

Commentary Booklet on Psalm 23



The Lord is MY Shepherd

Psalm 23:1 NKJV

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October: Introduction Psalm 23:1-6

Taken from “The Lord is My Shepherd” by Robert J. Morgan:

Now more than ever, we Christians need the peace and power of Psalm 23.

Many of us are far too busy. The stresses of life are wearing us down, little by little, and the noise around us can be an unending cacophony of confusion. Our lives—with all our electronic tethers, emotional entanglements, and financial pressures—are more demanding than ever. We’re simply not resting, not managing our clocks and calendars as we’d like, and as a result, we are often anxious and angry, even when we don’t realize it. We’re pulled in so many directions, as if we were twistable toys in the hands of a toddler.

But consider this: the six verses and about a hundred words of Scripture that make up Psalm 23—the passage that lovingly likens us to sheep—can improve the serenity of our lot every day, because every lot needs a few sheep, and all sheep need a good shepherd.

From the moment it was penned three thousand years ago, the Twenty-third Psalm has been the world’s best-known and most-beloved poem. It’s been engraved on the hearts of every generation from antiquity to modernity. It’s been quoted across the centuries and through the millennia. Its words have blessed millions of sickrooms and thousands of classrooms. It’s been quoted in hospitals, jails, homes, and churches; in open-air rallies and underground meetings; in seasons of peace and in times of war. It’s been whispered by the bedsides of sleepy children and spoken as the last words of dying convicts. It’s the most memorized and memorialized passage in the Bible.

In a hundred words (only fifty-five in the original Hebrew), Psalm 23 sums up all our needs in life and all the abundance of God’s grace. It begins with “The Lord,” and it ends with “forever.” What could be better than that?

When the Lord is our Shepherd, that is enough. *He* is enough. Enough to meet our needs, calm our nerves, clear our vision, restore our souls, ensure our future, and bless our day.

So take a moment, open the windows, read aloud these timeless words, and practice for yourself the peace and the power of Psalm 23 and its all-sufficient Shepherd.

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

*²He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.*

*³He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of
righteousness for His name's sake.*

*⁴Yea, 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 runs over.*

*⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me all the days of my life.
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever. (NKJV)*

Read the Introduction pages ix-xi in “A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23” by W. Phillip Keller.

November: The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

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Taken from “The Treasury of David Psalm 23” by Charles H. Spurgeon:

Verse 1. “The Lord is my shepherd.” What condescension is this, that the infinite Lord assumes towards his people the office and character of a Shepherd! It should be the subject of grateful admiration that the great God allows himself to be compared to anything which will set forth his great love and care for his own people. David had himself been a keeper of sheep, and understood both the needs of the sheep and the many cares of a shepherd. He compares himself to a creature weak, defenseless, and foolish, and he takes God to be his Provider, Preserver, Director, and, indeed, his everything. No man has a right to consider himself the Lord’s sheep unless his nature has been renewed for the scriptural description of unconverted men does not picture them as sheep, but as wolves or goats. A sheep is an object of property, not a wild animal; its owner sets great store by it, and frequently it is bought with a great price. It is well to know, as certainly David did, that we belong to the Lord. There is a noble tone of confidence about this sentence. There is no “if” nor “but,” nor even “I hope so;” but he says, “The Lord *is* my shepherd.” We must cultivate the spirit of assured dependence upon our heavenly Father. The sweetest word of the whole is that monosyllable, “*My*.” He does not say, “The Lord is the shepherd of the world at large, and leadeth forth the multitude as his flock,” but “The Lord is *my* shepherd;” if he be a Shepherd to no one else, he is a Shepherd to *me*; he cares for *me*, watches over *me*, and preserves *me*. The words are in the present tense. Whatever be the believer’s position, he is even now under the pastoral care of Jehovah.

The next words are a sort of inference from the first statement—they are sententious and positive—“*I shall not want.*” I might want otherwise, but when the Lord is my Shepherd he is able to supply my needs, and he is certainly willing to do so, for his heart is full of love, and therefore “*I shall not want.*” I shall not lack for *temporal things*. Does he not feed the ravens, and cause the lilies to grow? How, then, can he leave his children to starve? I shall not want *for spirituals*, I know that his grace will be sufficient for me. Resting in him he will say to me, “As thy day so shall thy strength be.” I may not possess all that I wish for, but “I shall not *want.*” Others, far wealthier and wiser than I, may want, but “I *shall not.*”

“The young lions *do* lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” It is not only “I do not want,” but “I *shall not* want.” Come what may, if famine should devastate the land, or calamity destroy the city, “*I shall not want.*” Old age with its feebleness shall not bring me any lack, and even death with its gloom shall not find me destitute. I have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have skill and wit with which to win my bread, but because “*The Lord is my shepherd.*” The wicked always want, but the righteous never; a sinner’s heart is far from satisfaction, but a gracious spirit dwells in the palace of content.

