

The Good Shepherd

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[0:00] So as I mentioned earlier, we're going to have a look at the first three verses of Psalm 23 tonight. And verses that are very well known to us all.

The very opening line speaks of security and safety and comfort. And it's a line that is much loved in particular at funerals.

Because people like that sense of comfort that comes through the Lord being their shepherd. And David, King David, wrote these lines as a shepherd himself.

One who knew the hardships and the challenges of being a shepherd in ancient Israel. Of being out in the wilds and having to deal with all the issues that came upon his flock.

And yet as he wrote this psalm, he was able to look beyond himself as being a good shepherd. To the one who was ultimately the good shepherd. The one who was far greater than himself.

[1:03] And in saying the Lord is my shepherd. David was implicitly recognizing that he himself was a sheep.

And that therefore he belonged to his shepherd. It's one of those things that the Bible speaks of in many different ways of two groups of people within the world.

And Jesus put that very clearly when he was speaking in Matthew about the judgment to come. And he spoke about on that day the sheep and the goats coming before him. And the sheep, his sheep would come to him and they would go to eternal life.

But the goats would be cast out and they would go to eternal death. So there's very serious issues associated with either being a sheep in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or of not being so. And as we go through these verses tonight, it's important we keep this in mind. A shepherd is one who cares for his sheep.

[2:10] And he has a duty to look after his sheep. And as many of you here will know as you work with sheep, it can seem as though the one and key purpose in a sheep's life is to die in the most bizarre way imaginable.

And yet the purpose behind a shepherd is to care for those sheep. To help them in all their distresses. To take them out of the ditches of this life.

To heal them from the diseases that they get. When they roll over on their back and can't get up. To lift them up. And when a little lamb goes down a hole and his mother can't get to it.

It's the shepherd's job to find the lamb and to rescue it. The very nature of a shepherd is to care for their sheep.

And King David here, when he says, The Lord is my shepherd. He is speaking about a very personal relationship that he has with his shepherd, the Lord.

[3:14] He knew that he belonged to the Lord. And that he belonged to the Lord's flock. The Lord is my shepherd, he could say. Because he himself had come to know the Lord by putting his faith in him.

And the very implication that comes from David saying, The Lord is my shepherd. As he speaks to us through this psalm today, he is saying to you, Who is your shepherd?

Is the Lord Jesus Christ your shepherd? Or is it somebody else? For in reality, we have two options in this life. We can follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or we can follow the devil and all his minions. And thinking about the sheep and the goats, There are many people who think it's actually much more fun to be a goat.

Because then you don't go around in herds. You just wander wherever you like. You can run up cliffs. And you can scatter whichever way you want to go. But the reality is, Anyone who thinks they are running away on their own, In fact, are doing nothing more than following the devil himself.

[4:26] And his rebellion against God. And they are serving him rather than serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Because there are indeed only two places in this world.

They are the dominion of darkness and the kingdom of light. And Jesus' kingdom of light is one that is much more worthy of belonging to.

And ultimately, it is for our good. I remember when I was in my teens, Helping my uncle gather sheep on the Isle of Skye.

And just north of poor tree there, You've got the hills go up high, And you've got great cliffs facing out onto the Sound of Razzie. And we were gathering underneath those cliffs.

And the rock there is what they call rotten rock on sky. Very crumbly. And just over time, It weathers and great blocks of stone come, Crashing down from the cliffs onto the land below.

[5:27] And I was gathering below my uncle. And I was just walking along following the sheep. And we came into this area. There was these big boulders that they had to navigate.

And they shouted down to me, Just stand back a minute and give the sheep their time. Which is what I did. And the sheep picked their way one by one over these boulders, Through these obstacles that were in their way.

And afterwards, he said to me, Thanks for doing that. He said, Last year, the guy who was out gathering just had his dog on the back of the sheep. And they were charging into the boulders and running over them.

And no doubt doing themselves some damage. Because he had no idea what he was doing in driving them into this boulder field. And that is the way it is. If you have the devil as your shepherd, He's there to drive you onto the rocks.

