

# The Lord is My Shepherd I Shall Not Want

## PSALM 23 • PART 2

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### **\*\*COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE\*\***

It is good to be with you this morning! I hope all of you have the elements for the Lord's Supper, either from home or from the table in the entryway. John/Aaron will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper right after our study this morning. Then, Caleb/Josh hopes to lead us in three songs today. And then, after those songs, we really need to do a better job of getting outside right away. Let's talk, and let's visit, but let's do it outdoors. Thank you so much for helping with this.

As our custom has been, we are starting today with a summary of God's plan for saving us. We have sinned, those sins have separated us from God. But, God has made a way for us to come back. God sent his only Son to live a perfect life, he was crucified, offering himself as a sacrifice for our sins. In response, we believe the good news, we turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Son of God, and we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins, at which point the Christian life begins.

And once again, we have several examples this week, starting with two from Daniel Mayfield, a former camper at Beaver Creek Bible Camp. Daniel grew up in Owatonna, Minnesota, and now preachers for the church in Kingfisher, Oklahoma, where Caleb's dad used to preach. Several weeks ago, their congregation hosted a fishing tournament for the men of the congregation. Daniel says that it wasn't too successful in terms of catching fish, but one of the men was baptized later that day, and so, overall, a definite win! We rejoice with Mat (in the upper left-hand corner). Then, we got another update just a few days ago, that Jeremy was baptized this past Wednesday night. The picture on the bottom is of the whole church coming together to pray for Jeremy. So, we rejoice with Jeremy as well.

Then, we have Anna, from Albany, Georgia, who heard the good news through the Gospel of Christ, an online outreach out of Manchester, Tennessee. The connection was made, they put her in touch with Charles Harris, a gospel preacher in Georgia, she studied with Charles, she visited the congregation a few times, and just a few days ago, Anna made the best decision of her life. So, we rejoice with Anna and her new Christian family this morning.

Then, we also have some good news from J.J. Hendrix, who had the privilege of baptizing Evan this week. J.J. is a friend and brother who preaches at the Northwest congregation in Fort Worth, Texas. He says that Evan is a

talented young man who will do great service for the Kingdom! As always, we share all of this by way of encouragement: What Mat, and Jeremy, and Anna, and Evan have done, you can do this morning. If you have any questions, if you would like to study together, please get in touch.

Before we get to our study of God's word this morning, we'd like to pass along another update concerning some of the technology we've used over the past year or so. Over the past few weeks, we've given some updates on the website, and YouTube, and today we have just a quick note on the subtitles. For those of you joining us online, you might have noticed a slight change in the subtitles over the past few months, and I thought you might appreciate a bit of an update. Since the beginning, we had been using YouTube's automated captions, where their system listens to what we say and does its best to auto-generate some text under the video. And for the most part, it has been really, really good, but it does have some limitations. It's obviously not perfect. Sometimes the slipups are rather interesting. Sometime last year, for example, one of our men stood up to pray and said, "Let's go to God." But instead of translating that as, "Let's go to God," YouTube interpreted that in the captions as, "I've got a gun," which was rather interesting, "I've got a gun, Our Father in Heaven," and so on. A few months ago, I noticed Caleb referred to the broken pottery being held together by "laquer." YouTube interpreted that as "liquor," so we had pottery being "held together by liquor." That's not really what he was trying to communicate. Not a huge deal, we understand that. But earlier this year, one of our young men wondered if there might be a better way, and so, we have been testing some teleprompter software, where I email the text of the sermon (as a Word document) to the church computer, and he then puts that on the screen under the video, and it automatically scrolls, matching my words to the text, just as you might see on a teleprompter. And it has been an interesting experiment. Some of those difficult words have definitely been better, but when I add something or take something away "on the fly," or when I edit my notes down at Cottage Café in the morning, the computer has to think about that for a moment, and sometimes they need to manually skip ahead in the back room. Several weeks ago, the young men in the back room really got on me, "Baxter, you really went off-script this morning!" But I just wanted to explain this to those of you who are joining online: When you see my words under the video, those are probably not auto-generated today (as they have been in the past), but you are actually looking at what I am looking at on my notes up here, including my little notation for when to progress to the next PowerPoint slide. I mention this just to let all of us in on a small part of what happens behind the scenes to get our services online. We are thankful to those of you who continue to work so hard with this, and we are thankful for your creativity and expertise.

