

Ps 23 (ESV) 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.

1. We are calling this series the song of the contented sheep

- A. Because of its beautiful picture of the sheep lying down peacefully in the green pastures
 - 1). If you know anything about sheep this is not the natural state – they are timid and skittish
 - a). For them to lie down and rest everything that worries them must be taken care of
 - b). For the sheep in this Psalm the good shepherd has done just that
- B. The people in biblical times would know why these sheep could rest
 - 1). They would be well acquainted with good and bad shepherds
 - You could tell immediately what kind of shepherd by the state of the flock
 - a). So the ancient readers of Psalms would know how good this shepherd is
 - By the state of the flock he is caring for – they are able to lie down and rest

Transition: The question we want to answer this morning is – “Who is this Shepherd?”

- A. The answer to that is vital when it comes to this Psalm
 - 1). Because all these promises in Psalm 23 are built upon this Shepherd
 - a). If he is not capable or not trustworthy the promises in this Psalm fall apart
 - 2). BUT if he is – then each verse will bring us great comfort and rest

I. WHO IS THE SHEPHERD?

Ps 23:1 (ESV) The LORD is my shepherd...

1. The “LORD” is my shepherd – but who is the LORD?

- A. “Lord” here is God’s proper name – we think it’s Yahweh or Jehovah
 - 1). I say “think” because LORD in all caps indicates the original was YHWH or JHVH
- B. The Jews wrote his name with letters you could not pronounce (tetragrammaton)
 - 1). Why? Because they viewed God’s personal name as being so holy
 - They didn’t want perverse lips to utter it – so they wrote it in a way that was unpronounceable
 - a). You still knew it was Almighty God’s name – you just couldn’t say it
- C. They would say the true name of God once a year
 - 1). It was by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement
 - 2). He would enter the Holy of Holies and say (probably with trembling) God’s name

2. In Biblical times names all had meanings

- A. Not like today – Bill – my parents just phoned that in – no imagination
 - 1). When we named Taylor we really thought about it
 - We wanted something that sounded cool – but had meaning
 - a). He’s named after one of my heroes – Hudson Taylor – great missionary
- B. Names really meant something in the days of the Biblical writers
 - 1). Adam = Man (first man)
 - 2). Eve = Living or to give life (all life can be traced back to her – mother of us all)
 - 3). Jesus – not named that because it sounded cool – that’s how we do it

Mt 1:21 (ESV) She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

- a). The name means Savior
- 4). We find the meaning of the personal name of God (Yahweh or Jehovah) in Exodus 3
 - a). God is speaking to Moses from the burning bush
Calling him to be his spokesman to deliver his people from Egypt
 - b). Let's pick up the story in Exodus 3:13

Ex 3:13–14 (NIV) Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, '*What is his name?*' Then what shall I tell them?" (14) God said to Moses, "***I AM WHO I AM.*** This is what you are to say to the Israelites: '***I AM*** has sent me to you.' "

- 1a). Moses asks "What is your name" – God answers "I am"
- 2a). So YHWH or JHVH is the same as what God said to Moses – the great I AM

Question: Fine. But what does that mean? It's meaning is quite full – it speaks of who God is

One writer put it like this: "I Am Who I Am—God almighty, unchanging and unchangeable. I Am self-sustaining, self-existent—the Creator, not the created. I Was, and I Am, and I Will Be—from everlasting to everlasting, First and Last, Beginning and End, Alpha and Omega."

Point: Right at the beginning of this Psalm David brings us face-to-face with Almighty God

- A. So we know who it is backing up these promises
 - 1). He tells us that our shepherd is the great "I am"
 - 2). ***God Almighty, unchanging and unchangeable***

Transition: Let's think about that for a moment – so comforting to know God is immutable

3. One thing life will never be is stable

- A. Everything is constantly changing – what is in vogue today won't be tomorrow
 - 1). You're hair style making you look so good today – may look funky tomorrow = Big hair
 - 2). You may have friends today – that change so radically one day they aren't friends at all
 - a). David's own son stole the kingdom from him
 - 3). How many have lost jobs because the company they trusted in closes or moves

Point: Life is chaotic – what can I really trust in – what can I give myself too?

