

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.

Ps 23:5 (ESV) You *prepare a table* before me in the presence of my enemies...

1. As we've been progressing we've been moving up the mountain

- A. We've gone through the valley as we've gone from the hotter lowlands up into the higher cooler regions
- B. These higher pastures were known as "tablelands"
 - 1). They were these high flat-topped plateaus where the sheep would graze

2. These "tablelands" would have to be prepared for the sheep

- A. The shepherd would always *go before* the flock to prepare these pastures
 - 1). He would place salt and minerals in strategic locations
 - 2). He would remove any poisonous plants – *enemies of the sheep*
 - 3). He would determine how hardy the vegetation was and how long the flock could graze

Transition: We could say the shepherd would go before the sheep to "set the table"

- A. There is a very comforting Christian parallel to this
- B. In the same way our shepherd goes before us – so good! Let's look at that!

I. THE SHEPHERD GOES BEFORE THE BELIEVER

1. He goes before us in our all of our Christian journey

Deu 1:30-33 (NIV) The LORD your God, who is *going before you*, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, (31) and in the desert. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place." (32) In spite of this, you did not trust in the LORD your God, (33) *who went ahead of you on your journey*, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, *to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go.*

- A. So encouraging – I never go anywhere on this journey He hasn't already been to prepare for me
 - 1). We are looking for a new place to live
 - a). I rest in the fact He is already busy - searching out that place – preparing it all for us
 - b). I'm following in His wake – drafting behind Him!
 - 2). When we arrive it will have already been divinely organized
 - a). The place and all the circumstances and situations that go along with that place

Transition: He is always before me preparing – arranging – setting everything up

- A. Let's look at a few examples of how our good shepherd goes before the believer
 - 1). Let's go all the way back to where our salvation began in God's mind

2. He has gone before us choosing us for salvation

Eph 1:4 (ESV) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...

- A. How comforting is that? Do you know how long you've been loved?
 - 1). Before anything was created you were already loved by God
 - a). He already knew you – already had chosen to adopt you
- B. Why do we worry so much? If He has loved us this long – will He not care for us now?

Transition: So He went before us choosing us to be His own

- A. But we would sin – what about that? Wouldn't sin make it impossible to be in relationship with Him?
His solution – "He would go before us to receive the wrath we deserved"

3. He has gone before us to protect us from God's wrath

- A. There was a great cost to coming to take God's wrath in our place
- 1). Almighty God – driven by compassion for those He had created
Willingly chose to leave glory and the worship of the heavenly host
 - a). Knowing He would be mocked, spit upon by those He came to rescue
 - b). Knowing He'd be falsely accused of gluttony, drunkenness, lying, and sin
 - 2). The cost was intense: Mentally, physically, spiritually
 - a). Pressure was so great it actually pushed the blood out through His pores
 - b). What a sight! Our sinless shepherd in that garden drenched in blood
 - 3). That was just a preview of what would be happening in a few hours
 - a). After being falsely accused – beaten to a pulp – crown jammed down upon Him
 - b). He would hang naked before a mocking crowd – remember THIS was God!
And the Father's holy wrath would lash out against Him for my sin
 - c). And His precious blood would be spilt to purchase my freedom
- Point:** Here was my shepherd *going before me* – walking into that firestorm of wrath
So that I would never have too! The good shepherd was crushed in my place

Transition: So He absorbed the wrath – so I could know God

- A. Next point – drawing us into a relationship with Him

4. He went before putting that call out that drew us to Him

Jn 6:44 (ESV) No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

- A. That call that drew us to Him was initiated by Him – it had to be
- Rom 3:10-12 (NIV)** As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; (11) there is no one who understands, *no one who seeks God. (12) All have turned away...*
- 1). Unless God initiates that drawing man will never seek Him
 - a). They are born as an enemy of God – Rom 5
They are hostile towards Him – Rom 8
 - 1a). That is the fruit of the fallen nature
 - 2a). Spiritual death – Adam ran to God – after fall ran away from Him