To give you no rest and no peace. And he just simply forces you on. Do you want to be driven onto the rocks in your life?

[6:31] Because if you do, then you carry on in the path that you are following. If you are outside of Christ tonight. It's the devil's desire to destroy everyone.

He hates the image of God because he has rebelled against God himself. And he hates each individual person who walks the face of this earth. And it is his desire to destroy each and every one.

Whether he manages to do it in this world. Or simply by taking them with him to the next. He would destroy everyone if he had the chance. Even believers if he was able to.

1 Peter 5 and 8. Peter says that he's like a roaring lion prowling around looking for whom he can devour. And the question can often come up amongst believers asking the question.

Is it possible that I can be lost too? And I think there's a brilliant picture of the security that believers can have in the Old Testament.

[7:36] From David himself. The author of his psalm. Looking in 1 Samuel 17. And verses 33 to 37. And we have the account there of where David was about to go and fight against Goliath the Philistine.

And we have Saul saying to him. You are not able to go out against the Philistine and fight him. You are only a boy. And he has been a fighting man since his youth. But David said to Saul.

Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock. I went after it, struck it, and rescued the sheep from its mouth.

When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it, and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear. This uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them because he has defied the armies of the living God.

The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of the Philistine. What words of confidence David had there as a shepherd in this world.

[8:45] And we see there in that picture. He went after the sheep. Even though it was in the mouth of a lion. Even though the situation looked absolutely hopeless for one of his sheep.

Yet he went and he struck that lion. And he rescued the sheep from the lion's jaws. And if David was able to do that for one of his sheep.

The Lord Jesus Christ can easily do that and better for one of his own. If you as a believer tonight think you're down in a terrible chasm. As if you are within the jaws of the very devil himself.

Yet there is nothing for you to fear. Because the Lord Jesus Christ will rescue you out of that situation. I think it was one of the Puritans said that God never arrives late.

But he always arrives at the last minute. Because for him that is the perfect time to rescue people. When he can show his own glory to its maximum.

[9 : 51] If you're going through a time of trial. As a believer the Lord Jesus Christ will indeed deliver you from that trial. And the remarkable thing we see here is that David only killed the lion.

After he had removed the sheep from its mouth. He said he struck the lion. He rescued the sheep from its mouth. And it was only after it turned on him.

That he seized it. Struck it. And he killed it. And why did he do that? I think it was quite simply because David's focus was solely upon the sheep.

That was the thing that was most important. The lion might have looked ferocious. But to David what was precious was the sheep within its mouth. Therefore you can be certain tonight as a believer.

That whatever you are going through. The Lord Jesus and his focus is upon you. And not upon the one who would have you. For he knows that you are his.

[10 : 56] And he will not lose sight of you. Amazing. Amazing thoughts there. From David. No wonder why he could write in this psalm.

That he would not. The Lord was his shepherd. And he would not be in want. He's speaking there about lacking nothing. About being short of anything in his life.

Because he knew that the Lord would provide for him. And we see in verse 2 there. How that works itself out. Because the Lord provides for his needs.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. Has anyone here ever tried to make a sheep lie down?

The reality is it's impossible to do so. You could grab hold of a sheep. You could crush it onto the ground. Sit over it. But as soon as you take your hands off it.

[11 : 56] It will be away like a shot. It's not possible to force a sheep to lie down. What the shepherd must do is to create the conditions in which the sheep can feel able to lie down.

In which it wants to lie down. And to rest. And those conditions are very clear. It needs security first of all. And it needs to be well fed.

We see there the security. Or have seen there the security that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. And being well fed is one of the things that makes a sheep want to lie down.

If its stomach is empty and it's hungry. It wants to graze constantly. I did a number of lambings as a young man on various farms on the mainland. And we would have the sheep.

One large field up to lambing. We'd be feeding them every day. And after the lambing you would then put the ewes with the newborn lambs into the best fields.

[12 : 59] And they would go out and they'd go in the fields that had the young spring grass growing in them. And after a few days you'd wander out there. And a nice sunny day.

