

**SBC – Aug. 28, 2022**

**Psalm 23 (NKJV) - “The Shepherding LORD”**

Psalm 22, 23, and 24 are called a “Trilogy of Messianic Psalms” related to our past, present, and future.

As people we tend to have three areas of concern. We have concerns about our past with all our failures and shortcomings; we have concerns about the present challenges and difficulties, and we have concerns about the future. In the trilogy of Psalm 22, 23, and 24 all of these concerns are addressed.

**Slide # 1**

***PSALM 22, 23, 24 (A Trilogy of Psalms)***

Psalm 22 – The Savior’s Cross answers to our PAST.

Psalm 23 – The Shepherd’s Crook answers to our PRESENT.

Psalm 24 – The Sovereign’s Crown answers to our FUTURE.

In Psalm 22 we have the Good Shepherd-giving His life for the sheep; in Psalm 23, the Chief Shepherd in resurrection life guiding His people on their pilgrim journey through life; and in Psalm 24 we have the Great Shepherd coming again as the King of glory in power and glory to bring in everlasting blessing.

Tonight we are looking at Psalm 23 – the Shepherding Psalm.

David is the human author of Psalm 23. In the NT in Acts 2:29-30 David is said to be a prophet. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm describes the LORD as the Shepherd of God’s people which anticipates the coming of Jesus who in the NT is spoken of as the Shepherd of God’s people.

**Slide # 2**

***JESUS as SHEPHERD...***

The GOOD Shepherd – John 10:14

The GREAT Shepherd – Hebrews 13:20

The CHIEF Shepherd – 1 Peter 5:4

This Psalm 23 depicts the LORD in the imagery of a Shepherd. This is a familiar symbol for God in the Scriptures (cf. Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Ps. 28:9,

80:1Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:12, 23; 37:24; Mt. 2:6; 26:31; Jn. 10:1-16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4; Rev. 7:17).

### **Psalm 23 (NKJV)**

#### **A Psalm of David.**

#### **1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

To start with, note a couple of obvious points. If the LORD is the Shepherd of His people and Jesus claims to be the Shepherd of God's people then Jesus must be LORD.

Second to say the LORD is my Shepherd is to say that you are His sheep. The imagery of the LORD being our Shepherd is one of care. He cares for all our needs. However, the imagery of us being sheep is not really flattering.

Sheep are among the most helpless of all God's creatures. Their bite is not dangerous. They have no sharp claws or fangs. They can't run fast. They can't camouflage their appearance. They have no specific odor to ward off predators, no venom to strike back with, no horns, no needles. Sheep are basically totally defenseless.

And they are (for lack of a better word) dumb. They are followers and will follow another dumb sheep right off a cliff. Sheep desperately need care – they need a Shepherd. Left to themselves they will not survive long. Thus, the word sheep is a very appropriate metaphor for people. We are totally dependent upon our Shepherding LORD.

David begins with, "The LORD is my Shepherd". LORD is YHWH the most sacred name for God in the OT Scriptures. It is the covenant name for God indicating His unchanging faithfulness. Our divine Shepherd is totally faithful and can be fully counted on.

But note the little word "my" – in "my shepherd". Everything hinges on the personal pronoun "my". Not everyone can claim this Psalm. It only applies to those who have a personal relationship with the LORD as "my Shepherd".

### **Slide # 3**

#### **John 10:26–28 (NKJV)**

**26** But you do not **believe**, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.

**27** **My sheep hear My voice**, and I know them, and **they follow Me**.

**28** And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

True believers are God's sheep! The evidence of truly being a sheep of Christ is that we follow Him. It is followers who give evidence of knowing the LORD as "my shepherd" and thus having eternal life.

David says because the LORD is my shepherd "I shall not want" which is to say "I shall not lack". God as a faithful Shepherd meets all the needs of His sheep. That is the overall responsibility of a shepherd to take care of the needs of the sheep – whatever they may be.

We as sheep are not self-made people. We don't provide for ourselves – we don't take care of ourselves. It is the LORD our Shepherd who provides for us. He gives us our daily bread. He meets our every spiritual need.

Now we should note that God has promised to meet our needs and not our wants. Our needs are whatever our Father deems necessary to bring glory to Him. We are here for His good pleasure. Having that perspective changes everything.

Sometimes people act as if God is there for their good pleasure rather than us being here for His good pleasure. God is God. He created us for His purposes and glory. We serve at His good pleasure and He meets all of our needs to do that very thing. As Paul would said – his desire was that Christ "be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20). That is the end goal and with that goal in view God meets all our needs. He gives grace in every situation and His grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12).

#### **Slide # 4**

##### **Matthew 6:33 (NKJV)**

**33** But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and **all these things shall be added to you.**

##### **Philippians 4:19 (NKJV)**

**19** And **my God shall supply all your need** according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

If it is truly a need God will provide it. If He doesn't provide it – then we don't ultimately need it. And yet He wants us to ask – showing our

dependence upon Him and when He answers to say “thank you” and thus bring Him glory.