- A. Here is one of those great things about this shepherd – he will never change

Mal 3:6 (NIV) "I the LORD do not change. (all caps = same LORD as in Psalm 23:1)

- B. Max Lucado tells a story in his book "Safe in the shepherd's arms"

When Lloyd Douglas, author of *The Robe* and other novels, attended college, he lived in a boardinghouse. A retired, wheelchair-bound music professor resided on the first floor. Each morning Douglas would stick his head in the door of the teacher's apartment and ask the same question, "Well, what's the good news?" The old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of the wheelchair, and say, "That's middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat. The piano across the hall is out of tune, but, my friend, that is middle C."

You and I need a middle C. Haven't you had enough change in your life? Relationships change. Health changes. The weather changes. But the Yahweh who ruled the earth last night is the same Yahweh who rules it today. Same convictions. Same plan. Same mood. Same love. He never changes. You can no more alter God than a pebble can alter the rhythm of the Pacific. Yahweh is our middle C.

- C. Right here in verse 1 we are comforted by massive truth – the truth of who is watching over us
 - 1). Our faithful – unchanging God
 - 2). The one who had writers of Scripture record one incredible promise after another
Promises given as gifts of love to comfort and sustain his people
 - a). Now 1000's of years later he is just as serious about keeping them
 - b). This LORD does not change – therefore the Bible is just as relevant today as it was then

Transition: Let's take a moment to let that sink in – who this Shepherd is – who is taking care of us

Point: This is no ordinary shepherd – this is the Great I am

- A. This is the one who created all we see – the known universe with a radius of 46 billion light years
 - 1). That’s big – multiply 46 billion light years by 6 trillion miles (how far light travels in a year)
 - a). That’s 276 followed by 23 zeros miles
 - 2). He just said “Let there be” and there was – in six days – it could have been six seconds
 - a). He chose six days to teach us the need of rest one day a week
 - b). But creation didn’t tax his power one bit
- B. This is that great Middle C – the one who has promised – the one who will never change his mind
 - 1). The one who will love me as much tomorrow as he did when he first chose me
 - a). When did he first put his love on me?

Eph 1:4 (NIV) For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

 - 1a). That is when he started loving you – and it never stopped
He loves you as much today as he did that first day he chose you
 - 2a). “Yeah but do you know what I’ve done?”
Those actions may change man’s love – but not God’s

La 3:22–23 (ESV) The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ⁽²³⁾ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

- C. This is our shepherd – Almighty God – the great creator of all we see

This is the one who has joyfully taken on the responsibility of caring for his sheep

Point: Here is where we find comfort when life gets hard – when we become afraid

- A. We measure those problems not against us and our abilities – we aren’t big enough – wise enough
 - 1). We must learn to measure our problems against who him and his abilities = rest
- B. That bill comes crashing into your life – faith says – He promised to provide
 - 1). It is his responsibility to take care of his sheep – that’s what good shepherds do
 - a). That is why he chose that title – to let us know this truth that brings rest
- C. Something threatens your life – He said he’d protect us – good shepherds do that
 - 1). He patrols around our life keeping alert for predators
- D. When were cast down – we have a shepherd lovingly watching over every individual sheep

Ps 3:3 (ESV) But you, O **LORD**, are a shield about me, my glory, *and the lifter of my head.*

 - 1). He comes to us and lifts our heads – encourages us
 - 2). You can’t lift yourself – he will lift you

Is 40:11 (ESV) He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.
- E. Sheep are not designed to handle anxiety – neither are we
 - 1). The littlest thing freaks them out – a stick on the ground that may look like a snake
 - a). One sees it panics and start running – all joined in – stampede – hurting themselves
So a good shepherd walks the pasture – remove everything that caused fear
 - 2). Why does God call us sheep – we’re the same way – little things cause us to panic
 - a). Our shepherd doesn’t remove every circumstance that would cause anxiety
He tells us what to do with anxiety – by faith cast it on him
1 Pe 5:7 (ESV) casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.
 - b). How do we cast it on him – through prayer
Php 4:6–7 (ESV) *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer* and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁽⁷⁾ *And the peace*

of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- 1a). As sheep – if we want to enjoy this peace
We must get into the habit of taking our cares to our shepherd and leaving them there
- c). So God doesn't remove all negative circumstances because they are beneficial
 - 1a). They force us to learn how to trust him – how to give them to him
 - 2a). They teach us how to rest regardless of what we are going through