And all the sheep would just be lying down. Rested because they had good nutritious spring grass in their stomachs. The lambs were happy because they had plenty of milk from their mothers.

And they would lie down there. And I could walk amongst the sheep within a yard or two of them.

And they wouldn't move. Because they recognised me as being their shepherd.

They recognised that I was not a threat to them. And so it is with the believer. The Lord Jesus Christ feeds us through his word. He feeds us.

As we come to the Lord's table. And when we are rested and when we are content with the word of God within our hearts.

[13 : 56] Then we are able to lie down and rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't only have that security and the food that we need.

We also are able to drink from quiet waters. From still waters. It is interesting.

Shepherds in the time in ancient Israel. And indeed in the Middle East today. They are the ones who take their sheep to water. Because water there is scarce.

Think of Psalm 63. David is speaking about being a dry and parched land. Where there is no water. And this is the sense of the shepherd taking his sheep to the water in order to drink.

But sheep will never drink from water that is turbulent. They don't drink from a barn that is tumbling down the hillside. They look for a pool where the water is quieter.

[15 : 00] Where the water is still. And they are only happy drinking from water that is still. And where waters are still. They tend to be deeper.

There is a lovely picture in the New Testament. A real story. In the New Testament. In John chapter 4. Where Jesus meets the woman at the well. And there.

It is a hot and it is a dry day. And he asks the woman for a drink. And she is quite amazed. That he would ask her. Samaritan. For a drink.

And he says. If you knew who it was. Who asked you for a drink. You would be asking him. And he would give you living water. And so it is that the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gives us living water. So that we may drink. And we may be content. And we may not thirst. And the outcome of all of that.

[15:57] Is that David can say. He restores my soul. Rest and recuperation. Come to David. Come to David. In the midst.

Of a dry and a parched land. In the midst. Of the wilderness. In which he operated. As a shepherd. Because he had the security. That came from being.

In the Lord Jesus Christ. He had the food. And the water. That the Lord Jesus Christ. Provided for him. And we all know.

That still waters. Run deep. And so. The water that Jesus provides. Never runs out. And it is always there. To satisfy our needs.

Having given. David rest. We see. He speaks. Of the journey. That he makes. He goes on to say. That the Lord leads him.

[16:53] Or guides him. In paths of righteousness. It is. A wonderful thing. That the Lord Jesus Christ. Doesn't simply save us. And then leave us.

On our own. He is the one. Who goes before us. And he is the one. Also. Who is our rear guard. As I mentioned. Shepherds in ancient Israel.

Would walk ahead of their sheep. And the sheep. Would follow them. So he would lead them. And they would follow. In his tracks. There is something about sheep. That they just seem to feel.

Safe. In paths. David would write. In Psalm 16. And verse 16. The boundary lines. For me. Have fallen. In pleasant places. He knew.

Where the boundary lines were. Which enabled him. To travel on his pilgrimage. And safety. And security. And he was content.

[17:47] With that. Psalm 119. And 19. And verse 32. He was also able to say. I run in the path.

Of your commands. For you have set my heart free. Envisaging. The Lord's commands. Like a path. Before him. And he was able to run. In those commands.

And to delight in them. And. If you go out onto the hill. Where there are sheep. You will see. That they have their own paths. And tracks. That they follow.

As they go from one place. To another. I worked on one farm. Where they used to cut. Silage. And shortly. After they'd removed the silage. And the grass grew again.

They would then put the sheep. Onto them. And there wouldn't be. Any path. Or track. Within that field. Whatsoever. But within a few days. You would start to see. The lines appearing.

[18:42] Of those paths. Being created. By the sheep. Themselves. And if you came to gather them up. They would all run. Into one of these paths. And then start following. One another.

Along a route. That might even look. A little bit mazy. As it went through. A perfectly straight. Flat. And square field. There's something. About the sheep. That made them. That simply made them. Feel safe. Walking in paths. And walking in routes. That other sheep. Had gone in before. And so it is. With ourselves.

As we are created. To be in fellowship. With one another. We find safety. By walking. In the routes. That believers. Have gone before us. So it's good for us.