This morning, we continue our study of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. We are looking at this passage as the result of a request from one of our senior saints, and I'm glad she made the request, because we haven't looked at this in sermon form since October 2007. It has been a while! Some of us might not realize that the book of Psalms makes up roughly 15% of the Bible. And so, if we look at it just from that point of view, and if we consider the fact that we come together only 52 Sundays every year, and if we were to divide our studies evenly, we should really be looking at the book of Psalms for at least 8 Sundays every year. And even then, it would take us nearly 19 years to make it through all 150 of those Psalms like that. The point is: The Psalms are a significant part of the Bible. And in the book of Psalms, Psalm 23 is one of the most well-known. We hear it at funerals. We sing this Psalm from time to time, as we will do in just a few moments, near the end of today's service. And it has truly been a favorite of God's people for the past 3,000 years.

Before we jump back into Psalm 23, I feel like we need to add a segment to our introductory thoughts today, "Sheep in the News." One of our Christian sisters mentioned "Shrek the Sheep" on our way out last week. I really wanted to share a picture, but Shrek the Sheep has become quite the big deal, and most of those images are copyrighted in a way that we can't share any of those on the livestream. I can, though, share some pictures

on the bulletin board. So, make sure to check out Shrek on your way out today, or just do a quick online search for Shrek the Sheep. Basically, Shrek wandered away from his shepherd in New Zealand and wasn't found for six years, back in 2004! In the process, his wool got so huge that you really couldn't even see his eyes. He got to meet the Prime Minister of New Zealand, and as I remember it, they sheared poor Shrek live on national TV over there. They took off 60 pounds of wool, enough wool for 20 suits. Shrek, I suppose, is something of a warning as to what can happen if we somehow manage to evade the shepherd for a number of years. In honor of Shrek, I am wearing a wool t-shirt and wool socks this morning. In the hiking and backpacking community, wool is the gold standard. My sister, in search and rescue out in the Pacific Northwest, has reminded me that "cotton kills." If you are out in the wilderness and wearing cotton that gets wet, game over! Wool, on the other hand, is designed by God to insulate, even when wet. And it dries quickly as well. So, I just wanted to remind all of us of what happened with Shrek the Sheep a few years ago.

And then, just over the past week or so, maybe I've had sheep on my mind a bit more than usual, but two stories made the headlines, starting with a study that came out last week concerning the benefits of combining solar panels and pasture lands. The practice is known as "agrivoltaics." Researchers at Oregon State University looked at sheep pastures out in Oregon over the past two years, both with and without solar panels installed, and they found some benefits. The solar panels gave the sheep a place to rest, out of the sun, making them a bit healthier and more productive, and cutting down on the need for water. They also found the plant material under the solar panels was slightly less productive, but it was of a higher quality. It was an interesting article, and I'm sure they will continue with more research in the future.

The other example of sheep in the news this week comes from (of all places) New York City! According to the NYPD Twitter account, last week, "a Brooklyn homeowner called 911 after discovering a flock of sheep in his rear yard." Well, at this point, the NYPD ESU was deployed, the "Emergency Services Unit." I don't know much about the NYPD, but in my mind, ESU is pretty serious. I looked it up. ESU includes the SWAT Team, the K-9 units, the mounted units, Hazmat, Heavy Rescue, the Bomb Squad, and all that stuff! Apparently, they can also handle sheep! They are also shepherds! The Twitter post said that "ESU safely wrangled them up and with the assistance of the Mounted Unit the 8 uninjured sheep were transported [to the Animal Shelter] in Brooklyn." Anyway, I just had to get this out of the way here at the beginning – Shrek, agrivoltaics, and the NYPD.

If you were with us last week, you might remember how we introduced the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm by looking at the first verse, and we had a lesson with basically one point, and the big idea last week is that, "***The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.***" This opening line explains everything that comes after it. Even though He is the Great I Am, he is also our "***shepherd,***" and because of this, "***I shall not want.***" We learned that sheep are needy creatures. They are dependent on someone else for leadership and to provide for their needs.