Point: Because of who he is we can lie down peacefully resting in peace

“Counselors can comfort you in the storm, but he is the one who can still the storm. Friends can hold your hand at your deathbed, but he is the one who has defeated the grave.”

Transition: But I want to go a bit deeper and see which one of the Trinity this is speaking of

- A. We have a choice – is it the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit?
 - 1). I want to show you this to make it more personal

Which Member of the Godhead is the Shepherd?

1. We've seen it is the LORD (all caps) who is the great I am from the burning bush

- A. I think most would think that is God the Father – but is it?
- B. Jesus makes a radical claim in John 8

Jn 8:58 (ESV) Jesus said to them (disciples), “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, *I am.*”

 - 1). What was he saying? I am the one that Moses spoke to from that burning bush
 - 2). Do you think they knew what he was speaking about? Who he was saying he was?

Next verse: Jn 8:59 (ESV) So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

 - a). They accused him of blasphemy – I guess – UNLESS its true
- C. Jesus claimed the same thing in other scriptures

Jn 13:19 (ESV) I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

 - 1). Interesting how other translations record this

John 13:19 (NASB) "... you may believe that I am *He*.

John 13:19 (NKJV) "... you may believe that I am *He*.

 - a). “He” is in italics because it isn't in the original manuscripts
 - b). Jesus simply said “That you may believe I AM”
 - 1a). The one who was speaking to Moses in that burning bush – Almighty God
 - 2). You find the same thing when the soldiers came out to arrest him – John 18:5-6
 - a). Jesus says “Who are you looking for?” They answer “Jesus of Nazereth”
He said to them “I am” (He is in italics)
 - 1a). They drew back and fell to the ground! That power knocked them down

Transition: So the shepherd is Jesus – can he take care of us – let's look at a few thoughts

2. Scripture says Jesus is the creator

Col 1:15–16 (ESV) He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ⁽¹⁶⁾ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

- A. So he is the one who intimately and intricately crafted you in your mother's womb
- B. Your shepherd is Almighty God – the one who created you now tenderly cares for you
- C. This is not some feeble shepherd who can't handle adversity when it comes into our life
 - 1). If you find yourself anxious – look around – listen to the sermon creation is preaching

Ps 19:1–4 (ESV) The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ⁽²⁾ Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ⁽³⁾ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁽⁴⁾ Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

- 1). Every day, everywhere, to everybody creation preaches a sermon – telling us about our God
 - a). It teaches us about His wisdom and power
 - 1a). The genius it took to design the universe – every atom
The power it took to put that design into motion

3. Scripture says our creator came to earth as a man (why is that important?)

- A. Because he knows what it's like to be you – to go through what you go through
Heb 4:15–16 (ESV) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
 - 1). Our shepherd is not some distant deity who has no idea of what it feels to be us
 - a). He came as a man to die for our sins and so he could be that good shepherd
Who has been tempted like we are in every way – who knows the pain we feel
 - b). So he could be that sympathetic Shepherd
 - 1a). He is the perfect shepherd because he was also a sheep
- B. Almighty God became a man to die for our sins
And Almighty God became a man so he could be the perfect High Priest/Shepherd
 - 1). One who can relate to everything we go through
Who doesn't judge us when we are weak – He is sympathetic and will help

Transition: So that is the shepherd. It is Jesus Christ the great I am

 - A. But when is he going to take care of me?

II. WHEN WILL I BE SHEPHERDED?

Ps 23:1 (ESV) The LORD **IS** my shepherd...

