

Easter 4/Good Shepherd

April 22, 2018

*CW-S – “The Lord’s My Shepherd”

Psalm 23

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“The LORD Is My Shepherd!”

- I. Our Shepherd provides for us.
- II. Our Shepherd protects us.
- III. Our Shepherd richly blesses us.

Dear Christian friends,

Psalm 23 has to be one of the MOST WELL-KNOWN – **beloved** – portions of Scripture. The Holy Spirit inspired David to write these verses some **3,000 years** ago. We don’t know JUST WHEN in his life David wrote it. Was he still shepherding his **father Jesse’s** flock? Was this during the years when he was ON THE RUN from King **Saul trying to kill** him? Or was this an aged king David LOOKING BACK over his **long, eventful** life? Who knows!

Just think of HOW MANY MILLIONS of Christians over those centuries – people FROM EVERY WALK and **station** in life – believers **“from every nation, tribe, people and language”** – have turned to these **familiar words** and have FOUND in them the comfort and **strength** – the peace and **hope** they SO DESPERATELY needed. **Just think** of how many times YOU have turned to this psalm!

Psalm 23 is a VERY PERSONAL psalm. David didn’t write, **“The LORD is OUR shepherd.”** Psalm 23 is David writing about his OWN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with God. It wasn’t a cold – distant – relationship – God an OCCASIONAL VISITOR in David’s life. **“The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.”** Even as we now look at it Psalm 23 remains very PERSONAL. The words speak to us INDIVIDUALLY. The Lord takes care of us **not as** a HUGE FLOCK but as individual sheep needing His PERSONAL CARE and **attention**. With David EACH ONE of us can say, **“The LORD is MY Shepherd!”** Psalm 23 shows us our Shepherd 1)providing for us, 2)protecting us and 3)richly blessing us.

I. Our Shepherd provides for us.

Psalm 23 is not the words of a SELF-SUFFICIENT – **“I can do it myself!”** – person. David isn’t bragging about what HE’S ALL **accomplished**. David sees himself as a SHEEP SO DEPENDENT on its shepherd. Psalm 23 is David rejoicing in his **“Good Shepherd.”**

“The LORD is my shepherd. I lack nothing – I shall not want.” In other words I HAVE EVERYTHING I **need**. Boy, do I need that **reminder!** I may think I’m LACKING -NEEDING – some things but my Shepherd says no I not. **How often don’t we think** our HEALTH is **“lacking”**? We **NEED glasses** – hearing aids – canes and walkers – and let’s not forget all those pills! We’re **certainly NOT LACKING** when it comes to stress and **problems!** WAIT a minute! Drop that attitude and LISTEN again – **“the LORD is my shepherd. I lack nothing.”** Stop focusing on what’s **wrong** – what **hurts** – and get your eyes back on your Good Shepherd. With “the LORD as my shepherd” we **“lack nothing”** – we have everything we need. We **MAY WANT** better health – a better **job**, etc. – but we have what we **NEED**.

David pictures that. **“He causes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters.”** We hear “green pastures” and we think of sheep **GRAZING** to their **heart’s content**. How important too to have **“quiet waters”** to drink from – not a WILDLY RUSHING river to sweep the sheep away. That’s **really ONLY PART** of the picture here. **“He causes me to lie down in green pastures.”** Sheep don’t lie down to **eat**. They **“lie down”** when they’re well-fed and **watered**. This is the picture of sheep **RELAXED** and resting contentedly **“in green pastures.”**

Sheep are perfect pictures for us SPIRITUALLY. Sheep are pretty much helpless and **defenseless** ON THEIR OWN. Sheep without a good shepherd are EASY TARGETS for a **hungry predator**. Do you get the PICTURE? One our own we were SPIRITUALLY HELPLESS. We had wandered off into the **paths of sin** and away from God. We were drinking the dirty waters of temptations – we were easy targets for the devil. We were ready to fall OFF THE CLIFF and into hell's eternal banishment and punishment. And like dumb sheep we DIDN'T EVEN KNOW it

But Jesus our **“Good Shepherd”** – He **“came to seek and to save that which was lost.”** It's time to graze again in the gospel of God's grace! It's SO FAMILIAR but it never gets old. Our **“Good Shepherd”** is none other than **“the LORD”** Himself – the eternal Son of God born our brother. Jesus took the place of all people under God's law and took care of everything to save us. Jesus lived for us that life of **perfect love** and **obedience** that we owed God but could never live. Then Jesus went to the cross bearing the sin of the **whole world**. There Jesus **“laid down His life”** to fully pay for all our sins. Yes, our **“Good Shepherd”** is also the innocent **“Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”** And as we heard Jesus say in the gospel reading, **“I lay down My life only to take it up again.”** We're back to Easter – Jesus risen triumphant over death and hell – Jesus sharing that victory with us – Jesus promising us eternal life in heaven the **very moment** we die. GRAZE regularly in that **gospel** – DRINK deeply of **God's grace** – feast regularly on your Lord's Supper – rejoice in the **washing** of your Baptism. Come faithfully to church – faithfully have those daily devotion and feel the stress and **worries** of life MELT AWAY. Let your “Good Shepherd restore your soul” with His grace and **“cause you to lie down in green pastures”** RELAXED and content – FORGIVEN and at peace with God.

