

## THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Psalm 23:1-6

Key Verse: 23:1

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing."

This is a psalm of David. David himself was a shepherd of his father's flock. Later, God appointed him as a shepherd of his people Israel. (2 Sa.5:2) David knew what it meant to be a shepherd because he himself had been a shepherd from his boyhood. But in Psalm 23 David admits that God is his shepherd. Psalm 23 is known as the most beautiful psalm of all psalms and poems in the world. But there are many who do not know why this psalm is so beautiful. But when we read this psalm repeatedly, we learn that this is a happy song of a sheep who is led by a shepherd like God. Usually we think sheep are rebellious, as the people of Israel were to God their shepherd. They were always ungrateful to their Shepherd, God, for many reasons. But Psalm 23 tells us that there is a sheep who can sing a song of praise and thanksgiving to his shepherd. Let's learn how we can be a good sheep to God.

### I. Shepherd and sheep (1-4)

The characteristic of this psalm is that there is an inseparable relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. This relationship underlies depth and strength with simplicity. So we have to think of the shepherd and sheep at the same time.

Look at verse 1. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing." In ancient times, people thought of a shepherd metaphorically as a king or deliverer who would protect them, or as an impersonal rock or shield in which they could hide themselves. A shepherd meant everything to them. David calls the Lord "my shepherd." The Lord God was everything to him. He met all his needs and was always with him. He was so satisfied with his shepherd that he felt that he lacked nothing. How can one feel that he is fully satisfied in this world, where everything is limited in time and space? But David said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing." In the following verses he gives us several examples of why he could make such a confession of faith.

2.

**First**, "he makes me lie down in green pastures." A sheep's desire is to graze all the time in a green pasture, and after grazing enough they want to lie down to take a nap with the satisfaction of a full stomach. The problem is that sheep are not able to be put out to graze by themselves. They cannot find green pasture. They always need a shepherd to lead them out to green pasture. They are too weak to protect themselves from wild animals. They need a shepherd. Here, David uses the most comprehensive and intimate metaphor. God is his shepherd, who is everything to him. Though David was a king, he admitted that he was a helpless sheep who could not do anything without his shepherd, God. As long as he was sure that the Lord was with him, he felt secure and happy, like sheep lying down after grazing. As long as the Lord was his shepherd, he lacked nothing. In God, David was fully satisfied and happy. His satisfaction did not come from possessions or gratification. His satisfaction and happiness came when he was with God in a relationship in which the Lord was his shepherd, and he, his sheep.

Look at verse 2 again. "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters..." What a peaceful scene just to think of! Sheep are put out to a green pasture. Now they are grazing under the watchful eyes of their shepherd until they are fully satisfied. After grazing, they are thirsty. Their shepherd leads them to quiet waters to satisfy their thirst. After grazing and drinking, they are fully satisfied and become sleepy. But sheep cannot lie down to sleep because they are afraid of the attacks of wild animals. But their shepherd makes them lie down in green pasture so that they can take a nap, snoring. This is exactly what David felt when he believed that God was his shepherd.

However, David had lived in a real world. He lived a dangerous life. He was a soldier who fought the enemies of God's people. Once, David fought against the Philistines. One of the Philistine warriors, whose spearhead weighed 300 shekels, was about to kill David. But Abishai, one of King David's generals, rescued him. (2 Sa.21:15-17) He had to spend many years in the desert wilderness, for King Saul was jealous of him and pursued him to kill him. Still he could say, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters." So, "I shall lack nothing" means more than just living in a comfortable, beautiful environment. David

fully trusted God his shepherd to protect him, and he was grateful to God for supplying all his physical, material and spiritual needs. He was not restless, driven by desire or by ambition. He could be deeply content in God, and he had peace.