This morning, then, we return to Psalm 23. Where is God in a pandemic? He is our shepherd, and he has been with us the whole time, "***The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.***" Everything else in this Psalm depends on this truth, "***The Lord is my shepherd, he is enough.***" Is the Lord truly enough to give me rest in troubled times? Is God enough to keep me on the right path? Is God enough to bring me comfort in the face of death? Is God enough to provide for my needs? Is God enough to bless me in an uncertain future?

With these questions in mind, let's go back and answer these questions by looking again at Psalm 23 – Psalm 23:1-6, a Psalm of King David,

- <sup>1</sup> ***The LORD is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.***
- <sup>2</sup> ***He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside quiet waters.***
- <sup>3</sup> ***He restores my soul;  
He guides me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name's sake.***
- <sup>4</sup> ***Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil, for You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.***
- <sup>5</sup> ***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You have anointed my head with oil;  
My cup overflows.***
- <sup>6</sup> ***Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.***

As we look at what King David writes here, let's move through it a piece at a time, noticing how everything in this Psalm delivers on the observation in verse 1 that ***"The Lord is My Shepherd, I shall not want."***

- I. **And the first thing we notice is that God is truly my Shepherd, because he PROVIDES everything we truly need.**

When David thinks of God, he remembers that, ***"He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters."*** God provides! God takes care of us. And when we look at what David writes here, we realize that this is what sheep really need: They need to eat, and they need to drink! What do sheep really need? Water and grass, water and grass, water and grass! However, as we learned last week, sheep need to be led. Sheep need to be taken to food and water. Left on their own, they are quite likely to eat themselves right off the edge of a cliff. They need to be led. They can't see very far. They aren't good at making long-term plans. They don't see a patch of grass a mile away, and they certainly don't make plans on how to get there. Most are focused on the grass right there in front of them. Shepherds, then, will bring their sheep to green pastures. Not only that, but notice how David says that God, as his shepherd, ***"makes me lie down."*** Sheep are nervous creatures, sheep are a bit twitchy, and will sometimes have to be forced to chill out for a while. The shepherd, then, will have to push the "pause" button from time to time. I think of our work at Beaver Creek Bible Camp. Kids may not admit it, but they also need to rest. Every day at 1 p.m., then, we have an hour of rest built into the schedule. Sometimes we need to be made to lie down. And the shepherd provides this. As Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, ***"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."*** He provides what is needed (food and rest).

And the same goes for water. Water is often dangerous for sheep. We know that most sheep are scared of running water, and for good reason. We might imagine one of us trying to swim wearing a 10-pound wool coat. Shepherds, then, will sometimes divert water into a pool or will take their sheep to a place they know is safe. Whether it's food or water or rest, a shepherd provides the most basic of needs.

And what is true of sheep is also true of us. As Jesus explains in Matthew 6:7-8, we don't need to pray long and repetitive prayers, ***"...for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."*** And so, our prayers are simple and direct, ***"Give us this day our daily bread"*** (Matthew 6:11). And we are confident God will answer our prayers, because he is our Shepherd.

II. **The next part of this is that as my shepherd, the Lord also RESTORES ME, and he does this by GUIDING ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

We look at this, and we realize right away that our souls need restoring! Spiritually speaking, we are broken people. We have issues in this life, don't we? Several days ago, my niece out in Oregon posted an interesting meme that said, "There are two types of tired: One that requires rest and one that requires peace." That may be what David is suggesting here. Yes, God provides for our physical needs, but he also takes care of us spiritually. We need guidance, not just to the next patch of grass, but our souls need to be restored as well.

The word David uses here, the word translated here as "*restores*," is a word referring to "turning back." As our shepherd, the Lord brings us back. As sheep, we have wandered, but he makes a way for us to come home. Last week, I think we might have referred to 1 Peter 2:25, where Peter says, "*For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*" Like David, we have wandered spiritually, but (like David), the Lord also "*restores*" our souls. As his sheep, we have gone astray, but the Lord makes it possible for us to come home.

And he does this, David says, by "*guid[ing] me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*" Notice: He doesn't "drive" us in the paths of righteousness. He doesn't force us. He doesn't drive us like cattle, but he "*guides*," He leads, He shows. We don't need to find our own way. We don't need to make a way. All we need to do is follow. And he guides us "*for His name's sake*," or "*for the sake of his reputation*," as one translation puts it. As Christians, we wear his name. God's character is at stake. And so, he guides us, not because we deserve it, not because we are such awesome people, but he leads because his reputation is on the line.

