

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.

1. I love the way H.A. Ironsides opens his commentary on this passage

Some one has said, "I believe Psalm 23 is the most loved Psalm of them all, and it is the one least believed." Do you believe it? You love it, do you not? And you like to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." But the next time that you are thrown out of a job are you going to say, "Oh dear, I don't know what on earth I am going to do"? What was that about the Shepherd? "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." And when sickness and bereavement come, do you say, "Oh my, it is all up with me"? Is He no longer your Shepherd? Do you say these words over and yet not believe them? "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

Thought: This is a Psalm that promises so much – loved by so many – and applied by so few

A. Let me ask you: What do you do with the promises of God? "I highlight them in yellow"

- 1). Fine. But the promises of God are to be used in our daily life – do you apply them?
- 2). How many people have this beautiful psalm engraved on a plaque on their wall
 - a). But know nothing about the power of the promises contained in it
 - a). Promises given by a faithful God who cannot lie – meant to sustain and comfort us

B. So I want us to approach this Psalm with this truth – if we don't apply it – it will do us no good at all

- 1). This Psalm is meant for you to grab onto line after line and say – "Mine, That's given for me"
 - a). That's why God put it in His book – for me to use in my life

Thought: And AS I learn to use the promises of God – not only as beautiful words to put on a plaque
But as a weapon of war – as the Sword of the Spirit

THEN I can enjoy peace in times of darkness – Joy when circumstances go South

Question: Have you ever thought about why the scriptures are called a sword?

A. Because you were meant to pull them out of the Bible to bloody up – to hack down giants with

- 1). The giants of fear, discouragement, depression, worry, anxiety, the pain of disappointment
- 2). The giant of my own flesh as it rises up against what God is doing in my life
 - a). There is a sacred violence the believer is called to – not against other – against ourselves

Ro 8:12–13 (ESV) ⁽¹²⁾ So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ⁽¹³⁾ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, *but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

- 1a). The believer is called to war against themselves – against their flesh
- b). That is done through the power of the Spirit

And is done by using the Sword He gave – the Scriptures – commands and promises

Ps 119:9 (ESV) How can a young man keep his way pure? *By guarding it according to your word.*

Point: So Psalm 23 is filled with powerful promises – here is a sword forged in heaven by God Himself

A. The truths here are meant to put to death those things that steal your joy and peace

- 1). But brothers and sisters you must take the sword out and use it – apply it
 - a). When your feelings are running contrary – you must say "But God has said"

Adoniram Judson: My future is as bright as the promises of God.

Transition: So the truths in this Psalm must be used to make any difference at all

A. But used by who – let's look at that – I want to make sure nobody will miss out on any of this

2. I think the positioning of this Psalm is noteworthy

A. It follows Ps 22 where we find our Savior suffering on the cross for our sins

- 1). It's interesting there is no green pastures or still waters in front of Psalm 22

It is only after we have read “My God, my God why have you forsaken me”

a). **Then** the truth “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”

Then – He leads me to green pastures and besides still waters

Point: So we’ve seen - to benefit from this Psalm we must apply the truths that are in it – that’s Ps 23

- A. But let’s step back a bit – to apply these truths we must be recipients of Christ work on the cross for us
That’s Psalm 22
- B. IOW To know Him as Shepherd I must first know Him as Savior
And to know Him as Savior I must embrace Him by faith
- B. I want to spend a few minutes looking at what saving faith looks like
 - 1). How does one come to Christ with a faith that saves them?
 - 2). I want to make sure all of us are those who can say “I’m one of His sheep”
Therefore all the benefits of this Psalm are for me

Transition: I think the clearest example is in Luke 18 – parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector

The Parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee

TURN: Lk 18:9–14 (ESV) He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ⁽¹⁰⁾ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ⁽¹¹⁾ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ⁽¹²⁾ I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ⁽¹³⁾ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ⁽¹⁴⁾ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

