



Welcome to our All Age Worship Service (28/02/21)

My Shepherd?

Prepared by Mervyn Bedford

My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord there is none like you
All of my days, I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love
My comfort, my shelter, tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am, never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of Your name
I sing for joy at the work of your hands
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have In you.

Words and music by Darlene Zschech

Today we're looking at Psalm 23. It was written by David, who eventually became the King of Israel, but started out as a shepherd caring for his father's sheep. Here is a part of a true story from the bible that gives us a window into what kind of shepherd he was! David is being presented to King Saul because David has said he is willing to fight a giant from the Philistine army.

³³Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth."

³⁴But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, ³⁵I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. ³⁷The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."

1 Samuel 17 :33-37

Happy Birthday Mel

(6th Mar)

God
Bless
You!



Father God, we ask that you would open our eyes to see you in fresh ways today and that you would give us a glimpse of things from your perspective. We invite you to work in each of our lives, that we may know you as our personal shepherd. I ask that you would fill us with faith to walk in your truth and carry your fragrance with us wherever we go, so that more and more people may experience your love. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen**.



I read Psalm 23 as part of a service back in January, and since then the beauty and concepts within these six verses have been percolating through my mind and reaching new places in my heart. Let's read it again and then take some time to reflect on it.

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

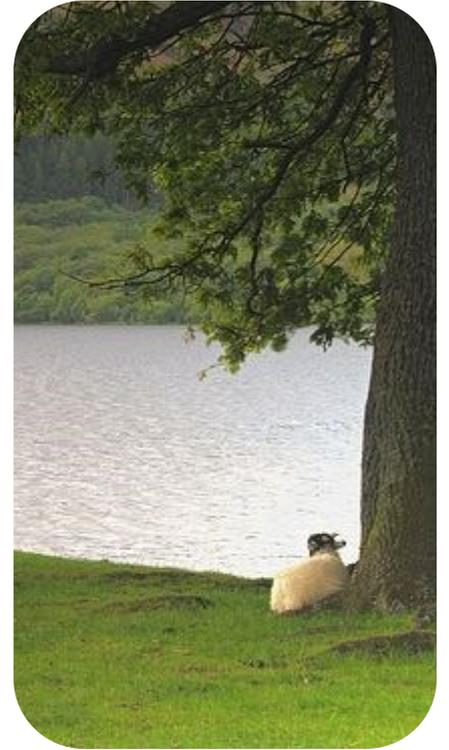
2He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.

3He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for the sake of His name.

4Even 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.

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

6Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.



There is so much that we can unpack from this Psalm, we will by no means exhaust it today, but I would like to share the things that have really blessed me recently.

The first thing I want us to think about is the one word that makes all the difference. It's the spark that lights the fire of faith, the key that starts the engine of faith and brings this psalm, (and in turn the whole Bible to life). It's the word **'MY'**.

David dives straight in by claiming the protection, love and care of God as his own. The Lord is MY shepherd. He could say, The Lord is **a** shepherd, that would be true. He could say, The Lord is **the** shepherd; that too would be true, and slightly more significant, or even **our** shepherd, again wonderful, and true. However, the word **'MY'** takes it to a whole new level of intimacy and personal relationship. Throughout the short psalm David uses the personal words **MY, ME** and **I** seventeen times.

We have seen that David was an excellent shepherd, passionate about caring for his sheep, meeting their needs, and defending them. He then realised that he could be confident that God was caring for him in a similar way.

The question for us is... are we confident in God's care for us? Do we see God as our personal Shepherd? I hope and pray that everyone who hears, or reads this message can confidently say and know in their hearts that God is their shepherd.

I just want to clarify the 'shepherd analogy' here as for me the metaphor is slightly troubling. Within farming practice the relationship between shepherd and sheep can be an exploitative relationship, we basically look after sheep for their wool and to eat them!

However, Jesus wonderfully takes the metaphor to a new level when he says in John 10 **“I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”** With Jesus there is no exploitation but elevation, he lifts us up as his friends and says you’re worth dying for! So Jesus doesn’t exploit us, but elevates us. This is a challenge to us, because as we follow him he calls us to treat other people in the same way as Sallyann reminded us when she talked about the sacrificial love of God.

So, making it personal makes all the difference! Remember what Thomas said when he finally met the risen Jesus...

He declared **“MY Lord and MY God.”** John 20:28

Having established that The Lord is his shepherd, David goes on to list many of the incredible benefits of this relationship. Provision, Care, Restoration, Security, Rest, Victory, Confidence, Blessing and hope for the future. We don’t have time to unpack all of these in this service, so I will just talk about a couple that I have been thinking about recently.



Verse 3 says, **“He restores my soul”** Firstly, this is written in the present tense, not he restored or will restore, but he restores my soul, it’s an ongoing process. Only God knows how deeply damaged and scared we all are as a result of the fall, only God knows how glorious we were before sin entered our DNA and set us on a course of harmful behaviour and self destruction. There have been a few times in my life when I’ve sensed God do something in my life, and I’ve thought... great, I’m restored, fixed, finished, but then over time I can find myself struggling with issues again, only to eventually realise with joy that God is still restoring my soul! Gently removing deeply set lies, healing wounds that we try to ignore and making us face up to our own bad attitudes etc...

He restores my soul! God is still restoring me and God is still restoring you. Thankfully he doesn’t get tired or bored, he’s not in a hurry and he doesn’t cut corners! Emma touched on this wonderful concept when she spoke about the Repair Shop tv programme a few weeks ago. God is our creator and our restorer.

