

I Shall Not Want

Psalm 23

Pastor John Miller

Let's read Psalm 23. I'll read it, beginning in verse 1, you follow with me. David said, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and"—I love this—"I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." Amen?

Psalm 23 is the most beloved of the 150 Psalms and very possibly the best-known and best-loved passage in all the entire Bible. Right up there, the only close thing would be the Lord's prayer. If you ask someone what portion of Scripture they know, they would know Psalm 23, "The LORD is my shepherd," and "Our Father which art in heaven." This is an amazing passage. I love what the preacher Kyle Yates said about Psalm 23, "More griefs have been put to rest by its sweet assurance. More sadness has been driven away. More confidence has been instilled than tongue can tell or pen can record. It pictures God in love with His people, with rest in His bosom, with grace for all our needs."

Psalm 23, as you see in the caption, was written by David. But notice how brief it is. It just says, "A Psalm of David." We know that King David wrote the psalm, but the interesting thing is we don't know when he wrote this psalm. Did David write this psalm when he was a young shepherd boy out in the fields playing his harp (probably a Fender harp plugged into an amplifier)? He's out there playing his harp, worshiping the Lord, and I can just picture the young shepherd boy, David, watching over his sheep and realizing that what he was to his sheep in his love and care and protection and his feeding and leading them, God had been to him.

Could it be also maybe in midlife, you know, maybe David was facing a midlife crisis? Midlife crisis for me was a long time ago. But you do kind of hit that "waste at noonday," the middle of your life and it's kind of like you're halfway there. You realize how far you've come, and you don't have a lot further to go; and you begin to just look at perspective on your life, and it can be kind of a difficult time.

Maybe David was out in the middle of a battle. Maybe he had been with the sword in his hand—not his harp, but his sword—and maybe even fighting battles. Maybe alone one night he got up from his tent and took a walk, looked at the stars, and began to just write this beautiful psalm. This is maybe more what I think is possible, that King David wrote it when he was old and he had the crown upon his head. He was sitting on the throne. I can see his long, gray hair, the gray beard, and he was looking back over his life and realized, ". . . goodness and mercy"—has followed him—"all the days of"—his—"life," and he realized that very soon he would, ". . . dwell

in the house of the LORD for ever.” We don’t really know when he wrote this psalm, but we do know that he was being guided by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” so the psalms are just as inspired as the book of Romans is. All Scriptures are equally inspired by God, there are not some that are more inspired than others. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,”—God breathed —“and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

So, in life, in death for eternity, we know the Shepherd, as this psalm says, will provide everything that we need. The theme of the psalm is found in verse 1. I want you to look at it with me, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Just a little advertisement footnote, by the way, I did about six sermons on this psalm, one verse a week, and it’s on our website if you want to go deeper into it. I also commend to you the book by Phillip Keller, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, and I think every Christian should read that book and do a study of Psalm 23.

The theme of the psalm is found in the first verse. Who is “the LORD”? Notice it’s all capitals, L-O-R-D. This is a reference to Jehovah or Yahweh, so He’s the covenant-keeping God, the eternal God. This is Jehovah-Rohi, the Lord my Shepherd. It’s one of the great compound names of God. Remember that Jesus actually said, “I am the good shepherd.” Psalm 23 is about Jesus Christ. Do you want to find Jesus in the Bible? He’s clearly here in Psalm 23. He is the Lord my Shepherd, or in John 10 He said, “I am the good shepherd,”—I give My—“life for the sheep.” The Bible said He’s, “. . . that great shepherd,” so Jesus Christ, who is our “good shepherd” or literally, Jesus the Shepherd, the good One.

If the Lord is our Shepherd, then we are His sheep. Now, that’s not flattering. If you’d have said, “We’re His lions,” or “We’re His bears,” or “We’re His tigers,” or “We’re His hawks,” I could dig that; I could get into that, “Yeah! Praise God!” But He said, “I’m the Shepherd, you’re the sheep.” I think, Baaaaaa. Have you ever heard of an NFL football team called the sheep? Not really. It doesn’t speak of strength or power. Sheep are dumb, they’re dependent, and they’re defenseless. I just thought I would encourage you all tonight. We need a Shepherd. Amen? We are dumb. We are dependent. We are defenseless.

Some of you know, I probably shouldn’t even be talking about it, my wife’s gone for a week to see the grandkids. Pray for me. I’m dumb, I’m weak, I’m dependent. The other day I was going to make eggs in the morning and realized that I made them the morning before. I didn’t wash the pan, and I didn’t want to wash it that morning, so I didn’t have eggs, I made a bowl of cereal. Pray that I can figure out how to make eggs again the second time. You talk about being a dumb sheep—I need a wife and I need a Shepherd.