1. The Bible can say so much with so few letters

- A. For God SO loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son

2. This tiny word "Is" speaks of immediacy

- A. Important because this moves the thought from the past or future – to the present – the NOW
 - 1). Doesn't say the Lord WAS or WILL BE my shepherd – He IS my shepherd!
 - a). This morning when I woke up he was watching over me
Right now in this room he is with you – guarding you – caring for you
- B. You're not looking back on the good old days when he did shepherd you
You're not looking forward to glory when he will shepherd you
 - 1). You enjoy the care of Almighty God in the present – every minute of every day

Thought: This what I need isn't it? I need a God who is present in this world

- A. I need his touch upon my life daily – I need to know I can trust him NOW
- B. Watch how David thought

Ps 27:1 (ESV) The LORD **IS** my light and my salvation; **(result)** whom shall I fear? The LORD **IS** the stronghold of my life; **(result)** of whom shall I be afraid?

- 1). Because God IS – right now! I have confidence – I'm not afraid – I can rest

Ps 46:1 (ESV) God **IS** our refuge and strength, **(result)** a very present help in trouble.

- 1). Because God IS he is a very present help – I'm not waiting for that – He is active NOW

One writer summed up verse 1: “Psalm 23:1 is the world’s most powerful opening for history’s most precious poem: *The Lord is . . . He is Yahweh God. He is Yeshua Jesus. He is here, and He is here now for you and me.*”

Transition: We’ve seen who is shepherding us – the Lord Jesus Christ – the Great I AM

- A. We’ve seen when he shepherds us – right now – faithfully, lovingly watching over you
- B. Let’s see who the good shepherd shepherds

III. WHO THE SHEPHERD SHEPHERDS

Ps 23:1 (ESV) The LORD is *my* shepherd...

1. Martin Luther said the heart of Christianity is seen in it’s personal pronouns

- A. Psalm 23 is filled with them

Ps 23 (ESV) 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.

Thought: We are at one of the most important questions I could ever ask you

- A. Can you say the Lord is my Shepherd?
 - 1). All the promises of this great psalm hinge upon your answer to that
 - B. Have you seen the reality of your sin and have you surrendered to his love?
 - 1). Are you following him?
 - 2). The sheep are led into these green pastures because they follow where he leads
- Jn 10:27–28 (ESV)** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ⁽²⁸⁾ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
- C. If you are his sheep rejoice! How great is it to be under this shepherds care
 - 1). I’ve lived 40 years constantly amazed at his goodness – love – and faithfulness

Transition: Let me end with just one aspect of his shepherding – how good it is to be under his care

2. He is faithful to come after us if our heart wanders off

Jesus speaking to shepherds: Lk 15:4–6 (ESV) “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁽⁵⁾ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁽⁶⁾ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’”

- A. Who of us haven’t wondered away – our heart has grown cold – lost our interest in the things of God
 - 1). Yet here you are! Some returning to church after years. Why?
 - a). Because of the unrelenting love of your Shepherd – who would not let you go
- B. He has taken on the responsibility to get you safely to the Father

Jn 6:39 (ESV) And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.
- C. This is why we can confidently say with David in the last great verse of this Psalm

Ps 23:6 (ESV) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

 - 1). That is true because my shepherd is faithful to hold me until I’m in glory

CONCLUSION

1. I can face life with confidence because I have a good shepherd who is the great I am

A. He is with me right now – I am never alone

Ro 8:31 (ESV) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

COMMUNION

1. We'll borrow from our next study in Psalm in two weeks

A. Easter message next week – invite your friends

Ps 23:1 (ESV) The LORD is my shepherd; ***I shall not want.***

1. What would that mean when we think of communion?

A. The whole satisfaction of Christianity is possible because of the cross

B. Because My Lord left glory and came to earth to end up on a cross

1). I shall not want for forgiveness – for cleansing of all my sin
For the removal of everything that would have cast me into hell

2). Because of the cross – now all the potential of Christianity opens up

a). All the promises of provision and protection

b). All the intimacy of knowing my shepherd

c). The joy of waking up every day knowing I will walk with him

d). The comfort that he is conducting all things so they will work for my good

C. We look back on the cross and say that is what made everything else possible

