

Psalm 23

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Preacher: Clifford Taylor

[0 : 00] Thanks for coming for our Lord's Supper service this evening.! If you don't know me, my name is Steve. I'm the pastor of the church here and one of the leaders.! And Clifford here, who's one of our church members, is going to be preaching for us tonight on Psalm 23.

But before we get there, we're going to just look quickly at 1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 24 and 25. It's on page 1218 in the church Bibles.

1 Peter, chapter 2. Trying to link together what we're looking at this morning with what we're looking at this evening. So Psalm 23, obviously the famous psalm about the Lord being our shepherd.

And we were thinking this morning about Romans 3 and the Lord Jesus bearing our sins in his body on the cross. And that's picked up here in 1 Peter, chapter 2.

Verses 24 and 25. So I'm going to read them. I'm going to pray for us. And we'll begin that way. Let's read God's words. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

[1 : 20] By his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray. But now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we thank you that the Lord Jesus bore in his body our sins on the cross so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness.

Thank you that his wounds on the cross are the source of our healing and wholeness. Thank you that though we were wandering far from you, you have now brought us back to the Lord Jesus, the shepherd and overseer of our souls.

And we pray for our time together this evening. We do ask, Lord, as we come to look at your word and hear it together, we ask that you might speak to us and encourage us.

We pray that we might know what it is to be being pursued by you, that you come after us and love us and take care of us.

[2 : 32] And pray as we share the Lord's Supper together this evening, that you might just remind us and refresh our confidence in what Jesus has done. So bless us in our time together this evening, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, if you turn your Bibles to Psalm 23. Psalm 23. If you head to the middle, you'll be about right.

It's page 555. In the church Bibles, page 555. Psalm 23. So I'm going to read it for us, and then I'm going to hand over to Clifford, who's going to preach God's word for us.

Psalm 23. A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

[3 : 31] Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely, your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen. Amen.

Good evening. Thank you for your welcome. Thank you for the opportunity, Steve, to share with you all this evening. I'm feeling nervous because I haven't done this for a long time, and Steve is looking at me.

Let's pray together. Amen. And so we acknowledge the fresh Lord that you are our rock and our redeemer. And so we come to you now and we ask that you would indeed speak to us through your word, your living word, your eternal truth.

[4 : 50] Help us to hear. Help us to understand. Give us a heart that are obedient to you. In Jesus' name. Amen. I suspect this evening as you come and look at this psalm, as you keep your Bibles open, it is one of the most popular psalms in all of the collection of the 150 psalms.

It is so popular that I've heard it read out in weddings, in funerals, anniversaries, birthdays, and children's dedications.

It's a psalm of great beauty, describing the peace, calm, and delight which dwells with the person whose trust is wholly in God.

David is the most likely author of this psalm, but he cannot be placed in the poem in a period of his lifetime. When David wrote this psalm, he appears to be experiencing a period of rest and refreshment in verse 1 to 3.

Prosperity and abundance in verse 5. His thoughts seem to be happy thoughts, and he lacks nothing. He has no fear. God's mercy and goodness are with him.

[6 : 13] And David feels assured that they will continue to be with him all the days of his life in verse 6a. Moreover, David has one desire for the future, and that desire is to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, verse 6b.

But in verse 4, there's a shift in the psalm, and David is confronted with the dark and dismal inevitability of death. But you notice in the psalm, even in this dark place, in his life experience, David is resolute.

He is confident. He will fear no evil. I draw your attention to the fact that the Lord is mentioned at least 10 times in this psalm, direct or indirectly, to emphasize and point to the fact that the psalm is not about David.

It is about the Lord. And so some commentators have suggested, and I quote, no amount of Hebrew scholarship can possibly let anyone into the deep meaning of the psalm.

No attainment in English literature will ever initiate any student into the mysteries of a mother's love. And no attainment in oriental learning will help anyone to learn the secret of the Lord, which is here disclosed in this psalm.

[7 : 46] There's nothing to equal in it in sacred books of the East, for none but the Hebrews has ever had such disclosure of God as that which is written by the psalm and which he rejoices in.

He went on to say that every clause in the psalm is suggestive enough to be at the basis of a separate disclosure in speech or in writing.

Unquote. This psalm is also famous among God's people because it has been identified as a messianic psalm that speaks about Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the anointed one, the one who is to come to be the Savior of the world.

It portrays Jesus as a good shepherd in John 10, 11. He gave his life for the sheep and he knows the sheep and his sheep follows him. He's portrayed as a chief shepherd in 1 Peter 5, 4.

And in Hebrews 13 and verse 20, he is the great shepherd of the sheep. And of course, in Revelation chapter 16 and verse 17, in Revelation chapter 7 and verse 16 to 17, he is portrayed as the divine shepherd.