1. The cast of characters in this story

- A. You have the Pharisee – extremely religious and proud – trusting in his own goodness to earn heaven
You have the Tax Collector – extremely sinful – considered to be the scum of society
 - 1). Hated because he collected taxes for Rome – to finance their occupying forces
And because he gouged the people – making up taxes – to enrich himself

Transition: Most Jews would think that God would accept the Pharisee and gladly judge the tax collector

- A. The story takes us into the temple where both men go to pray

2. The Pharisee trusted in himself to get to heaven – his works – his goodness

- A. He thought he was quite the catch – that God was lucky to have him on his team
 - 1). So he lists off his spiritual resume – reminding God of who he was
Lk 18:11–12 (ESV) The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ⁽¹²⁾ I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’
NASB is interesting: “The Pharisee stood and was praying thus *to himself...*
 - a). He’s just talking to himself about how great he thinks he is – God isn’t listening
 - 2). Our works outside of Christ don’t impress God one bit
Is 64:6 (ESV) We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our *righteous deeds* (The best we can do) *are like a polluted garment.*

Point: So this man is a superstar in his own mind – but how did he do with God as far as salvation goes

- A. V. 14 tells us he left that temple as lost as can be – still guilty before a holy God
 - 1). He prayed. He served God. He was lost

Transition: Let’s move to the tax collector

3. The tax collector – trusted in God’s work and goodness and not his own

Lk 18:13 (ESV) But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

- A. God I have nothing to offer you. I know that I’m guilty and have done nothing that deserves heaven
I know I only deserve wrath and hell
- B. So I’m not asking you for what I think I deserve – I’m pleading with you to NOT give me that
Oh God I need mercy = not getting what you deserve
- C. See the confession – the admittance of guilt there – “Be merciful to me *a sinner*”
 - 1). This is saving faith – turning away from any dependence upon your goodness – works
Admitting that you are a sinner in need of grace and mercy
And turning in absolute dependence to trust in Christ and His work alone to save you
*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling;*
 - a). That was the tax collector wasn’t it?
 - 1a). I’ve got nothing to bring to you but sin and spiritual failure
My only hope of heaven is that you’ll be merciful and cleanse me of my guilt

Thought: Even with these kind of truths in the Bible

There are still those who say things like “I hope I’ve lived a good enough life to get into heaven”

- A. Can I help you out here? God’s answer is simple – *You haven’t*
Ro 3:23 (ESV) for *all have sinned* and fall short of the glory of God,
Ro 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death...
 - 1). What death – the second death – *eternal punishment*
- B. Please listen – lock on now – if you think you can stand before God in your own goodness
 - 1). You will stand before God like this Pharisee – and you will be lost for all of eternity
- C. Listen to what Jesus said about these two
Lk 18:14 (ESV) I tell you, this man (**the tax collector**) went down to his house justified, rather than the other (**the Pharisee**). For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”
 - 1). If you think your goodness is good enough – you fall in the category of exalting yourself
 - a). The humbling that will take place will be eternal
 - 2). If you will admit your sin and cast yourself upon the mercy of God alone for your salvation
 - a). You will be exalted – enjoying heaven forever
 - 3). And let me repeat – there is nobody in this room (including me)
Who have lived a life that is good enough to make them right with God – it’s all of grace

Transition: I thought that was necessary – making sure you’ve visited Psalm 22 so you can enjoy Psalm 23

- A. After the longest introduction in history – we are only going to see one verse today – finish up next week
 - 1). But I think it’s necessary to preach the Gospel even to the church today
 - a). For every church has people sitting in it that are religious but not saved
 - 2). There are many who are trusting in their own goodness like the Pharisee
But have never gone to Christ like the Tax Collector – so the church must be evangelized
- B. So for this Psalm to be useful to you – you must apply it’s truths
But to be able to apply it’s truths you must be born again
- C. Now let’s begin to look at the Psalm – we are going to look at the Good Shepherd – great truth

I. THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Ps 23:1–4 (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.