December: He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. Psalm 23:2 NKJV

Verse 2. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.” The Christian life has two elements in it, the contemplative and the active, and both of these are richly provided for. First, the contemplative. “*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*” What are these “*green pastures*” but the Scriptures of truth—always fresh, always rich, and never exhausted? There is no fear of biting the bare ground where the grass is long enough for the flock to lie down in it. Sweet and full are the doctrines of the gospel; fit food for souls, as tender grass is natural nutriment for sheep. When by faith we are enabled to find rest in the promises, we are like the sheep that lie down in the midst of the pasture; we find at the same moment both provender and peace, rest and refreshment, serenity and satisfaction. But observe: “*He maketh me to lie down.*” It is the Lord who graciously enables us to perceive the preciousness of his truth, and to feed upon it. How grateful ought we to be for the power to appropriate the promises! There are some distracted souls who would give worlds if they could but do this. They know the blessedness of it, but they cannot say that this blessedness is theirs. They know the “*green pastures,*” but they are not made to “*lie down*” in them. Those believers who have for years enjoyed a “full assurance of faith” should greatly bless their gracious God.

The second part of a vigorous Christian’s life consists in gracious activity. We not only think, but we act. We are not always lying down to feed, but are journeying onward toward perfection; hence we read, “*he leadeth me beside the still waters.*” What are these “*still waters*” but the influences and graces of his blessed Spirit? His Spirit attends us in various operations, like waters—in the plural—to cleanse, to refresh, to fertilize,

to cherish. They are “*still waters*,” for the Holy Ghost loves peace, and sounds no trumpet of ostentation in his operations. He may flow into our soul, but not into our neighbor’s, and therefore our neighbor may not perceive the divine presence; and though the blessed Spirit may be pouring his floods into one heart, yet he that sitteth next to the favored one may know nothing of it.

“In sacred silence of the mind
My heaven, and there my God I find.”

Still waters run deep. Nothing more noisy than an empty drum. That silence is golden indeed in which the Holy Spirit meets with the souls of his saints. Not to raging waves of strife, but to peaceful streams of holy love does the Spirit of God conduct the chosen sheep. He is a dove, not an eagle; the dew, not the hurricane. Our Lord leads us beside these “*still waters*;” we could not go there of ourselves, we need his guidance, therefore it is said, “*he leadeth me*.” He does not drive us. Moses drives us by the law, but Jesus leads us by his example, and the gentle drawing of his love.

January: He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Psalm 23:3 NKJV

Verse 3. “He restoreth my soul.” When the soul grows sorrowful he revives it; when it is sinful he sanctifies it; when it is weak he strengthens it. “*He*” does it. His ministers could not do it if he did not. His Word would not avail by itself. “*He restoreth my soul.*” Are any of us low in grace? Do we feel that our spirituality is at its lowest ebb? He who turns the ebb into the flood can soon restore our soul. Pray to him, then, for the blessing—“Restore thou me, thou Shepherd of my soul!”

“*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.*” The Christian delights to be obedient, but it is the obedience of love, to which he is constrained by the example of his Master. “*He leadeth me.*” The Christian is not obedient to some commandments and neglectful of others; he does not pick and choose, but yields to all. Observe, that the plural is used—the *paths* of righteousness.” Whatever God may give us to do we would do it, led by his love. Some Christians overlook the blessing of sanctification, and yet to a thoroughly renewed heart this is one of the sweetest gifts of the covenant. If we could be *saved* from wrath, and

yet remain unregenerate, impenitent sinners, we should not be saved as we desire, for we mainly and chiefly pant to be saved from sin and led in the way of holiness. All this is done out of pure free grace; “*for his name’s sake.*” It is to the honor of our great Shepherd that we should be a holy people, walking in the narrow way of righteousness. If we be so led and guided, we must not fail to adore our heavenly Shepherd’s care.

February: Yea, 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. Psalm 23:4 NKJV

Verse 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.*” This unspeakably delightful verse has been sung on many a dying bed, and has helped to make the dark valley bright times out of mind. Every word in it has a wealth of meaning. “*Yea, though I walk,*” as if the believer did not quicken his pace when he came to die, but still calmly *walked* with God. To walk indicates the steady advance of a soul which knows its road, knows its end, resolves to follow the path, feels quite safe, and is therefore perfectly calm and composed. The dying saint is not in a flurry, he does not run as though he were alarmed, nor stand still as though he would go no further, he is not confounded nor ashamed, and therefore keeps to his old pace. Observe that it is not walking *in* the valley, but *through* the valley. We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. We do not die, we do but sleep to wake in glory. Death is not the house but the porch, not the goal but the passage to it. The dying article is called a *valley*. The storm breaks on the mountain, but the valley is the place of quietude, and thus full often the last days of the Christian are the most peaceful of his whole career; the mountain is bleak and bare, but the valley is rich with golden sheaves, and many a saint has reaped more joy and knowledge when he came to die than he ever knew while he lived. And, then, it is not “the valley of death,” but “the valley *of the shadow* of death,” for death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Someone has said that when there is a shadow there must be light somewhere, and so there is. Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path; let us then rejoice that there is a light beyond. Nobody is afraid of a

shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not, therefore, be afraid. "*I will fear no evil.*" He does not say there shall not be any evil; he had got beyond even that high assurance, and knew that Jesus had put all evil away; but "*I will fear no evil;*" as if even his fears, those shadows of evil, were gone forever. The worst evils of life are those which do not exist except in our imagination. If we had no troubles but real troubles, we should not have a tenth part of our present sorrows. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, but the psalmist was cured of the disease of fearing. "*I will fear no evil,*" not even the Evil One himself; I will not dread the last enemy, I will look upon him as a conquered foe, an enemy to be destroyed, "*For thou art with me.*" This is the joy of the Christian! "*Thou art with me.*" The little child out at sea in the storm is not frightened like all the other passengers on board the vessel, it sleeps in its mother's bosom; it is enough for it that its mother is with it; and it should be enough for the believer to know that Christ is with him. "*Thou art with me; I have, in having thee, all that I can crave: I have perfect comfort and absolute security, for thou art with me.*" "*Thy rod and thy staff,*" by which thou governest and rulest thy flock, the ensigns of thy sovereignty and of thy gracious care—"*they comfort me.*" I will believe that thou reignest still. The rod of Jesse shall still be over me as the sovereign succour of my soul. Many persons profess to receive much comfort from the hope that they shall not die. Certainly there will be some who will be "alive and remain" at the coming of the Lord, but is there so very much of advantage in such an escape from death as to make it the object of Christian desire? A wise man might prefer of the two to die, for those who shall not die, but who "shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air," will be losers rather than gainers. They will lose that actual fellowship with Christ in the tomb which dying saints will have, and we are expressly told that they shall have no preference beyond those who are asleep. Let us be of Paul's mind when he said that "To die is gain," and think of "departing to be with Christ, which is far better." This twenty-third psalm is not worn out, and it is as sweet in a believer's ear now as it was in David's time, let novelty-hunters say what they will.

March: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Psalm 23:5 NKJV

Verse 5. “*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.*” The good man has his enemies. He would not be like his Lord if he had not. If we were without enemies we might fear that we were not the friends of God, for the friendship of the world is enmity to God. Yet see the quietude of the godly man in spite of, and in the sight of, his enemies. How refreshing is his calm bravery! “*Thou preparest a table before me.*” When a soldier is in the presence of his enemies, if he eats at all he snatches a hasty meal, and away he hastens to the fight. But observe: “*Thou preparest a table,*” just as a servant does when she unfolds the damask cloth and displays the ornaments of the feast on an ordinary peaceful occasion. Nothing is hurried, there is no confusion, no disturbance, the enemy is at the door, and yet God prepares a table, and the Christian sits down and eats as if everything were in perfect peace. Oh! the peace which Jehovah gives to his people, even in the midst of the most trying circumstances!

“Let earth be all in arms abroad,
They dwell in perfect peace.”

“*Thou anointest my head with oil.*” May we live in the daily enjoyment of this blessing, receiving a fresh anointing for every day’s duties. Every Christian is a priest, but he cannot execute the priestly office without unction, and hence we must go day by day to God the Holy Ghost, that we may have our heads anointed with oil. A priest without oil misses the chief qualification for his office, and the Christian priest lacks his chief fitness for service when he is devoid of new grace from on high. “*My cup runneth over.*” He had not only enough, a cup full, but more than enough, a cup which overflowed. A poor man may say this as well as those in higher circumstances. “What, all this, and Jesus Christ too?” said a poor cottager as she broke a piece of bread and filled a glass with cold water. Whereas a man may be ever so wealthy, but if he be discontented his cup cannot run over; it is cracked and leaks. Content is the philosopher’s stone which turns all it touches into gold; happy is he who has found it. Content is more than a kingdom, it is another word for happiness.

May: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23:6 NKJV

Verse 6. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” This is a fact as indisputable as it is encouraging, and therefore a heavenly *verily*, or “*surely*” is set as a seal upon it. This sentence may be read, “*only* goodness and mercy,” for there shall be unmingled mercy in our history. These twin guardian angels will always be with me at my back and my beck. Just as when great princes go abroad they must not go unattended, so it is with the believer. Goodness and mercy follow him always—“*all the days of his life*”—the black days as well as the bright days, the days of fasting as well as the days of feasting, the dreary days of winter as well as the bright days of summer. Goodness supplies our needs, and mercy blots out our sins. “*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*” “A servant abideth not in the house forever, but the son abideth ever.” While I am here I will be a child at home with my God; the whole world shall be his house to me; and when I ascend into the upper chamber, I shall not change my company, nor even change the house; I shall only go to dwell in the upper story of the house of the Lord forever.

May God grant us grace to dwell in the serene atmosphere of this most blessed Psalm!