The Lord is our Shepherd, and He guides us, He provides for us, and He protects us. When Jesus is our Shepherd, I love it, verse 1, “I shall not want.” When I got saved in 1971, I kind of came to the Lord from reading what was called, Living Letters, by Kenneth Taylor. It became The Living Bible. I’d never really read the Bible, I mean I’m just a senior in high school, never really read the Bible, though I grew up in church, and I just fell in love with the Word of God as I

read this paraphrase of Kenneth Taylor. I'll never forget Psalm 23 in The Living Bible, "The LORD is my shepherd; I have everything I need." I love that. "The LORD is my shepherd; I have everything I need." I love the idea that if I have Jesus, I don't need anything else. Amen? That He is all that I need. I love that concept of, "He's all I need, / He's all I need; / Jesus is all that I need." If you are a Christian tonight, you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, and the Lord is your Shepherd, you have everything you need. What a blessing that is.

As we look at this subject of "all that we need," we see here in Psalm 23 that there are three areas that the Shepherd provides for us as His sheep: He takes care of our frailties, He takes care of our fears, He takes care of our failures—our frailties, our fears, and our failures as the sheep of His pasture. Look at verses 2-3. First of all, the good Shepherd takes care of our frailties. Go back with me to verse 2. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."

By the way, if you haven't noticed it, look at all the personal pronouns, "my shepherd," verse 1, "I shall not want;" verse 2, "He maketh me to lie down . . . leadeth me beside the still waters;" verse 3, "He restoreth my soul . . . leadeth me in the paths of righteousness;" notice, again, verse 4, " . . . I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me;" verse 5, he says, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies . . . anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." How personal is this psalm. When you can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd," then, and only then, can you say with the psalmist David, that "I have everything that I need." In Psalm 103:14 it says, "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

There are three blessings the Shepherd supplies in this category of our frailties, and I want to look at that. The first is He gives us rest because we're so needy and dependent and frail, we need rest. Look at verse 2, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures," He makes me lie down. In the Middle East there is very little grass, so the sheep must keep moving to find green pastures. They must go to higher areas to get green pastures, and they cannot really rest unless they're free of fear and hunger. They have to be free of fear and hunger. How much like sheep are we there—if we're fearful, we can't rest; if we're hungry, we can't rest—so the Lord makes us to lie down to give us rest.

Now, when we are unsaved, the Bible says, "There's no rest for the wicked, says the Lord." They are " . . . like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." But when we come to the Shepherd and we submit to Him and turn our lives over to His care, He gives us rest for our soul. Jesus said, Matthew 11, I love it, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." How precious that is. Tonight, if you're needing rest in the Lord...you know, you can go to a drugstore and buy sleep, but you can't buy rest. Rest comes from casting your cares upon God knowing that He cares for you.

Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night with all the fears and all the worries and all the concerns? The Bible says, roll "thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee." So, He

takes our fears away by giving us rest. He rests us in our frailties that we need. Jesus promised that He would give us rest. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, can provide rest for our weary souls.

The second category of our frailties is that He gives us restoration. I love that phrase in verse 3. Look at it with me, “He restoreth my soul.” So, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,”—that’s rest—“he leadeth me beside the still waters,”—that’s restoration. Righteous path, “He restoreth my soul.” He brings back my soul to health. The Hebrew idiom here means that He cleanses me, He heals me, and He forgives me—“He restoreth my soul,” or brings me back to health—brings me back through repentance and restoration. You might say, “When I sin, He rescues me.” Amen? “When I fall into sin, He comes and He rescues me.” David knew that by experience.

We all know the story of David’s great sin of adultery with Bathsheba. Have you ever read Psalm 51? Make a note tonight, read Psalm 51 before you go to bed. That was the psalm David penned of repentance when his sin was exposed by God through the prophet Nathan. So, that forgiveness, that restoration, that restoring when I stumble, when I fall. You need to be restored. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Jesus said in Luke 15, if a shepherd has a hundred sheep, one of them goes astray, that He would leave the ninety-nine and go and find that one lost sheep. Now, if I were that shepherd I’d say, “Good riddance, dumb sheep. You shouldn’t have wandered off. Too bad, he made his bed, let him lie in it.” Aren’t you glad I’m not the shepherd? That when I get off God’s path, He actually comes after me, and He rescues me and restores me and forgives me. That’s when he says that He gave him “ . . . paths of righteousness.” I got a bit ahead of myself a minute ago.

In verse 3 he says, “ . . . he leadeth me,”—and I love that phrase, ‘He leads me,’—in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” Sheep have no sense of direction. A dog can get out of the yard and find its way back. But a sheep, when it gets out of its enclosure, it’s lost. It has no sense of direction. That’s why Isaiah 53:6 said, “All we like sheep have gone astray,”—like sheep we’ve gone astray—“we have turned every one to his own way,” so how prone we are to wander off God’s path. I don’t know about you, but I’m so glad that God watches over me and restores me and brings me back, gives me rest and gives me righteous paths to walk in. He forgives us and restores us and He can lead us as well.