[9 : 13] In verse 1, David said, the Lord is my shepherd. To have been able to write this psalm is one of the greatest honors given to David. The content of the psalm comes fresh to us as though it was written yesterday.

They make their home in every language. The psalm touches, inspire and comfort us not as an echo or repeat of someone's opinion from 3,000 years ago, but as the voice of a living friend.

The child repeats the psalm as she sits on the mother's knees. The ordinary Christian loves the psalm for its simplicity as for as much as its beauty.

The psalm for Am falls like music on the six-man air and warms his heart as he's alone in his room. And as you reflect on his life, he's able to say, like the psalmist, the Lord is my shepherd.

The dying Christian says, this is my psalm and change themselves up with the words of faith and courage as he enters the dark valley of the shadow of death. And he says, the Lord is my shepherd.

[10 : 28] These words of the psalm is not written because of poetic license. These opening words of the psalm bears the stamp of deep, intimate, personal, lived experience of a person who has a relationship with his Lord.

David, the young shepherd boy, might have sung this psalm about his famous past experience for his years in the open fields with the sheep into the glorious future. with the mature veteran looking back to his youth, sees in the psalm the true meaning.

He could not have seen a light shining along the path that leads not to Jerusalem but leads to heaven and his Lord.

And something has gone wrong. I've missed the page. Sorry. Sorry. And so the background and context of this psalm we must remember that before David became a king in Israel he was a shepherd.

He spent many years in the open field with his sheep protecting them from lions, wolves, bears and caring for them. So when David asserts that the Lord is my shepherd he's not using a random metaphor.

[11 : 53] he's speaking from a deep personal and lived experience. David knew from his first hand experience what it meant to be a shepherd. My brothers and sisters and visiting friends to be a shepherd in ancient Israel was a big deal.

Owning sheep was a valuable business providing milk, wool, mostly certainly providing for the means of sacrifice for the worship of God's people at the temple in Jerusalem.

But David was also the spiritual shepherd of his people being the king. And as it's true this personal intimate relationship with God he was able to say the Lord Jehovah is my shepherd.

Jehovah is my pastor, my shepherd. He is my Lord. My brothers and sisters if we are able to see the truth that experience what all this means and if we know the significance and the glory of this statement and all of us could embrace this truth this evening and apply it all to our hearts and lives there is a sense in which that all that is all we need for our lives to know that the Lord is our shepherd.

We can leave here this evening with the clarity and conviction and certainty that David had when he said the Lord is my shepherd.

[13 : 26] I lack nothing says David. The reason that the fact that the Lord is his shepherd his ideal shepherd he's the one who's the one most perfect he's ideal and suitable to meet David's needs in every department of his life.

it seems to me that the shepherd of his people the nation and the church of Israel in Ezekiel brings this out the Lord Jehovah compares himself with the under shepherd who were feeding themselves instead of feeding the people they were meant to.

But Jehovah the good shepherd says that he would come himself and seek out the sheep rescue and gather them and he says I will be the shepherd to my people.

So Jehovah he is the ideal shepherd because he is unlimited he is in his omnipotence all the people will be fed.

He is the ideal shepherd because he is unchanging in his love for his people. he is unlimited in his faithfulness he is unlimited in his mercy he is unlimited in his goodness towards his people his grace towards his people is so unlimited that Peter called Jesus the chief shepherd who not only gave himself his life for the sheep he is also employed on the shepherd to feed the sheep in John 21.

[15 : 10] in 1 Peter 2 and 4 he says be the shepherd of God's flock that is under your care watching over them not because you must but because you are willing as God wants you to be not pursuing this honest game but eager to serve not lording over God's people but being examples to the flock when the chief shepherd appears he will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away Lord's my shepherd I shall not want but what does that mean I shall not want surely David is not saying that he will get everything that he sets his heart on and ask God for because the Lord is his shepherd no he's not saying that but what he is saying I believe is that because the Lord is his shepherd he's saying I have everything that I need in the

Lord I will not knock nothing will decrease I would not go without David is saying because God is my shepherd I will never be without what is truly necessary for me or he is my provider he provides all that I need not all that I want this means if he need peace he will provide it if he needs strength he will provide it if he need wisdom he gets it from the Lord the Lord is not just a provider he is the provider in his person in his being in his presence he provides well the Bible is full of story of God showing up and providing for his people at the point of their need and very often in the most unexpected ways you remember the

Lord providing the manna for the people in the wilderness! Exodus 16 when the Israelites had no food in a barren wasted land the Lord shows up and he provided in 1 Kings chapter 17 and verse 1 when the prophet Elijah had no food to eat God instructed a raven to bring him bread and meat in the morning and in the evening breakfast and supper in Matthew 5 and 4 Jesus feeding the 5,000

with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish were not a problem for him because he is the good shepherd and he is able to meet us at the point of our knee the God of the Bible never failed to provide for his people this is the message from the Bible from Genesis to