And I should point out that he guides us "*in the paths of righteousness.*" Some of you might have a footnote on "*paths*" in this verse, explaining that David is referring to "well-worn tracks" or an "entrenchment." We look up the word, and it's ultimately tied to the word "calf." I think of my grandparents' old place down in Tennessee. The cows had worn a path from the barn to the water. In perhaps a slightly similar way, righteousness is described as a "*path*," but sometimes we wander off of it, and we need to be brought back. We need to be restored. Often, we know the right path, but we need to be guided back on to it. We need a Shepherd.

III. **As we continue into verse 4, we also find that because God is our shepherd, he is able to COMFORT.**

And I need to point out that at this point in the Psalm, something changes. In the first half, it's almost as if David is bragging, one sheep to another, "My shepherd does this, my shepherd does this," "*he makes me lie down*," "*he restores*," *he guides*," and so on, as if we have two sheep having a conversation with each other over the back fence. But in verse 4, notice how David now starts directing his thoughts directly to the shepherd as he says, "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*" So, he transitions from "*my shepherd*" and all of the things "*he*" does, to "*You*," "*...for You are with me.*" This is personal! And the reason is, David senses that he is now perhaps in danger. He feels as if he's in a dangerous place. He is in "*the valley of the shadow of death.*"

Valleys can be dark and dangerous places. Growing up in the Chicago area, I didn't have too much experience with valleys until I did some more traveling on my own, later in life. I remember losing our brakes going down into a valley in the Rocky Mountains a number of years ago. I learned something through that experience. I went through a long and difficult valley out in Montana and Idaho on my last trip out to see my sister in Washington last year. The valley was so long that it stretched from Montana into Idaho, and I traveled close to an hour in

that valley with no cell service whatsoever. And what was strange to me is how dark it was. I was heading to hike to a series of hot springs in the mountains, and it really seemed as if it was getting dark, but it was only about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Very strange. A bit ominous. The shadows were long. And I was in the shadow.

In verse 4, though, I hope we notice how the sheep gets into the shadow. He's walking through the valley of the shadow of death, but the shepherd is with him. Doesn't that mean that the shepherd has led him there? So we need to ask, why might a shepherd lead his sheep through a dark valley? Why do shepherds lead their sheep anywhere? To get from one place to a better place! To get from a depleted pasture to a green pasture! And that has to be what's happening here, and yet this dark place certainly doesn't seem to be very good to the sheep at the time. And we don't know everything that's going on here, but we do see some parallels with death, don't we? Why are we somewhat scared of death? There are some unknowns! Perhaps we fear the possibility of pain. Perhaps we are worried about leaving loved ones behind. But we know that our Shepherd will be with us. He comforts us. We may have to pass through some rough terrain and some dark valleys, but he is by our side. As the author of Hebrews reminds us in Hebrews 13:5, the Lord has promised, ***"I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU."*** And in the last part of this, we have David saying to the Lord, ***"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*** In other words, David knows that God has the tools to keep him safe. And so, he is comforted.

#### IV. As we move into verse 5, David seems to shift the picture just a little bit as he describes the Lord as a GRACIOUS HOST.

I'm not sure this is the best way of summarizing this. Obviously, there might be a way of shepherds doing this for their sheep, but he seems to be picturing God as a host of some kind. We have the table, we have the oil, and we have the cup. And in this picture, God (as David's shepherd) is preparing a table before him in the presence of his enemies. We might expect David to picture God destroying his enemies. And yet, that's not what happens here. Instead, God is pictured as treating David like an honored guest. The word ***"prepare"*** refers to arranging something or setting it in order. I think of my grandmother and her concept of hospitality. The table was set, and everything was perfect – the china, the glasses, the napkins, even the silverware had to be arranged a certain way (fork on the left, spoon on the right, knife to the left of the spoon with the blade facing inward). This is not how we have company at our house these days! We use paper plates and cans in a bucket of ice sitting around the fire pit! But the point is: God is treating David as a respected guest. The table is prepared. Instead of David serving God (as we might expect), God is serving David. And it's the picture of a table lavishly prepared before him, as he is surrounded by his enemies. David had some enemies, didn't he? Goliath, Saul, the Philistines, and even his own son Absalom at one point. In the middle of this, though, God seems to be treating David to something of an all-you-can-eat buffet. And so, instead of focusing on his enemies, God is inviting David to focus on his blessings. This table is something of a distraction. Even when surrounded, God steps between us and our enemies, and he cares for us.