Point: So He draws us into that relationship with Him

- A. Illuminating the truth – making it so irresistible we freely and willingly respond by faith
- B. We become God's precious children!
- 1). Talk about a feast in the presence of our enemies (Ps 23:5)
We have started to enjoy that now!
 - 2). God has placed us in Christ! Applying His finished work to us!
He has ripped us out of Satan's grip – brought us into His family
And now says "You can relax. You're safe! I have a hold of you"
- Double grip of security: Jn 10:28–29 (ESV)** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ⁽²⁹⁾ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
- C. Brought into a relationship with God! The feasting has begun! Now and will last for all of eternity!
- 1). The meal just keeps tasting better and better – and will through all of eternity
 - 2). I get a foretaste now and it is great! But I haven't seen anything yet

Transition: He has gone before us – before anything was made – choosing to adopt us

- A. But nobody can get into heaven with sin in their account!
- 1). So He went before us to pay the debt we would owe
- B. Then He went before us – putting out that call that drew us into a relationship with Him

- C. But that relationship has been designed to be active – to be filled with good works
 - 1). So He went before us to prepare those good works – set it all up

5. He has gone before us to prepare good works that we will do

- A. Again this is setting that table for that feast – works end up producing so much joy in our lives
 - 1). This is part of the thrill of Christianity – serving our King – working with Him
 - 2). To fail to be involved in serving Him is to rob yourself of a great source of joy and life

Thought: I love the way this works – how our shepherd has gone before us in this realm of works
 I want to point out how God not only prepares the works for the believer
 But He also prepares the believer for the works

- A. He has gone before us choosing who would be His
 THEN He goes before the chosen to choose what they would do after they are saved

Ga 1:15–16 (ESV) But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ⁽¹⁶⁾ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...

- 1). Paul's not even born yet – yet there is His shepherd going before Him
 Already putting that calling on Paul's life

Thought: This is an incredible thought

- A. God knows how He's going to use you before you are even born
 What part you're going to play in His kingdom
 - 1). This allows Him to go before you to prepare you for that calling
 - a). To arrange circumstances in your life that shape you
 Giving you that mind for that calling – giving you the interests you have
 Giving you the talents and abilities
- B. Do you think it was any accident that Paul had been a Pharisee – knowing the law so well
 - 1). Living under the burden of mere religion
 The constant grind of earning God's favor through the law
 - 2). That was all preparing Him to fall in love with grace

Transition: So He's gone before us arranging circumstances to prepare us for good works

- A. What works? Works He's gone before us to set up
Eph 2:8–10 (ESV) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁽⁹⁾ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ⁽¹⁰⁾ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

- 1). Not saved by works – salvation is always by faith alone in the work of Christ alone
- 2). But all who are saved by His work alone are saved to do works for Him
Tt 2:14 (ESV) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.
 - a). This scripture really helps me when I don't feel like doing something I know I should
 - 1a). I remind myself of who I am in Christ – what I'm called to

“These are part of those good works I'm called to be zealous about. Let's do it”

- B. If you're thinking right now – what works? Pray and ask Him to show you – to open your eyes

Transition: So were called to be zealous about good works that He has gone before us to prepare

- A. We're also called to suffering as believers
1 Pe 2:20–21 (ESV) For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ⁽²¹⁾ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.
- B. So trials will be a part of our life – has our shepherd gone before us here?

6. He goes before the believer in all our trials

A. Ex. Peter. Jesus warned him that Satan had asked to sift him as wheat

1). He tells Peter “You’re going to fall big time – You will deny you even know me 3 times”

But reassures him – that fall won’t be fatal! Why?

Listen to what Jesus says: Lk 22:31–32 (ESV) “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ⁽³²⁾ but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Because Jesus had already entered into that situation by prayer Peter’s fall would not be fatal

a). I’m going to allow Satan to go so far and no further

b). I’ve prepared the circumstances of this trial to develop you Peter

1a). You need this failure to become humble – God dependent - to become usable

2). Notice *when* you have turned again (*Not if*) strengthen your brothers

Point: So Jesus had already been there preparing all this – setting the limits of temptation

A. Making sure it would all work for his good – that it would develop him and not destroy him

1). How comforting – Jesus does the same for us

a). When we about to enter a time of trial – He has already entered into prayer

b). And His prayers always get answered!

Question: Can I prove Jesus is always before us in a trial – Yes!

