for the “A” team.

Wealthy men of old traveled with two footmen walking behind them or sitting in the carriage behind them. The tasks of the two footmen was such things as to assist the master as he stepped from the carriage, open the door to the inn for him, and rush to his room to see that all was in fine order. The footmen made the wealthy man’s journey smooth. That is what goodness and mercy has done for me for more than 50 years. What would we do without Jesus?

I love going to the “house of the Lord” on earth. I can only imagine what the big “house of the Lord will be.” I have never seen walls of jasper nor streets of gold. What does a gate of pearl look like? I do not know. I do believe Heaven is an exotic place. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard what lieth in store in God’s forever.

All of this for a bunch of dumb sheep.