Revelation God is able to meet you at the point of your knee the problem that we stress about needs instead of us believing that he will provide I can tell you many instances that God had provided for us especially when I was at my first Bible college I share with a brother here I'm not going to call his name because I'm going to embarrass him that I was at Bible college and I was calling to the secretary office and asked why I haven't paid my fees and I said to him well look I have been here two years and God hasn't failed me and he will provide and he said well he better hurry up the next day God provided me amen God will provide you see we worry and say about the future!

instead of trusting God we chase after different things in the belief that and hope that he will fulfill us instead of resting and trusting in what God has already given to us to us to be to the shepherd thinking and believing that it will find better food on its own but what happens that instead it gets lost it gets hungry and it puts itself in danger and becomes vulnerable to various predators when in fact the best place the sheep can be is close to the shepherd and the place you and I can be this evening is being in the presence of the Lord the psalmist said in his presence is fullness of joy and delight forevermore blessed be is in his presence there's no better place to be you see by recognizing that

[20 : 31] God knows what you need before you ask him says Jesus Matthew 6 Paul encourages us to pray with expectation in Philippians 4 and 6 he says that we should not be anxious about anything but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present our requests to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard our hearts and that's the emphasis the peace of God that transcends all will guard our hearts excuse me from anxiety undue concerns we need to trust God we need to learn to trust God I need to learn to trust God a little more see Jesus wrote ring out to us this evening from Matthew 6 22 32 to 33 he says do not worry for your heavenly father knows the emphasis do not worry for who knows your heavenly father knows what your needs are don't want to be some patronizing but we're not talking about transient truth we're talking about eternal truth

God knows your needs he knows my he knows it even before you think about it kind of make you feel uncomfortable I feel uncomfortable when I'm in my study and I'm thinking about this and I'm thinking that I have to share this with you I am learning and you're learning that he knows your name and my name even before you think about it and you see the point that I think that is being made here because God of the Bible has never failed to provide for his people we all of us without fail need to rest on his promises and his timing I was sharing with the brother the same brother again about

God's timing and God has never led me up at cul-de-sac and I became a Christian on the 20th of January 1973 and I can tell you without any embarrassment or not boasting God has never led me up a cul-de-sac yet and I think this is what the psalmist is trying to convey in the psalm when you first read the psalm if you were standing at a bus stop or in a train or a bus and someone said the Lord is my shepherd you would look at him this day the psalmist is trying to convey something that I feel is very pertinent he's trying to convey that he has an assurance of a relationship with the Lord and the question that comes to my mind as

I share with you have you got that assurance you see the writer picks up this doesn't he blessed assurance Jesus is mine oh what a foretaste of glory divine heirs of salvation purchased of God born of his spirit washed in his blood these are not throwaway comments my brothers and sisters these are profound words and these words that you see in this time is serious words the psalmist is saying something that God by his spirit and his wisdom has brought you here to hear and Jesus said he that has the ears to hear let him hear see the God of the Bible is never late he's always on time you need to remember that God delay in answering your prayer is not his denial of prayer sometimes we get frustrated because we believe that

God deals with us like McDonald's instant and it doesn't work like that not the God of the Bible he's a God of your making God doesn't work like that and so when David said the Lord is my shepherd I shall not what what I believe he's saying and I stand to be corrected that as long as God he has God he doesn't lack anything as long as he has God doesn't mean that he wouldn't want breakfast tomorrow morning or he wouldn't want to go to work but he's saying in his heart his mind his

relationship he lacks nothing you see the psalmist is not writing about material need he's not writing about his spiritual need so my brothers and sisters and friends we do not have to chase after the things of the world to look and feel secure we most certainly do not have to worry about tomorrow and what it holds for us you see what

[26 : 26] David is saying is our shepherd is already ahead of us and we have everything we need in him and so let us take a deep breath and know that we are never without we lack nothing because our shepherd is always with us and he provides for me verse two he makes me lie down and rest in green pastures if we are honest with ourselves this evening not many of us know how to rest if the truth is told we are more comfortable with our busy business and restlessness and when we are at rest but if we are if we if we serve an all powerful shepherd why are we so restless why am I so restless why do I get agitated sometimes see when

David wrote these words he makes me lie down in green past they sound so peaceful and so tranquil do they not there may be more deeper truth in these words than we ought to miss this evening and I'm able to expand because Steve has told me that I am limited in my time if we know anything about sheep we will be aware that they do not lie down easily in fact a sheep will only lie down when they are first free from fear we see sheep are easily frightened the tiniest disturbance like a shadow or a wind blowing against the branches of a tree will keep them on edge secondly the sheep will only lie down if they are free from tension sheep have a hierarchy and if there is conflict in the herd they will remain restless thirdly if the sheep is hungry they will remain restless finally if there are any flies and parasites attacking the sheep they make it impossible for the sheep to relax and rest