A. Remember Job – Satan wanted to attack him but couldn’t – Why?

Job 1:10 (ESV) Have you not put a *hedge* around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

1). I can’t touch him because you have this divine force field around him

Unless you drop this hedge of protection I can’t get to him at all

B. So just like in Peter’s case the devil has to go to God and ask permission *first!*

1). God is always involved in our trial before it ever hits us

C. How comforting – Satan can’t do whatever he chooses – he can only do what God allows!

1). What will God allow? You know the promise. Only things that work for our good

a). If it won’t work for our good He won’t allow it

Summary: So what have we seen – in every attack on the child of God – our shepherd has been there first

A. The devil has to ask permission first

So our shepherd is involved way before the trial touches us

B. When He grants permission it is always with restrictions – this far and no further

1). And it will never be more than you can handle – another promise – 1 Cor 10

I know it feels like it’s beyond our capacity at times – but you can trust Him

C. God knows what He is doing – He knows how much you can take

He also knows how much is required to increase your reliance upon Him

2 Co 1:8–9 (NLT) We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. ⁽⁹⁾ In fact, we expected to die. *But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God,* who raises the dead.

1). Paul felt stretched beyond his limits – but that forced him to look at God

a). He was learning life lessons he would carry through the whole of his life

b). How to trust God when the waves hit

Transition: So our shepherd has gone before us

A. In His choice to adopt us – in his drawing us to Him – in His protecting us from God’s wrath

In preparing us for good works and preparing those works for us to do

And in every trial we have ever gone through or ever will

- 1). Preparing the circumstances so it is instructive not destructive
- 2). Praying so our strength wouldn't fail etc.

B. So let's move into glory

7. He went before us to prepare a home

Jn 14:3 (ESV) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

- A. The ultimate place of blessing – rest – satisfaction – what a home it is
- B. We marvel at the beauty of the world we see now corrupted by sin - wait to you experience this
 “Take the deepest enchantment that you have ever known, the loftiest ecstasy that you have ever felt. Take that moment when you felt most totally alive. Then intensify that instant a millionfold, and perhaps you will be getting within range of imagining what heaven is like.”
 - 1). This is waiting for every child of God
- C. I love the thought of heaven don't you?
 - 1). River of life flowing from the throne of God where the Father and Jesus are sitting
 - 2). Walking on those streets of gold – fellowshiping with Paul and David – Michael and Gabriel
- D. One of my favorite thoughts – bathed in the glory of God

Re 21:23 (ESV) And the city (New Jerusalem) has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

- 1). Bathed in the presence of God continuously!

Samuel Rutherford: I wonder, many times, that ever a child of God should have a sad heart, considering what his Lord is preparing for him.

Thought: Oh that we might be more heavenly minded

- A. The more of heaven we cherish, the less of earth we will covet

John Calvin put it this way: We ought to apply our minds to meditation upon a future life, so that this world may become cheap to us.

Transition: The next one tells us why we want to be serious about being zealous to do those good works our shepherd has already set before us

8. He has gone before us to prepare our rewards

- A. He has gone before – calling us – preparing us – preparing the works – NOW THIS!
 - 1). He is waiting in glory to pour those rewards out upon us for doing those works
 - 2). Every faithful act – every bit of hostility because we live for Him – All will turn into rewards
- B. Amazing how much He longs to reward us through those works He's prepared
 - 1). Even a cup of cold water given to one of His followers that is thirsty will be rewarded
 - 2). There are people who are always refreshing others – they will be rewarded greatly
 - a). Shows me – He wants our eternity to be as weighty with glory as possible

Thought: It is important how we live here – because it matters so much then

- A. While our good works do not merit salvation
 - 1). They are the basis God uses to determine rewards
 - 2). It seems there will be different degrees of blessedness in heaven
 - a). Paul called it a weight of glory

Balance: There is difficulty in handling this thought of rewards correctly

- A. We don't want to serve God just to get something – we want to serve out of love
- B. At the same time we don't want to ignore what the Scriptures say about rewards
 They are used as motivation – so there is power here in this thought we don't want to lose
 - 1). Author to Hebrews speaks of the Patriarchs experiencing so much pain, trial, suffering

- a). It says - they endured because they **“Looked to the reward”** Hebrews 11:26
- b). The thought of rewards helped them to persevere
- 3). See this same dynamic in Paul’s life

