

Shepherd and Friend: Psalm 23:1-6

The LORD
is my
Shepherd

Psalm 23
Ps Paul



A. Introduction

1. Most people's favourite book in the Bible is the book of Psalms. And undoubtedly Ps 23 is *the favourite psalm of all time*. Jews love it. Eastern Orthodox love it. Catholics love it. And the Protestants love it. This 3,000-year-old psalm never fails to speak to the people of all generations and gives tremendous comfort and encouragement.
2. A Psalm of David – *It is possibly one of David's life psalms*. David's deep, tender, trusting relationship with the Lord is shown in its depth and beauty in the simplicity of this psalm.
 - a. Different shepherding methods:
 - i. Shepherding in those days required constant movement – travelling 15 miles a day to find pastures for feeding;
 - ii. It was a 24/7 job. Shepherds slept with their sheep;
 - iii. Shepherds had close relationships with their sheep and called them by 'name' – Spotty, Snowy, Blackie, etc. Sheep were primarily raised for 'wool' rather than 'meat' in those days.

b. 'I am the Good Shepherd.' (Jn 10:11)

This statement of Jesus comes from Ps 23. Believers are likened to sheep, Herod to a 'fox', and the brute soldiers to 'bulls' (Ps 22). What does it take for a grown man to acknowledge that he needs a shepherd for his life? But David did even as a king!

- i. Sheep easily goes astray. *'All we like sheep have gone astray...'* (Ps 53:6)
- ii. It is an admission that 'I am not self-sufficient.'

We don't claim *'I did it my way'*, but *'I need the Lord's protection, provision, guidance, help, and comfort. I need my 'Good Shepherd. God, take the steering wheel of my life.'*

It takes humility and wisdom to accept that it is beyond man's ability to be self-sufficient, to chart his life's course; to know what lies beyond the grave and face it with confidence; to know how to work and how to rest; to keep his soul refreshed from life's bitter experience and disappointments; to keep on walking only in the path of righteousness without turning from it; to courageously face and walk through valley of shadow of death.

Therefore, this psalm opens with an honest confession of David - God is his Shepherd and David, and he is a sheep that follows his Shepherd!

B. V1 'The LORD is my shepherd.' - David's Creed

- a. 'YHWH IS' – one word in Hebrew (present continuous tense). 'YHWH' is God's personal name. It means 'I AM (Always)'. No other god, but YHWH the ever-present God, is my Shepherd. This confession makes the rest of the psalm 'true.'
- b. Sheep-Shepherd Relationship is one of 'total dependence.' Sheep can't run fast. They can't hunt animals. They have no sharp teeth or claws. They can't camouflage. They can't defend themselves. They just eat grass. Their only chance at survival is their shepherd. Their life depends on hearing the shepherd's voice and following him. This is the only thing sheep are good at. Note: not so the oats.
- c. 'I shall not want.' (Heb. 'chaser' = 'need') What a statement! *'The Lord is my Shepherd and that's all I want!'* It is the confession of total trust in the Lord's leadership over my life as my total provider. I am at peace and unafraid to face the future because of the Lord's leadership over my life. How many contented people do we meet in life?

This is a confession that deeply honours and pleases God. It is a statement of trust in God's ultimate goodness, which glorifies Him. *'God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him.'* Are we learning contentment and rest in the Lord?

C. V2 'He makes me lie down in green pastures.' – 'Rest, Guidance, Providence'

- a. Lesson #1 – 'Rest' - We are not good at this! Shepherds cannot push their sheep too hard. They cannot move more than 15 miles a day, yet they need to keep the sheep in constant move to new pastures for resting and feeding. Shepherding is a highly skilled work! Our Lord doesn't make us march all day without proper rest along the way. Sometimes He must 'MAKE' us to lie down. The noon heat is too much. Modern life's sickness is restlessness. The biblical day starts with rest – evening and morning. Rest is related to Worship! *Much ill comes from putting work before worship!*
- b. Lesson #2 - 'Guidance & Providence' *'He leads me beside the still waters.'* Guidance and provision come with the rest. Grazing in green pasture and drinking at the still waters. Sheep cannot drink in choppy water because their mouth and nose are too close.
- c. Balance: 'Lying down' and 'Moving'; 'Rest' and 'Work'; 'Feeding (Word)' and 'Drinking (Spirit)'.