1. Here is David's testimony regarding the Lord's faithfulness

- A. He writes out his experience of being a shepherd himself – tending the flocks of his father
- B. As he thinks through what a good shepherd is – he relates that to God's care for His people
 - 1). It becomes one of the most beautiful pictures in the Scriptures
 - 2). There is so much tenderness here between God and His people

I love the picture in Isaiah: Isa 40:11 (NLT) He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart...

 - a). Beautiful picture of the Lord's tender care for those that are His
 - a). He is watching over His flock – He holds us close to His heart!
- C. We're not sure when this was written – but probably in latter part of David's life
 - 1). As he looks back on his life – he recollects the faithfulness of God
And writes with such confidence in His loving care for him

Transition: In our introduction we've seen you must be born again to benefit from this
That was through the work of Christ on the cross – Psalm 22

- A. Now here in V. 1 we see two results that are proof you have been born again
 - 1). Every one who is saved and forgiven from their sin will be changed
 - a). New nature, new desires, new power

Two Characteristics of God's Sheep

Ps 23:1 (ESV) The **LORD** ...

1. Jesus sheep are those who can call Him Lord

- A. They are those who obey Him – listen to how Jesus defines His sheep
Jn 10:27 (ESV) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.
 - 1). His sheep hear His voice in His word AND they follow what He said
- B. So to be saved we embrace Christ by faith
The evidence we have done that is a changed heart that wants to hear and follow
Jn 10:2–4 (ESV) But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ⁽³⁾ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁽⁴⁾ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, **and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.**
- C. John puts it this way in his first epistle – confronting the merely religious
1 Jn 2:4 (ESV) Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,
 - 1). Truth is not in him – he's fooling himself

Transition: So Jesus sheep are those who can honestly call Him Lord

- A. Not perfection – but direction – they follow Him even though there are times of failure along the way
 - 1). But when they fail they are convicted – they confess – get up and follow again

2. Jesus sheep are those who can call him "My Shepherd"

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

- A. Religious folk may call Him shepherd – But His sheep can call Him **MY shepherd**
 - 1). It doesn't have to be the title "shepherd" but they have a **personal relationship** with Him
 - a). He isn't just the Savior – He is **my** savior
He isn't just the shepherd – He is **my** shepherd

- B. Interesting – athletes – musicians are always giving God credit – I don't take much notice
But whenever I hear somebody thank "My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" I do
 - 1). That is evidence of relationship isn't it? Evidence of belonging to Him
- Point:** So David says – He is not just the shepherd for the world at large
- A. He can say with confidence – He is *my* shepherd = relationship
- Transition:** Let's think about this title shepherd
- A. When you start seeing God as your shepherd it will change the way you look at life

The Lord is My **Shepherd**

1. In ancient Israel to be a shepherd was not a job with prestige

- A. Nobody envied the shepherd – nobody wanted to be a shepherd or be like a shepherd
 - B. The shepherd and his work put him near the bottom of the social pecking order
- Thought:** But Jesus came and elevated this title to something beautiful

2. The work of the shepherd

- A. The shepherd lived with his sheep 24 hours a day – they were his companions
 - 1). He would show unwavering devotion towards them
 - 2). In good weather or foul – the shepherd would nurture, guide and protect his sheep
- B. The shepherd assumed full responsibility for the care and needs of his flock
 - 1). This was his responsibility and a good shepherd took that very seriously
 - a). Even to the point of laying his life down for them
 - b). David talks about fighting off lions and bears who came after his flock
 - 1a). How he went after them to rescue the lambs out of their mouths