And that's the picture with the oil as well. The custom at the time was that when you invited a guest into your home, you would anoint their head with oil. We remember Jesus cutting on Simon the Pharisee and making a contrast between what Simon did and what the sinful woman did. Simon was the host, but Jesus says, ***"You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume."*** Hosts, then, would anoint their guests with oil. God is doing this for David in the presence of his enemies.

And the last part of this is that God causes David's cup to overflow. Again, the custom was, as long as you wanted your guests to stay, you would keep their cups full. This is the custom in restaurants today, isn't it? One sign of

good service is to always have something to drink. And if we run out of drink, something has gone wrong. This is why it takes me a while to come to an understanding with a new server down at the Cottage Café. I like to have a grand total of two cups of coffee every morning, with four sugars in each one. But if somebody tries to top off my coffee every five minutes, that gets my coffee to sugar ratio off. Those who know me know to let me finish one before going on to the next. God, though, is old school. God not only keeps refilling the cup, but he fills it to overflowing, a sign of generosity, a sign that we are always welcome.

**V. In the last part of this Psalm, David describes God as PURSUING HIM WITH BLESSINGS.**

***“Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*** When David uses the word ***“follow,”*** he uses a word referring to being “chased” or “pursued.” Certainly, David knows what it means to be pursued. David has been on the run. Some of you know that I have been chased by the police before. Many years ago, down in the Chicago area, I took a shortcut along the train tracks. The train on the other set of tracks slowed down. That’s a little weird. But then I looked up, and several uniformed officers jumped off the back of the train. Instinct kicked in. Not wanting to get killed by my parents, I ran. I ran for my life. I ran through some thick briars along the tracks, and that’s when the officers gave up. I got sliced up that day. I’m hoping the statute of limitations has run out on that one. I share this to let you know that I know what it’s like to be chased. But here, God is the one doing the pursuing. God is chasing David down with blessings.

Some of you might remember a bit of controversy here in Madison not long after we moved here: The police were pulling people over to reward good behavior. They would see you going the speed limit, and they would light you up and pull you over to give you some kind of reward or gift certificate to a local restaurant. What a terrifying program! Nobody likes to get pulled over! And it did not last very long. But this is almost exactly what David is describing here in verse 6. He is being pursued by God’s goodness and lovingkindness. God is chasing him down with love and blessings. Sometimes we might think of God as distant and not too concerned about us, but that is definitely not what’s going on here. He chases us down with goodness – not just right at the moment, but all the days of our lives. I love the fact that God still chases us down, even if we aren’t pursuing him. Most of us have moments when we aren’t quite as “on fire” as we should be. We have moments of weakness. But at all times, God is chasing us down all the days of our lives.

And David’s conclusion is: Because of this, because God is his shepherd, because he is chasing him down with blessings, David knows that ***“I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”***

**Conclusion:**

We started this study by thinking about the pandemic. We are living in uncertain times. But times have always been uncertain. The only certain in this life is that ***“the Lord is my Shepherd.”*** We are looking to this Psalm for encouragement, and so, as we press forward, we look to the Lord. He provides. He restores. He leads. He comforts. He serves as our gracious host. And his love pursues us. The Lord is our Shepherd, and he is enough. He is all we need.

Let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome God, the Shepherd of your people. You are all we need. We pray that you would continue leading us to green pastures and beside quiet waters. We pray that you would always bring us back when we wander, always leading us in the right paths. We pray that you would comfort us as we walk with you, even in the valley of the shadow of death. Thank you for welcoming us as a part of your family, and thank you for pursuing us with love, especially when we are weak. Forgive us, Father, for we are truly like sheep. We pray that you would welcome us into your eternal home when this life on earth is over.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. Thank you for being all that we need.

In Jesus we pray, AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)