God the good shepherd wants to lead us into true rest but many of us are spiritually restless why because we are full of fear we are worried about the future we live in our lives full of tensions with some of us holding on to grudges and forgiveness from the past we are distracted and irritated by constant noise life as we live in a fallen world and so what God does sometimes God forces us into rest when we think about it how many times God has had to show us to shut us down for a variety of reason when we think about it God works in ways that are so profoundly mysterious it leaves us perplexed and confused and yet he is in control maybe through a time of waiting God wants you to rest or through a period of sickness or job loss or a door that did not open as you expected perhaps expected it to he closes his door and if we are being honest as we go through some of those experiences at times we felt frustrating but what

God in fact was leading you to is rest God does not force us to rest because he is cruel he does it because he loves us and have our best interests at her and in the context of Psalm 23 and God's words the secret of rest is resting in the shepherd trusting in the shepherd sheep only lie down if they feel safe in the presence of the shepherd in the same way we will never experience true rest until we learn that God is in control he's in control when we are on the mountain top and he's in control when we are in the valley he's in control when we feel good about ourselves and he's in control when we don't feel good about ourselves God is in control remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 11 28 come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your soul now that needs to be in part doesn't it but time would not allow me to do so but just to say that this is a promise from Jesus the good shepherd so that you and

I do not have to carry every burden and care alone he speaks about cast your care upon me because I care for you so today whatever is making and keeping you restless your fears your burdens and your stresses please give them to Jesus the good shepherd because when you are in relationship with Jesus the good shepherd you can finally breathe with the knowledge that you're safe you can rest when I was at Bible College in Scotland where I did missiology it was a missionary college and very often when the people when the students were going out to people like China even India India and so on Nepal there's a hymn that had a recurring theme that brought a lot of emotions in the college and it goes something like this we rest on thee our shield our defender we go forth not alone against the foe strong in thy strength and in thy keeping tender we rest on thee and in thy name we go hold that heart strength rest trusting obeying and then

[33 : 34] I'm doing alright good thank you he he leaves me beside the waters the imagery here is something like if you are standing beside the lake calm and tranquil and the sound around the lake is peaceful but why does the sheep need still and quiet waters you may ask well the answer is quite simple sheep that's naturally afraid of fast moving water you see if the sheep fall into the fast

moving water its wool gets soaked and heavy and it can quickly drown so a good shepherd does not lead the sheep to a dangerous flow stream but he finds calms and quiet flowing stream where the shepherd can drink water safely what does this mean for us many of us might be drowning in the rushing waters right now of the busy life some of us might be caught up with the rushing waters of business and be always on the move never stopping some of us are involved in the rushing waters of social media with incessant texting and attention to your phone noise and there is no peace and yet

David says with his Lord he is led by the still waters I'm going to close with the last because I want to preach again so I don't want Steve to ban me so I'm going to pray he wrote restore my soul and I believe this is a conduit for the rest of the psalm I believe the psalmist here is asking us to see his life in a different light where he is restored you see this restoration here is to give back something that was lost or taken away the psalmist here is looking back I believe on 2 Samuel chapter 12 and 13 when he committed adultery committed murder treachery lies my brothers and sisters this experience in David's life left an indelible mark on him what I find disturbing about that story is the fact that when

Bathsheba's husband was eventually killed David sent a message to Joab and said to him don't let this trouble you can I say to you my brothers and sisters the thing that does not trouble us troubles God the sin that does not disturb us disturbs God and God heard what David did saw what David did understood what David did and he sent Nathan to David and sending him Nathan was able to tell him a little story that indicated that something was wrong and David draw a conclusion that the person who stole the sheep was wrong and Nathan said you are the man and David confessed his sin and as a result of that he was restored restored myself he was restored

I wonder if the Lord has brought you here this evening that he may restore you to himself for whatever the reason you know that Peter was also restored he had failed the Lord Jesus miserably yet we find in John 21 around a barbecue breakfast of fish Jesus asked him three times do you love me and what Jesus said to Peter he said to you and me this evening as he was restored and recommissioned Jesus said to him follow me and I'm sure that those words rang in Peter's heart like a dagger but a dagger of love you see because in Matthew chapter 4 the lake of Galilee Jesus had called Peter to follow him and he would remember that and the rest is history he followed the Lord Jesus may God help us to have the assurance and the confidence to be able to say the Lord is my shepherd and to follow him as an obedient sheep for Jesus sake Amen