D. V3 'He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.'

- a. Restoration - The Lord puts life and energy back into weary hearts. We cause and receive hurts, experience disappointments, and at times carry deep scars in our soul that make life wearisome.
When you fall, how do you get back up? Sheep don't know how to get back up when they fall. So the shepherds stay near them to help them get up. So, also our Good Shepherd provides ongoing healing and restoration for our soul. He helps us to get back up when we feel we are done.
- b. Shepherd's pathway – *'...in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.'* Have you seen a sheep track? *It is very narrow.* Sheep will go astray until it is 'trained' not to. *'The chastening of the Lord yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.'* (Heb 12:11) Why? *Because we bear His name.* We have the imprint of God's own DNA! This is discipleship. 'Righteous living is more important than so-called successful living.'

E. V4 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.'

- a. There is a sudden change in David's psalm. David is now looking at the *'valley of the shadow of death.'* Even though we do not like it, we must pass through this valley. ['death' is supplied by the translator.] Shepherds must cross the deep Jordan valley where wild animals - jackals, foxes, lions - come out looking for prey. Usually at dawn and dusk, long shadows are cast over the valley. (Earlier years & twilight years?)
- b. David's dark valleys
 - i. Chased by Saul and his military for many years like a dog.
 - ii. Almost pinned to the wall by Saul's spear twice.
 - iii. Lived in the holes and caves.
 - iv. Forced to run for his life into the enemy's territory, feigned 'madness' to survive, etc.
- c. No other poetry or song articulates the depth of human suffering like the Psalms. (Ps 39; 42; 43; 88) They provide endless comfort when you are walking through deep dark valley.
- d. But David makes this confession - 'I will fear no evil.' Why?
 - i. Because of the *LORD's presence!*
 - ii. Because of His protection. *'For You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.'* Rod is a defensive weapon to chase away wild animals. Staff is a guiding crook to pull back the straying sheep.
- e. Notice the change in David's reference to the Lord from 'He' to 'You' in the newly found intimacy. *'I thought I knew You, but I never knew You like this!'* In the valley of the shadow of death, David found that the Lord was not walking ahead of him, but with him like a friend! (C.f. 'Footprint')

F. V5 'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over.'

- a. There is a change of perspective - from outdoor to indoor. On the other side of the valley, there is a table prepared for you – the table of the Lord. It is a table of a great feast and great honour. You are sitting on

one side and the LORD is sitting on the other side. You are barely aware of your enemies looking in from the outside. You are inside at the table, stunned by the luxury and honour bestowed on you at the head of the banqueting table. It is a public banquet the Lord has prepared for you as the guest of honour!

- b. Ancient Middle Eastern hospitality for the guest of honour: (1) bring the best food they can afford; (2) anoint your head with fragrant oil; (3) personally pour a cup of drink before a meal. (My mother-in-law always poured to the brim! *'I will give you all I can!'*) The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is pouring the best wine (which He has saved for this day - Matt 26:29). And He is not holding back the wine although your cup overflows. We call it a waste, but the Lord calls it 'My extravagant love.' [like the alabaster jar from Mary of Bethany].
- c. You are so blessed and honoured, and your enemy simply fades into the background. You don't even see them. You are so blown away by the LORD's kindness that there is no room for anyone or anything else. One day you will be sitting at the table of the Lord. And you will not remember your enemies as the Lord wipes away every tear from your eyes. It is called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

G. V6 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.'

- a. 'goodness' can be translated as 'generosity' and 'mercy'. It is a covenant word for loyalty and love used in weddings.
- b. Notice 'they' follow you as you follow the Lord and walk with Him. He is your consuming desire, passion, and your life's highest goal. He is your Shepherd and Friend. 'Follow' in Hebrew (chased) means sheep are chased by wild animals! But David says only God's goodness and mercy will chase him all the days of his life!
- c. 'I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.' This was the ultimate vision of David's life. A lot of people do not have a clear vision for their lives as David did – 'dwelling in the house of God forever!' Where there is no more pain, sorrow, sickness, death, darkness, sin, curse, etc. Only unending joy, endless life, unending fellowship with the saints of God, rewards, worship, and glory of God forever! 'One thing I have desired of the Lord...' (Ps 27:4)
- d. *Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.'* (John 10:11) Will you confess this Jesus as the Shepherd of your soul?