I am reading a book titled, “A Good & Faithful Servant” which is a book about the life and times of Dr. John C. Whitcomb who was my mentor.

In the 60s his first wife was dying of a rare disease. As she was in the hospital the family’s resources dwindled to nothing. John called his children together and said he needed \$155 that very day to pay a debt and asked them to pray with him. That day when the mail came John opened an envelope, raised his eyebrows and said, “God has answered our prayers”. In the mail was a note from an old student saying earlier in life Dr. Whitcomb had lent him some money and he had overlooked paying it back until now. In the letter was a check for exactly \$155. They promptly got in the car and went to the bank and paid off the debt. (Summarized from page 20)

### **Psalm 23:1 (NKJV)**

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

**2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.**

Green lush pastures are a picture of abundant provision. Still waters are a picture of plenty of drinking water. Sheep would not drink from gushing water. They want still waters and so the divine Shepherd leads His people to exactly the right place they need to be to meet their needs.

### **Slide # 5**

The word translated “leads” in verse 2 means “to lead gently.” You cannot drive sheep. – **Warren Weirsbe**

What a beautiful picture this is of the kind of shepherding care the LORD provides for His sheep.

**3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.**

Sheep often need restoration. For example, if a sheep gets rolled over onto its back it cannot get up on its own. Left in that condition it will die there.

David making application speaks of how the LORD restores his soul. Often we get “rolled over” (so to speak) and are spiritually in need of restoration. And as we look to the LORD for restoration He is faithful to revive us – to pick us up and put us back on the path again.

And then He leads us in the paths of righteousness. The LORD’s leading is always good – it is always in right paths that are for our ultimate good and His glory. It is only when we go our own way that we go astray and are again in need of spiritual restoration.

And God works in this way in our lives, “For His name’s sake” which is to say for His own reputation – for His own glory. When we follow the LORD and His leading it brings Him glory. That is His ultimate purpose in shepherding the sheep – so that He might be glorified in it (cf. Ps. 25:11; 31:3; 1 Kg. 8:41-42; Jer 14:21; Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22).

**4 Yea, 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.**

David at this point becomes very personal. He changes from using the personal pronoun “He” to now saying “You”. He is no longer talking about the Shepherd but to the Shepherd. This is very personal. You know when God becomes very real and precious to you is in the scary times of life – in the context of “the shadow of death”.

We are all human. We all have fears and things that unnerve us. In those times we need God’s special shepherding care. The “valley of the shadow of death” is literally “the valley of deep darkness.”

The language “shadow of death” occurs about 20 times in the OT.

### **Slide # 6**

It is clear that [*shadow of death*] implies intense darkness that represents extreme danger (Job 10:21; 28:3; Jer. 2:6). “Darkest” fits this specific context, since it is in the darkest valley where the greatest danger [such as a predator] lurks for sheep. - **HCSB**

Thus, “the valley of the shadow” of death represents a threatening place of great danger. But note where David finds his comfort in this dark and scary place – it is in the fact that the LORD is with him. Here the imagery of God is not God before him but right alongside WITH him.

It is knowing the LORD is right there with him guiding and leading him through this dark place that shields him from fear. Note he anticipates walking “through” this deep dark valley. He knows that God’s presence is going to see him through it.

What a comforting reality. There are all kinds of terrifying things we face as we go through life and then we come to the cold place of death itself. But in each case – even if death should prevail still God is with us and will see us through to the other side.

### **Slide # 7**

#### **Hebrews 13:5 (NKJV)**

**5** Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**”

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse said, “A man walking along the deck of a ship might fall. His fall might hurt him, but it wouldn’t be the same as if he fell off the ship. A believer when he sins falls on the deck, but he’s never lost overboard. Christ has seen to it,” said Barnhouse, “that no wave – not death or life, or angels or principalities, or powers or things present or things to come, or height or depth shall ever sweep us off the deck. Fellowship is forever. (Shared by John MacArthur)

There is a German doctor by the name of Dr. Helmut Renner who is a believer. He is a cancer specialist. Dr. Renner often orders the reading of Psalm 23 to his patients – sometimes by prescription if necessary. He says cancer patients need to find hope and part of the prescription is Psalm 23. And of course that is true for everyone – as everyone (whether they realize it or not) is facing death.

Scary things abound in the world. You have thugs that might abuse or murder you, you have inflation that might starve you, you have Covid that might kill you. And the fearmongers live on TV and in the media. Things to make us afraid are everywhere. Where do we find refuge?

There is only one safe place in the world and that is in the LORD. With the assurance of His faithful presence we can rest easy. There is nothing that can touch us without being filtered through His sovereign hands.

### **Slide # 8**

#### **Psalm 56:3 (NKJV)**

**3** Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.

And God's presence is not passive but rather active. God has a rod and He has a staff which is a very comforting reality.

The rod was a club the shepherd carried. It was often an oak club with a large knot on the end. This would be used to stun, wound, or kill any predator attacking the sheep. Here God is pictured as our protector who stands ready to beat any thing that dares to attack His sheep.