Where does He lead us? Verse 3, “ . . . paths of righteousness.” Where are they found? In the Word of God. God’s righteous paths are laid out for us in the Scriptures. So, we read the Word, and then we obey the Word, and we walk in His ways in His righteous paths. All God’s ways and paths are righteous or holy.

Remember when Jesus forgave the woman in John 8 and afterwards He said, “ . . . go, and sin no more.” I love that beautiful story, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” We’re forgiven in order to live holy lives. I quote so often Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace are ye saved

through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.” And, I don’t always quote verse 10, the next verse, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” That word “workmanship” is the Greek word *poiō* where we get our word poem from. It means something made, a work of art. So, you’re God’s *poiō* → you’re something made. God has not made you, He’s making you; and that’s the sanctifying process of God’s justifying us and sanctifying us to walk in holiness.

Now, why He leads us? Verse 3 says, “. . . for his name’s sake.” We always need to keep that ever before us. Everything we do is to bring glory and honor to the Lord. When the Lord is our Shepherd, we want Him to get all the praise—right?—to get all the glory for all the good things that He has done. In Ephesians, again, chapter 1, in verses 6, 12, and 14, it repeats this phrase three times, that we should be, “To the praise of the glory of his grace.” He leads us in those righteous paths so that our lives can bring praise and glory and honor to Him. So, He forgives me, He restores me, He leads me, all for His glory, “. . . for his name’s sake.” I need a Shepherd.

I want to go to the second main thing that our Shepherd provides for us so that we “. . . not want,” that is, He takes care of our fears. He takes care of our frailties, but He also takes care of our fears. This is verses 4-5. He says, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,”—why?—“for thou art with me,”—I love that—“thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”

Sheep have no natural defenses. They are timid and fearful. So many times when the shepherd’s leading them up into the higher grasslands, they have to go through valleys; and in the afternoon, when the sun starts to go down, the shadows are cast across the valley. Sheep are very timid and shy, and it’s hard to get them to go through those dark canyons. David, using this great picturesque speech, says, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” We have so many things that we fear. One of man’s greatest fears is death. But, you know, that Jesus takes the sting out of death? Jesus takes the fear out of death, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God,”—that Jesus Christ has conquered sin, conquered death, conquered the grave, and that I don’t need to be afraid of death.

Now, when it says here, “. . . I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” we have traditionally for many years, and I think rightfully so, thought of that as when it’s time for me to die, I don’t need to be afraid. But the psalm’s not over yet, he still has to have his cup filled and his head anointed with oil, and be in the presence of his enemies, so I’m not sure that David had specifically death in mind. I’m told that in the Hebrew this phrase, “the valley of the shadow of death,” is literally just deep, dark valley or valley of deepest darkness. It could just mean that we’re going through a time of deep discouragement or deep difficulties.

We all face discouragements—amen?—and difficulties and heartache, dark times in our lives

when we can't really see Him or we don't really hear Him or we may not sense His presence and we have to walk by faith. Maybe you're in one of those situations right now. You're a believer, but you don't really sense the Lord's presence and you don't have His peace. You have these fears, and it's like everything's dark around you. You can bet the Lord is with you. You don't need to be afraid. "Never doubt in the dark," someone said, "what God has spoken in the light." You always fall back on God's promises in times of darkness and difficulties. When you're walking through, whether it be death or whether it be just a deep, dark valley, fears of life, you do not need to be afraid.

Notice verse 4, ". . . I will fear no evil." I love that. The psalmist also said, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in"—the Lord. He also said, "I will trust in the Lord and not be afraid," which is better than being afraid and trusting the Lord. It's better to trust in the Lord and just not be afraid. How wonderful, when I'm facing death or I'm walking through a deep valley of difficulty of doubts and fears—maybe financial, maybe emotional, maybe marital difficulty, maybe problems with a family member, maybe lost a job or loss of health, you've been diagnosed with something that's quite difficult—and we trust the Lord in those difficult times, "I will fear no evil." We can live lives free from fear.

Notice here, why we are free of fear, because He's our Shepherd, we have His presence. Notice it, verse 4, ". . . for thou art with me." We know that as Christians, but do we really believe it. Do we really believe that He is with us, we're never really alone, ". . . for thou art with me." Jesus said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He said it emphatically, never, ever leave you or forsake you. I've been forsaken by people, and I've probably forsaken others, too. But there's One who will never leave me, He will never forsake me. He will never let me down. He'll never let me down.