Verse 3 goes on to say **“He guides me in the paths of righteousness”** There is a lovely gentleness in this Psalm, notice it doesn’t say he *forces* me in the paths of righteousness, or pushes, drags or pulls etc, but guides. Within life there are good paths that lead to blessing and bad paths that lead to sorrow. Sometimes the paths are obvious, clearly right or wrong, but sometimes the paths can be unclear. God gives us the gift of free will to choose, but lovingly waits to guide us if we ask for his help. Proverbs 3:6 says **“In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.”**



In a world that pretty much says, 'do whatever you want as long as it doesn't hurt anyone', a concept which on the surface may sound ok, but tends to ultimately devalue us, how wonderful that we can have a shepherd who longs to guide us in the best way.

We see the righteousness of God fully displayed in Jesus! We wander off God's path of



righteousness and get entangled in sin, but Jesus never did. Isaiah 53:6 says "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all."

Interestingly, the Psalm says that he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name sake. When we let Jesus guide us in his good paths, we glorify his name.

Jumping back to verse 2, David gives us the beautiful image of green pastures and still waters, a place of peace and provision. This is a spiritual place that is available for us 24/7. Often our lives are so busy rushing from one thing to another that we can miss out on all the blessings right in front of us, and get frustrated when things don't go at the pace we want. In the ten commandments God commands us to rest one day in seven to really rest in Him. How does God make us lie down in green pastures? Perhaps by slowing us down, could it be that the things that frustrate us may be God getting us to a point where we stop struggling and lie down in green pastures in a place of trust?

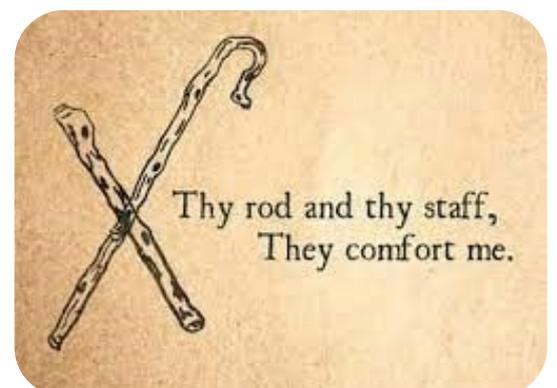


Verse 4 talks about not fearing the shadow of death and being comforted by the rod and staff. Two wooden shepherding tools of slightly different length used for various tasks including defence, and support, they don't sound like the most comforting things. However, I remember someone saying once that Shepherds sometimes carried the rod on their shoulders in a horizontal position while holding the staff in a vertical position creating a wooden cross. Could it be that the rod and the staff are a foretelling of the cross of Jesus? We don't know for certain, but we do know that nothing has brought more comfort to humanity than what Jesus did for us on the cross!

We also know that death has been reduced to a shadow for those who believe in Jesus, because he is the God of resurrection, and promises eternal life to his followers.

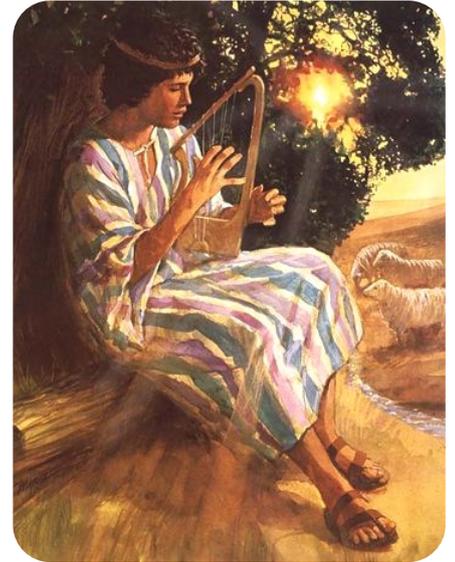
James spoke last week about Jesus inviting us to his banquet, and verse 5 talks about God preparing a feast for us, where his endless abundance is portrayed by an overflowing cup.

God has limitless resources at his disposal and will ultimately satisfy the deepest longings of all his people, as displayed by Jesus turning water into wine.



Verse 6 assures us that God's goodness and mercy will never be too far away as we journey through life, and that when our lives here end, we have a permanent home in God's house. Jesus himself said to his disciples "In my Father's house are many mansions and I'm going there to prepare a place for you" John 14:2

Back to David's sheep for a moment... If I was a sheep that could choose any shepherd, I'd choose David, because I know he'd care for me and keep me well fed and safe. I know that whatever predator tried to creep up on me, David would be watching over me and able to wipe out whatever comes against me. Also, I'd enjoy watching him use his sling and listening to him play his harp. Wow! No wonder they were happy sheep! (As part of the online service we sing a song called Happy Sheep.) Thankfully I'm not a sheep, but I do get the opportunity of choosing to make Jesus my personal shepherd! Am I a happy sheep, trusting in the provision and care and timing of God or am I fretting and fussing?



In Matt 11 :28 Jesus invites us all to come to him and find rest. There is room in God's flock for you and me. Perhaps as you read this you may not have realised how much God cares for you, and that you can bring your life completely under his care, and call him YOUR shepherd. Or perhaps you've known that God loves you for many years, but have never come to a point where you know deep in your heart that he is YOUR shepherd? Either way, why not pray today

and ask Jesus to be YOUR shepherd, so you can say with confidence... The Lord is MY shepherd. You'll find he's not a sleeping partner; the title 'Lord' assures us he'll make changes in our lives. However, he will never devalue you and everything he does in you life is for your ultimate good.

May we all be able to say with great joy... The Lord is MY shepherd. Amen

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the fellowship of
The Holy Spirit be with us all, now
and evermore. Amen**