The staff was a crook that was used to guide or rescue a sheep that had fallen into a ravine.

### **Slide # 9**



What a great two-pronged approach to ensure the safety of the sheep. The rod to ward off predators and the staff to rescue and guide. The LORD is able and ready to do whatever is needed for our protection and safety.

These are instruments of comfort to the sheep knowing the Shepherd is ever ready to protect or help them as needed.

**5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.**

Some think the imagery at this point changes from that of a Shepherd to that of a host. Perhaps but I tend to agree with Warren Wiersbe that the imagery of Shepherding continues throughout.

The word for "table" is sometimes translated "feast." This table doesn't necessarily refer to a piece of furniture used by humans, for

the word simply means “something spread out.” Flat places in the hilly country were called “tables,” and sometimes the shepherd stopped the flock at these “tables” and allowed them to eat and rest as they headed for the fold. – **Warren Wiersbe**

God prepares a “table” right in the very presence of the enemies of His people. In the night as the wolves are circling around the shepherd has prepared a place where His sheep can feast right in their presence.

What a beautiful picture of God’s abundant care of His people in the context of a hostile world that would like to destroy us. We feast on God’s Word and His fellowship right in the midst of enemies circling around us. It is a beautiful reality.

We feast on life and that “more abundantly” right in the very presence of our enemies. In spite of the threat of the enemy God takes care of His own and that in abundance.

Anointing the head with oil is a picture of soothing refreshment or medicinal treatment. If the enemy happens to get a lick in the good Shepherd is there to soothe and heal. If in the struggle, we are weary and discouraged He is there to refresh us.

Oil in the Bible is consistently a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Applying the analogy, it refers to the comforting ministry of God’s Spirit.

Our cup running over is a picture of abundant refreshment that more than meets our needs. For the thirsty sheep exhausted in the struggle the shepherd would have a two-handled cup filled to overflowing with water by which he would serve the sheep.

**6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.**

What a beautiful verse.

Goodness is defined by God Himself. Good is in contrast to bad. God is a good God. His goodness is His blessing. In God’s working in the lives of children all things ultimately work together for good (Rom. 8:28). God has an overarching purpose of constantly working for the ultimate GOOD – that is our ultimate benefit.



This follows God's children all the days of their life. When adversity comes we can rest in the truth of God's goodness and that His good and sovereign purposes are working all things out for our ultimate good.

### **Slide # 10**

#### **Nahum 1:7 (NKJV)**

**7 The LORD is good**, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.

The word "mercy" is the rich Hebrew word "hesed" in the OT. This is one of the most precious and meaningful words found in the Bible. It is often defined as "Loyal Covenant Faithfulness".

### **Slide # 11**

#### **Lamentations 3:22–23 (NKJV)**

**22** Through the LORD's mercies [**hesed**] we are not consumed,  
Because His compassions fail not.

**23** They are new every morning; **Great is Your faithfulness.**

God is always good – working for our ultimate benefit and He is always faithful to His promises.

These truths pursue us with unfailing intensity all the days of our life. The word "follow" is an intense word often used on an animal in pursuit of prey or of a warrior in pursuit of an enemy. But here it is used in a good sense of God's goodness and mercy hot on our trail all through life.

And the conclusion of the matter is that God's shepherding care which so wonderfully and faithfully sees David through the whole of life will eventuate with him dwelling in the house of the LORD forever.

God's shepherding care ultimately results in the greatest blessing of all which is to live intimately in God's presence forever.

### **Slide # 12**

#### **Revelation 21:3 (NKJV)**

**3** And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the **tabernacle of God is with men**, and **He will dwell with them**, and they shall be His people. **God Himself will be with them** and be their God.

This Psalm is a song of David is a testimony of God’s faithful care! But here is the connection I want to make tonight. Although this Psalm does not specifically mention the Messiah it does speak of the LORD as Shepherd which is directly applied repeatedly to Jesus in the NT. All the shepherding promises made to God’s people are ultimately fulfilled in the One Who is called “that great Shepherd of the sheep” in Hebrews 13:20.

All of the Shepherding imagery in the OT ultimately ties in and finds ultimate fulfillment in Messiah Jesus. What a glorious reality is the shepherding care of our God which is found in Jesus.

Psalm 23 has been called the most beloved of the songs of David. It is certainly one of the most beloved because it emphasizes God’s unfailing faithful care of His own.

And of course I would be remiss if I did not emphasize that the greatest thing Jesus has done for our ultimate care is to take care of our sin problem.

### **Slide # 13**

**John 10:11 (NKJV)**

**11** “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

This is what Jesus the LORD did as our good shepherd so that we might have a personal relationship with God through Him. This was the ultimate act of caring.

**J.R. Littleproud** outlined Psalm 23 in this way..

The secret of a happy life – every need supplied

**The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

The secret of a happy death – every fear removed.

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for You are with me.**

The secret of a happy eternity – every desire fulfilled.

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

How wonderful that the LORD is the Shepherd of all His children - all made possible by the Lord Jesus Christ our good shepherd. Thank you Jesus!