I'm so glad that in those times of great fear in the deep, dark valleys that I can call upon the Lord, and He hears my cry. He lifts me ". . . out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock . . . and . . . put a new song in my"—heart. Amen? And, He hears my cry and answers my prayers, and He's with me. His presence calms my fear. Someone put it in these words, "I'd rather walk in the dark with God / Than walk alone in the light, / I'd rather walk with him by faith / Than walk alone by sight." I love that. So, trust Him even when you can't see Him or hear Him or feel Him. His promise was He would never leave you.

Notice He's also our protector, the Shepherd's protection. He says in verse 4, ". . . thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." The "rod" was a club, and the club or the "rod" was not for the sheep, it was for the predators. It was for the bears or the lion or the wolves. It doesn't say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley,"—He clubs me, He beats me. No. It's to ward off the enemy. He's going to protect me from the enemy coming against me. ". . . thy rod,"—is a protection that comforts me—"and thy staff"—which is that long pole with a crook on it which he would use to grab the sheep and direct the sheep. So, He protects us and directs us, so it gives me courage and comfort.

Notice also His provision, verse 5. I love this. It's believed, I think rightfully so, that the image

here possibly changes from the Lord, my Shepherd, Jehovah-Rohi, to the Lord, my provider, Jehovah-Jireh, and he begins, by the way, to talk to the Lord, verse 5, not about the Lord. This is His provision for us, His protection or His provision now. Notice verse 5, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.” This is our host, Jehovah-Jireh, “ . . . thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.” It’s a picture of Him inviting us into His house and providing for us.

I love Psalm 37:25, another psalm of David where he says, “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” I love that. I remember when I was a young pastor, and I used to quote that verse. I thought, I can’t really say that. I could say, ‘I am young, and I am still young, and I’m not old yet.’ But now I can say, “I’ve been young, now I’m old, and have never seen Him forsaken me or the righteous forsaken, “ . . . nor his seed begging bread.” Amen? How wonderful to look back and see His provision, His care.

Paul said in Philippians 4:19, “But my God shall supply all your need”—not your greed, but your need—“according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” If the Lord is my Shepherd, I’ve everything I need. I need not fear because I have His presence, I have His protection, and I have His provision.

Here’s the third, verse 6, and this is so marvelous. It’s a summary verse of the psalm, “Surely”—I love the surety of this verse—“goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will”—not maybe, but I will—“dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” As I said, David summarizes the psalm, and you know the Christian life is a pilgrimage? We’re pilgrims, strangers, and sojourners. We’re looking for a city “ . . . whose builder and maker is God.” We have to keep our eyes on the prize, our eyes on eternity, and we’re on our way to the Celestial City. If you haven’t read John Bunyan’s, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, take the time to read that marvelous allegory—fleeing the City of Destruction on our way to the Celestial City. It’s such a beautiful picture of the Christian life, so we’re on a pilgrimage, “The LORD is my Shepherd,”—and it ends in verse 6—“ . . . the house of the LORD for ever.” So, the psalm opens with, “The LORD is my shepherd,” it ends with, “ . . . the house of the LORD for ever.”

In life, two things follow me, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” Even in the dark valleys, God is good. Amen? God is good all the time. God’s goodness is higher than the heavens. His mercies are new every morning. The phrase “mercy” conveys the idea in the Hebrew of lovingkindness. God is so loving, so kind, so merciful. How wonderful to be His sheep and to have Him as my Shepherd.

Then, in death, “ . . . I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” God keeps the best for last. Remember in John 2 when Jesus turned the water into wine? They took some wine to the host of the wedding and he said, “Wow! That’s amazing! You brought the best for last.” You know, that’s what God does, He brings the best for last. This psalm ends with kind of a thought of: All this and heaven, too—You saved me, You guide me, You direct me, You provide—You do all these blessings and then You take me to heaven with I die. How marvelous and how wonderful.

Jesus said in John 14, “Let not your heart be troubled,”—neither let it be afraid—“ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house,”—that’s the house of the Lord. “In my Father’s house”—which is heaven—“are many”—abiding places. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

D.L. Moody said, “With me, the Lord; beneath me, green pastures; beside me, still waters; before me, a table; around me, my enemies; after me, goodness and mercy; and ahead of me, the house of the Lord forever.” Amen? So, David’s assurance of heaven, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

Do you have that assurance? Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? You know, when we take Communion tonight, Communion doesn’t save you. Communion doesn’t forgive your sins, but it points to One who can, that’s Jesus Christ. Amen? If you haven’t trusted Him and put your faith in Him, who died on the cross for you, was buried, He took your sins, paid its penalty on the cross, was buried, rose from the dead, and now He everlives to save those who call on the Lord, “For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’”

The most important word in the psalm is “my,” “ . . . my shepherd.” “I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever,” when the Lord is my Shepherd. Make sure tonight, before we take Communion, that the Lord is your Shepherd—that you put your trust in Him and your faith in Him. Amen?