2 Co 4:17 (ESV) For this light momentary affliction (what?) is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

 - a). To Paul all the beatings, imprisonments etc. were well worth it. Light. Why?
 - 1a). It all added to the weight of glory he would experience in Heaven
 - 2a). Every difficulty handled faithfully would somehow enhance his eternal experience
 - c). Therefore he ran everything through that thinking

2 Co 4:17 (ESV) For this light momentary affliction (what?) is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

Next verse. The result: 2 Co 4:18 (ESV) as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

 - 1a). We don’t look at the temporary pain – hardships – we look to the reward

The weight of glory faithfulness in life – even in trials will bring

Point: So Jesus has gone before us to prepare good works we are to be zealous to do

- A. Then gone before us to prepare those rewards we will receive for doing them when we get into glory
- B. Therefore. How you live now matters! How you respond to thought of good works now matters

Faithfulness now explodes into eternal reward then

 - 1). Every bit of sacrifice, every bit suffering now for serving Christ will turn into beauty then!
 - 2). The Scriptures assure us it will be well worth it
- C. This should change the way we think – should govern some of our fears

We can be so afraid of others reactions if I really live for Christ

What if they “roll their eyes” when I talk about Christ

 - 1). Flip your thinking – look at that eye roll and say – another entry into the books of heaven
 - a). That will turn into reward one day so “Thank you for that deposit”
- D. Our shepherd wants our glory to be as weighty as possible
 - 1). He has prepared all the good works in advance so it will be
 - a). But how you live matters

Internal summary: He’s gone before us in everything from our initial salvation to preparing our eternal home

Transition: I want to finish with something I find very interesting

The Shepherds Preparation of Himself

1. He has gone before us to prepare Himself through temptation

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.

- A. Why did Jesus have to be tempted in every way? We see why in this verse
 - 1). So that He could sympathize with us when we are tempted
 - 2). He had never been tempted before – didn’t know what it felt like
 - a). So He took on flesh – came as a man – lived in the world we live in

And suffered every temptation that we experience as a man
 - 3). He became that sympathetic high priest who understands the pressure and pain of temptation
 - a). He felt that temptation to strike back in anger when He was mocked

The temptation to hate when He was abandoned – to get even when He was mocked

b). Even was tempted with sexual temptations – “tempted in all things”

Point: He has gone before us onto the battleground of temptation – He has faced it all

- A. He has prepared Himself so that we have a place to go when we are tempted
 - 1). Knowing that we will find sympathy from one who knows what it feels like
 - 2). But also find help from the one who was able to stand against it
- B. When your enemy is tempting you – seducing you – you feel him so strongly
 - 1). The Lord says run to me - I’ve been there – I know what it feels like – I know the pressure
 - 2). Run to me – you will find compassion and help

CONCLUSION AND CALL

1. So our great shepherd has gone before us – in all things

- A. Our spiritual journey is being prepared meticulously
 - 1). The circumstances – the people we run into – the news we perceive as good or bad
The opportunities to do good works have all been prepared
 - 2). Every trial has already been prepared by Him for our maximum good
- B. I find so much rest in all this – life is not comprised of a number of random circumstances
 - 1). It is being divinely conducted by a loving shepherd – every bit of it

2. And soon we will be with Him in glory

- A. Dwelling in that home He has gone before us to prepare

Question: Will you be there?

- A. If you said “Yes” – then let me ask you why?
 - 1). Why will God allow you into His heaven?
 - a). Because I’ve been good – I’ve always tried to help others
 - b). While your works may be impressive on a human level – they will not get you into heaven

Is 64:6 (NLT) We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags.

- B. You are a sinner – we all are

Ro 3:23 (ESV) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

- 1). Those sins will keep you out of heaven
Ro 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death...(second death = hell)

- 2). Fortunately, that verse goes on
Ro 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Point: You will receive salvation and heaven as a gift or you don’t receive it at all

- A. You are the beggar (so am I) with nothing to offer God to allow you in
 - 1). You must humbly receive what He has to offer you – grace
You bring sin to the table – He brings grace
 - a). When you turn away from trusting in yourself to trust in Him alone for your eternity
You will be saved