

The Lord Is My Shepherd
Psalm 23

In Psalm 22 King David prophesies about an execution, specifically an execution on a cross. King David wasn't crucified, but his descendant, the Savior and Shepherd of the world, would be 1000 years later in Jerusalem. Jesus of Nazareth fulfills this prophecy and proclaims in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." (John 10:11)

In Psalm 24, King David asks, "Who is the King of glory?" He answers, "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord might in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in" (Psalm 24:8-9). In Psalm 24, David describes the chief shepherd, the Divine Warrior and future King of Glory.

In Psalm 22 David is picturing the cross of the Good Shepherd, and in Psalm 24 David is picturing the glory of the Good Shepherd and His strong and mighty intervention. Psalm 23 describes the time in-between. The time between the cross and the King of glory coming again. The time in-between that involves green pastures and also valleys of the shadow of death, comfort and fear, cups running over and enemies, goodness and mercy and dreams of dwelling in the house of the Lord.



All around us are temptations that want to destroy or disfigure us. All around us exist circumstances that are physically, emotionally and spiritually crippling us. God calls us sheep and WE NEED A SHEPHERD.

The Good Shepherd wants to lead you, sometimes carry you, from the green pastures and still waters through the dark valley of the shadow of death into the banquet hall of God.

King David has some things he wants us to understand about the green pastures of our lives and the valleys of the shadow of death.

The Good Shepherd is with you in the green pastures of life and also the valleys of the shadow of death, and His promise is that goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.

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.

³ He restores my soul; He leads 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 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 runs over.

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.

--Psalm 23

In the first three verses David refers to God as "He" ("*He* makes me lie down . . . *he* leads me . . . *he* restores my soul."). Then something changes in verses 4 and 5 and David begins to refer to God as "you" ("I will not fear, for *you* are with me; *your* rod and staff comfort me; *you* prepare a table before me; *you* anoint my head with oil").

King David switches from "He" to "You" when he enters the valley of the shadow of death. This is the universal experience among God's people. The tragedy and crises of life draw us to the intimate "you" prayers to God. We are prone to talk about God when we are in the green pastures and prone to cry out to God when we enter some fearful ravine.

Do God's sheep ever lack anything? Yea, it sure feels like we are lacking things right now in our lives. When the sheep are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, the sheep lack light and green pastures and quiet waters. The picture here is of a situation with extreme danger.

But why would God's sheep be going through such a place? The reason the sheep are going through the valley is because the shepherd is leading us. David says the Shepherd leads us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. The paths of the valley of the shadow of death are paths of righteousness in which God leads.

God's green, grazing pastures are almost never fence to fence, but often separated by very difficult and treacherous territory, and the Good shepherd says - Follow Me! The valley or dark ravine is the most dangerous part of our journey.

King David says that He leads us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. God's reputation rests on His capacity to lead, care and provide for His sheep. His rod and staff comfort.

A rod is the defensive weapon of a shepherd and was fashioned from a tree sapling with a hard root knot at the end of it. It was used as a flying baseball bat and an experienced Shepherd took great delight in throwing and swinging their rod to protect and correct the sheep.

The staff is hooked so the shepherd can pull back the sheep. The Shepherd would often build relationship with his sheep through the touch of his staff.

"I shall not want" is not freedom from suffering and the trials of life. Even though God is our shepherd we will still go through trying times, but the comfort is that He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. The path of righteousness starts with Jesus' grace and ends with Jesus' grace. God's glory is its end, for His name's sake.

David takes us from green pastures through the dark valley into the banquet hall of God where we are anointed with oil over our head and our cup runs over. God the host spreads a banquet for his guest, anoints his head with festive oil (Luke 7:46), and keeps his cup not half-filled but running over.

David closes this great Psalm with these words, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever" (Psalm 23:6). Two "sheep-dogs" follow God's sheep continually: goodness and love (Rom. 8:28, Gen 50:20). The Hebrew word *radalph* is translated "follow", but a better translation is "pursuing to overtake."

Two questions to wrestle with these next two weeks:

Are you in the valley of the shadow of death?

God is not only your good *shepherd*, not only your lavish host; He is the One pursuing you with goodness and mercy every day of your life.

Today you might be dealing with the valley of the shadow of death, but God is not finished writing your story. When everything is said and done, one thing will be absolutely proven.

God's goodness and loyal love and mercy will be said to follow you all days of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. When all the facts of eternity are laid out before our eyes, we will confess as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death - You are with me!

Are you a "cast" sheep?

Sometimes with sheep they roll over onto their back and they get stuck. When this happens it is called a "cast" sheep. It can't get up without assistance. It happens most commonly with short, stocky sheep with full fleeces on flat terrain.

Cast sheep can become distressed and die within a short period of time if they are not rolled back into a normal position. They can't get up and the shepherd must remedy the situation or the buzzards will get them. A sheep left in such a position will die unless the shepherd helps.

Do you feel stuck like this? What would you like the Good Shepherd to do for you? What is at risk if you continue to be stuck?