II. Our Shepherd protects us.

But the sheep can't lie around all day long. They need to move on to the **next pasture**. Don't picture Israel like our MIDWEST. It wasn't always easy or SAFE **finding pasture** and **water** for the sheep. But THAT'S WHAT the shepherd was for. So David did for his father's flocks. So David sees the **Lord doing** for us.

“He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.” English translations vary between **“paths of righteousness”** and **“the right path.”** BOTH are good. **“Paths of righteousness”** are the paths that lead to us into a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP with God – the gospel path of TRUSTING in Jesus as our Savior and so enjoying God's **grace** and **forgiveness**.

“The right paths” are the RIGHT WAY for us to be living our lives. Shall we follow the WORLD – the **“crowd”**- our **sinful natures** – to figure out WHAT'S RIGHT for us? Jesus bluntly tells us that **“wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it.”** Just because everybody else is DOING IT – just because it FEELS right to us – doesn't make it right for us. God gave us His Word as **“a lamp to our feet and a light for our paths”** to show us “the right paths” to take. Ignoring and defying God DOESN'T LEAD anyone closer to God or heaven.

“The right paths” are also God leading us on the PATHS RIGHT for us. AS MUCH AS I need to see that I **“lack nothing”** I also need to see GOD LEADING me on **“the right paths.”** I may not like the **path God** has LAID OUT for my life – I might never have chosen it myself – but THANKFULLY my Shepherd is smarter than me and He loves me enough to DO WHAT HE KNOWS is **best/right** for me.

Now those “right paths” are NOT ALWAYS EASY paths. How SHEEP NEED their shepherd to guide and protect them on their journeys. **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.”** Here the translations vary between **“the valley of the shadow of death”** and **“the darkest valley.”** Both are good. Life now HAS ITS SHARE of **“darkest valleys”** where we can't see where we're going or what the outcome will be – **“darkest valleys”** of FEAR – uncertainty, etc. And there's

NO DARKER valley than death itself. But now matter how dark the WAY AHEAD may be ***“I will fear no evil.”*** WHY not? ***“For You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”***

The shepherd’s rod and staff were used to LEAD and PROTECT the sheep. With “the LORD as our shepherd” leading and protecting us we’re SAFE FROM WHATEVER may threaten or terrify us. Even when it’s OUR TURN to ***“walk through the valley of the shadow of death”*** there’s no need for us to fear. Our RISEN Savior – our ***“Good Shepherd”*** who is also “the Resurrection and the Life” – will be right there with us. He’s promised His sheep, ***“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of My hand.”*** We have Jesus’ word that when we die we will immediately be SAFELY HOME with Him in heaven. That’s not something to fear but to LOOK FORWARD to!

III. Our Shepherd richly blesses us.

Psalm 23 shows us HOW SO GOOD God is to each one of us. The devil wants to FOCUS US on what’s wrong – what hurts – what’s NOT RIGHT or **fair**. Our sinful natures can be SO SELFISH and **such whiners wallowing** in self-pity. David shows us something TOTALLY DIFFERENT. ***“You set a table for me in the presence of my foes. You drench my head with oil. My cup is overflowing.”***

David shows us God SO RICHLY blessing us. God isn’t cheap or **stingy** with us. It’s the EXACT OPPOSITE. God spreads a feast for us. He has blessings and promises GALORE for **us to enjoy**. ***“My cup is overflowing.”*** And God does all this “in the presence of my foes.” The devil sees GOD DOING all this for us and he can’t do anything to stop it. He can’t wreck **God’s plans** for us. He can’t thwart **God’s promises** to us.

No wonder this psalm ends on SUCH A HIGH NOTE. **Living our lives we might see** PROBLEMS and **pains** – **hardships** and **headaches** – DEATH – **chasing after** us READY to **overtake and destroy** us. Again David shows us something TOTALLY DIFFERENT! ***“Surely goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life.”*** We can’t outrun - and we’ll never RUN OUT of - God’s ***“goodness and mercy”*** no matter how long ***“the days of our lives.”***

And when those days reach their end we have God’s promise PUT SO SIMPLY and SO SWEETLY, ***“and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.”***

Psalm 23 is David writing his OWN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with God. God wants each one of us to **take Psalm 23** PERSONALLY and make it our PERSONAL CONFESSION of faith – ***“the LORD is MY Shepherd!”*** Amen.

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