

The LORD is my Shepherd

Psalm 23: 1-6

With the exception of John 3:16, the 23rd Psalm is likely the most familiar and quoted passage in all of Scripture. It is often read for comfort at funerals, and yet it has brought encouragement and peace to many struggling believers down through the ages. As we read and ponder these beautiful words, our minds are carried to a place of peace and rest. In Christ our Lord, we have a source of comfort and assurance in the midst of the most troubling times.

I love the words of John Phillips regarding this great psalm: The psalm divides into three parts. First David takes us into *the glen*, then he takes us down into *the gorge*, and finally, on into *the glory*. In the first part of the psalm he introduces us to One who can take care of *our frailty*; then to One who can take care of *our foes*; and finally to One who can take care of *our future*. But of all the ways we can divide this psalm, I like best the one I found in my mother's open Bible, there beside her bed, the day after she died. Alongside this psalm she had written: "The secret of a *happy life, a happy death, a happy eternity*." ⁱ

Let's take a few moments to consider the [great provisions](#) of Christ as we think on: [The LORD is my Shepherd](#).

I. The Satisfaction in the Shepherd (1) – [The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want](#). As we consider this great psalm, we must remember the familiarity of David with tending sheep. He had vast experience serving as a shepherd, and yet he rejoiced in his Great Shepherd. He does not speak of one he had merely heard of or casually met, but of the Great Shepherd of his soul. The LORD was his shepherd; he knew Him in a personal and intimate way!

- David also knew that worthy shepherds provided for their sheep. They tended to their every need, ensuring all their needs were met. David had come to know the Great Shepherd and he declares, in His presence, he lacked or wanted nothing. The Lord had cared for him, providing for every need David encountered. He was completely and fully satisfied with his Shepherd. [Phil.4:19](#) – [But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus](#).

II. The Security with the Shepherd (2) – [He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters](#). Having tended sheep for many years, David was familiar with their behavior and varied needs. Sheep need to be closely watched. They tend to stray and need the constant guidance of a shepherd. They are vulnerable to attack and lack the ability to secure needed provision on their own. David knew the Lord was able to lead him into the green pastures of peace and provision. He knew where the refreshing still waters were, and would lead His sheep there.

- We live in a world of great uncertainty. We too are vulnerable to attack from the enemy. We lack the wisdom we need to find those places of peace and rest alone. I am thankful the Lord allows us to rest in the green pastures of His grace and leads unto the still waters of refreshment for our thirsty souls. While the enemy rages all around, we enjoy the security found within the Shepherd of our souls!

III. The Sanctification through the Shepherd (3) – [He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.](#) David knew men, like himself, and sheep were prone to wander. They are aware of the gracious provision of the Shepherd, and yet they wander after the lure and lusts of the world. David had experienced those moments in life when he had strayed from the security of the fold. He found himself indulging in the pastures of the world, apart from the Lord. The Shepherd was always willing to welcome him back into the fold of grace, restoring his soul and continuing to offer abundant grace and provision. David knew the Lord always wanted the best for His people. Like a loving Shepherd, He led them in the paths of righteousness, showing them the right path to travel. David rejoiced for those times when the Lord called out unto him when he had strayed, lovingly restoring him and leading him in the right way.

- We too are prone to wander and stray. We know the blessing associated with the fold, but yet we submit to the temptations of the flesh. We find ourselves pursuing the desires of the world, and before we know it, we have wandered a great distance from the Lord. He would be just to leave us in that condition, allowing us to perish in the wilderness, but He lovingly chastises us, restoring our fellowship, and continues to lead us in the right path. The Great Shepherd takes no pleasure in His sheep being astray, and through the Spirit calls us back into the fold, to enjoy sweet fellowship and provision.

IV. The Sovereignty of the Shepherd (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.](#) David was a man of war, facing death and destruction on many occasions. He had stared death in the face before, but the Lord had preserved his life. He knew what it was to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, but he had learned to trust in the Lord without fear. Regardless of what he faced, he knew the Lord was always near, guiding and protecting Him. He was safe within the sovereign hand of God. What was there to fear when the Lord was near?