To learn. From older believers. In our own fellowship. And to learn. From reading. Christian history. To see how believers. In the past. Dealt with certain challenges. And issues.

[19:38] And problems. Because you can be sure. That if they. Beat through the bushes. And created a path. That is one. That is well worth. Following for ourselves. Rather than for us.

Trying. To do. The same thing. Once again. And learn. By. Going. Into. Odd and difficult. Places. If we can follow.

The paths. That others have taken. That. Will enable us. To continue. Following Christ. Safely. And securely. The things that Christ.

Does for his people. Are truly amazing. All encompassing. Giving us safety. And security. Food. And rest. The restoration. Of our souls.

But why does he do all this? There was no need of him. To come down. From heaven. To earth. And yet he did. And David. Simply says. It's for this reason.

[20 : 35] He guides me. In paths of righteousness. For his name's sake. It's for the sake. Of the name. Of the Lord. He names him here. At the beginning.

Of the. Psalm. Simply as the Lord. And as we see it. In. Capital letters. In some translations. It's a reminder. The Lord.

That has been spoken of. Here is the covenant. Keeping God. The God. Who makes his promises. And who never deviates. From them. The God. Who has a plan. And a purpose.

For this world. That will be fulfilled. No matter. What may come. And it's the Lord. Jesus Christ. Who. Having been exalted. Into heaven.

Now has the name. That is above every name. And it's at that name. That every knee will bow. And every tongue. Will confess. That Jesus Christ. Is the Lord. And he will not have.

[21 : 31] His name run down. He will not have. His name besmirched. By. Those who are against him. Or indeed. By believers. Failing. To follow him.

As they should. Or by. Him. Failing. To bring. His believers. His sheep. Safely home. And the very sense. Of. That covenant.

Keeping name. Of God. Takes us all the way. Back to Genesis 15. Where God first. Met with Abraham. And promised him. That there was a great.

Inheritance. For him to be had. And that the number. Of his offspring. Would be. Beyond. Counting. And he asked. The quite reasonable. Question.

Having believed. And having been. Credited to him. As righteousness. He asked the reasonable. Question. How can I know. These things. So God told him. To cut up.

[22 : 27] Several animals. Put them in pieces. And then. That night. God came along. In the presence. Of a burning brazier. Passing. Between. The parts.

Of the animals. As he confirmed. His covenant. With Abraham. And in doing so. In passing. Between those animals. He was saying. To. Abraham.

If there's one thing. I want you to know. It's this. If I fail. To keep my word. I should be cut. Into pieces. I should be ripped apart. Just as these animals.

Have been torn in two. That. Is the kind of promise. That God makes. And that. Is the kind of promise. That God keeps. And ultimately.

Christ's body. Was torn upon the cross. To pay. For our sins. And by sending. Christ. Into the world. He enabled Christ.

[23 : 21] To call his sheep. Out of the world. As we read earlier on. From John 10. Christ said there. I know my sheep. And my sheep know me. I call them.

And they come out. Are you feeling the call. Of Christ. Today. In your own life. Well do not try. And resist his call. The devil.

Tried to destroy Christ. But he failed. And as I mentioned earlier. The devil will look to destroy you. If he has the opportunity. And he may have the opportunity.

If you do not have Christ. As your good shepherd. Do you take comfort. From the words of Psalm 23. It's wonderful.

If you do. But simply taking comfort. From the words. Is not enough. If your faith. Is not in Christ himself. You must find comfort.

[24 : 16] In the very arms. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. The one who was. And is. The good shepherd. The one who will never. Lose one. Of his sheep.

And if you come into. Trusting. In Christ. If you come into his arms. And into his presence. As that good shepherd. He will provide you.

With the peace. And the security. And all the feeding. You need. For this life. And the promise. Of eternal peace. And security. And contentment.

In the next. What a shepherd. We have. What a savior. Let us praise his name. As we go through this world. And enjoy being the sheep.

Of the good shepherd. And of the living God. Let us pray. Thank you.