Transition: This is all a picture of our good shepherd – let's look at that

3. Christ the good shepherd

This is so important for you to see for your rest

- A. Christ our good shepherd has assumed the full responsibility of caring for His people
 - 1). If He wasn't willing to do that He would have chosen a different title
 - a). The face He chose to call Himself shepherd shows us
He was willing to do all that a good shepherd did to care for their sheep
 - b). Providing for them – guiding them – protecting them – taking care of every need
- B. I find so much joy in that – so much freedom from worry
"Why should I worry about this or that – I am just a sheep – But I have a good shepherd"
 - 1). Sheep are cute – so we kind of like being referred to as sheep
But sheep are stupid – clueless (see next week) – to survive they need a shepherd for everything
 - a). So do we – and because we have a good shepherd we can rest
 - 2). Listen to how David puts it in Psalm 100
Ps 100:3 (ESV) Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
 - a). Know that the Lord, He is God! Almighty – all powerful – sovereign God
 - 1a). There is nothing too hard for Him – nothing too big that comes into our life
 - b). Know that He made us and we are His – we belong to Him!
 - 1a). This world is so threatening – but I belong to Him!
 - c). Because I belong to Him – I one of the sheep in His pasture – He is our shepherd
 - 1a). This is one of those ways He relates to me – as a Shepherd

He has taken on the complete and total responsibility for me

Point: What rest to be able to say “The Lord is MY SHEPHERD”

- A. I am His sheep – *so this need I have is His responsibility!* I can rest in His loving care!
- 1). If He didn’t want to meet this need He wouldn’t have called Himself shepherd
But because He did, He will! Case closed – so rest!

Transition: Then this leads to the great promise at the end of verse 1

I Shall Not Want

1. Let’s get the flow correct so we can see the logic

- A. The Lord is MY shepherd
- 1). That means He has willingly – joyfully – taken on the full responsibility of caring for me
- B. Therefore if He is my shepherd - I shall not want
- 1). He will faithfully carry out all those responsibilities He has assumed
- a). A good shepherd sees that every need of the flock is provided for
- C. Again you can love this Psalm – but do you really believe what it is saying about your needs

Question: What does it mean? I shall not *want?*

- A. It means that everything I *need* will be provided – want there means = our needs
- 1). Many of our wants if provided would destroy us – He loves us too much to provide those
- 2). But everything I need He will provide – that is the promise here
- B. Therefore I’ve learned to rest – If He isn’t providing something
Then either I don’t need it – or it isn’t the right time yet
- 1). This brings such rest into my life – just being a sheep – trusting His care
“Lord *you choose* what I should have. *You know* better what is best for me.”
- C. Only when you can trust Him as a good shepherd can you obey commands such as...
- 1 Th 5:18 (ESV)** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- James 1:2-3 (NIV)** Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, (3)
because you know...
- 1). You know the “Good shepherd” is working out good in your life

Thought: This takes faith in Him – faith in His love – His character doesn’t it

- A. Faith that He knows what He’s doing – faith that this trial will be worth it
- 1). If you didn’t need it – then your good shepherd wouldn’t have allowed it

Transition: So the promise is we won’t want – we will not lack - if we follow Him where He is leading

- A. The rest of the Psalm tells us the areas we won’t want in

2. What we won’t want (From Charles Swindoll)

I shall not lack rest - why?

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

I shall not lack peace - why?

He leads me beside quiet waters.

I shall not lack restoration or encouragement when I faint, fail, or fall - why?

He restores my soul.

I shall not lack guidance or fellowship - why?

He guides me in the paths of righteousness.

I shall not lack courage when my way is dark - why?

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil.

I shall not lack companionship - why?

You are with me.

I shall not lack constant comfort - why?

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

I shall not lack protection or honor - why?

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

I shall not lack power - why?

You have anointed my head with oil.

I shall not lack abundance - why?

My cup overflows.

I shall not lack God's perpetual presence - why?

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

I shall not lack security - why?

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

CONCLUSION

1. If you're one of His sheep – you follow Him – you're in relationship with Him

- A. You're not perfect but your life is characterized by obedience rather than sin
 - 1). Then all of this incredible Psalm becomes yours to use daily in your life
- B. Please take this home with you – He is YOUR shepherd
 - 1). That means He has assumed all responsibility for the care of your life
 - 2). He is the good shepherd – that means no responsibility He's assumed will go wanting
 - a). That is truth you can rest in! Truth that will change your life