- We all face discouraging and even frightening situations in life. Like David, regardless of what we face, the believer enjoys the presence of the Lord. If the Lord doesn't soon return, we all we be forced to face death. Even then there will be no reason to fear, for our Lord will be near. He is our constant Companion and Guide, regardless of the difficulties we face in life.

- David speaks of the Shepherd's rod and staff comforting him in times of distress. A good shepherd always had both and was very familiar with their proper use in varied situations. The rod was a short, club-like tool the shepherd carried. It had a large, heavy end that could be used to crush the head of a wolf or other animal that sought to harm the sheep. The staff was longer with a shepherd's crook on the end. It was used to gently grasp the neck of the sheep and pull them to safety or lovingly correct their path. We enjoy the protection and guidance of our Shepherd. He continually stands in our defense, and is constantly observing the path we travel, providing gentle correction when necessary.

V. The Sufficiency of the Shepherd (5) – [Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.](#) I love the description of peace and rest David offers here, finding complete sufficiency in the Lord. Being a man of war, he knew the difficulties of the battlefield. Meals were often eaten hurriedly, with a great deal of anxiety, fearing an attack from the enemy. David declares the Shepherd has the ability to spread a well filled table for his sheep to enjoy, even in the presence of enemies. While the world was raging around them, the Lord could provide peace and provision in the midst of turmoil.

- He also rejoiced in his head being anointed with oil. This seems foreign to us, but in that culture it was viewed as a sign of honor and acceptance. When a guest was welcomed into a home, his feet were washed and his head was anointed as a sign of welcome and acceptance. Failure to do so was viewed as a sign of contempt and displeasure with the guest. David rejoiced that he was always graciously welcomed by the Shepherd. Every believer enjoys acceptance and access to the Shepherd of our souls!

- As David pondered the sufficiency of his Shepherd, he declared that his cup was literally running over with provision and blessing. While walking this journey of life, the Shepherd had guided each step, and provided for his every need. David couldn't think of a single need he had that hadn't been supplied. He was so blessed, he could not contain all he had received.

VI. The Salvation through the Shepherd (6) – [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.](#) David sums up his experience with the Lord by declaring that through it all, the Shepherd had been faithful. He rested in the salvation of the Lord. This abundant supply was actually two-fold.

- David rejoiced in present grace. [Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.](#) He had enjoyed goodness and mercy throughout his life and he was confident these would follow him as long as he lived. He did not fear facing a day without the goodness and mercy of the Lord. We too can claim this promise and rejoice in the salvation of the Lord.

- He also anticipated future glory. [I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever](#). David rested in the eternal promises of the Shepherd. He knew life on earth was not all for the children of God. He anticipated a future glory, dwelling in the house of the Lord forever. His eternity was secure in the Lord. Eventually death would come, but it would not be final or devastating. Death served as an entrance into the eternal presence of the Lord.
- There is great comfort and assurance for every believer in these words. Those who are saved by grace will dwell in the presence of our Shepherd and Savior forever. He purchased our redemption on the cross of Calvary, removing the condemnation of sin and restoring us unto the Father. Rising triumphant over death in resurrection life, He secured eternal life for all who come to Him by faith in salvation. We have nothing to fear, not even death. When a believer closes their eyes in death, they immediately experience life as never before, in the presence of their Lord and Savior. We have much to rejoice in and look forward too!

Conclusion: We have read a very familiar portion of Scripture. I likely have not shared anything that you were unaware of, but I hope I have challenged you to consider what you have in the Lord. We are blessed beyond measure to have a Shepherd who cares for us and provides for our every need. We enjoy His blessing in this life and anticipate the glories of our future with Him.

If you are struggling away from the fold of fellowship, the Shepherd is calling for you to return to a place of security and provision. If you have never been saved by His grace, the Shepherd of men's souls is calling for you to respond in repentance and faith. Come to Him and receive the gracious provision that He alone can provide!

ⁱ John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Psalms, Volume One: An Expository Commentary.