**Second**, "he guides me in paths of righteousness." Look at verse 3. "...he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." David confesses that his shepherd God restores his soul. As the Bible teaches us, man is more than just a body. Man is both body and spirit. In verses 1-4 David confesses that the Lord is his shepherd, and that he shall lack nothing in terms of security and satisfaction when he has to live in the world. But in verse 3 he goes one step further. He confesses that he needs restoration of his soul.

How did the Lord restore his soul? Verse 3b says, "He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." David was a man after God's own heart. He loved God. He loved his people. He was a king. So he could have done whatever he wanted. But he was not happy when his soul was very sick. One time he committed adultery with the wife of one of his most loyal generals. In order to cover up his sin of adultery, he murdered her husband by sending him to the most dangerous front line of battle. After that, David was not happy, even though he was king of Israel. His soul was getting sicker and sicker. He asked God's mercy to restore his spirit. He asked God's mercy to cleanse his sin. He asked God's mercy to create in him a pure heart. God restored his soul, and then he became very happy. (Ps.51)

David tried to live according to God's word. But most of all, God was pleased by David because David was a man of mission. He did not live for himself or for his own benefit; he lived as a shepherd for God's people, for the sake of his name. Even when he was a fugitive in the desert, shepherdless people came to him and became his sheep. (1 Sa.22:2) When the Lord was his shepherd, David could be a shepherd for God's people.

Our Shepherd, who guides us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake, leads us into a holy life. God saved us through his Son Jesus so that we might participate in his divine nature. Let's read 2 Peter 1:4, "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that

through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." God our Shepherd leads us not to live to eat three meals a day, but to live a life of mission. (Ro.1:5)

When we are true sheep of Jesus and keep on following our Shepherd, we learn his shepherd heart, and we, too, become shepherds. (Mk.1:17; Jn.21:15) What is the difference between a sheep and a shepherd? Sheep are unconditionally selfish; but shepherds must be unconditionally sacrificial. When we follow the Lord our Shepherd and receive his sacrificial love, we are transformed by his grace into people who can live as sacrificial shepherds. "He guides me into paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

God made man to live for the glory of God, not to live a selfish life. But sinful man's soul is so sick that he cannot live for the glory of God. God restores our souls by leading us in the paths of righteousness. God leads men to the paths of righteousness through his words. So a psalmist said, "Your word is a lamp to my feet..." (Ps.119:105) How can a young man keep his way pure? Psalm 119:9-14 says, "By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches." Why do we have to be led to the paths of righteousness? As long as we walk in the paths of righteousness, we can glorify God's name.

**Third,** "I will fear no evil." Look at verse 4. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me..." Everyone has a fear problem, and David did, too. David was close to death many times. But there is an impression that David was a brave man by faith. It was true. He was also fearful; from time to time, he felt as if his heart were melting because of the fears in his heart. But whenever he was overcome by fear, he trusted in God Almighty. Then, God took away his fear. He could overcome his fear when he believed that "The Lord is my shepherd." The Lord his shepherd solved his fear problem. He confessed, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Sometimes, he felt like he was walking through the valley of

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the shadow of death. But he was not fearful because he believed that "the Lord is with me." David was helpless like a sheep before strong enemies. But he believed that God the Almighty was on his side. When David thought about his death and about his destiny after death to be food for earthworms, he became very pessimistic about life. But when he believed that he would be raised up by the coming Messiah, he could overcome his fear of death. (Ac.2:25-31)

Look at the last part of verse 4. "...your rod and your staff, they comfort me." The rod is a symbol of authority. The Lord our Shepherd is King. He is sovereign. We must acknowledge his sovereignty and obey him. When the sheep feel the gentle touch of the shepherd's staff, they are reminded that he is there. They are comforted. When they feel a sharp blow from his rod, they are also comforted, for they know he cares about them and is watching to keep them from going astray. When we feel God's hand of discipline, we must accept it as his love.

## II. "You prepare a table before me" (5,6)

Look at verse 5. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." This verse is a description of the Lord's feast for his flock. But it seems very strange. It is a feast for his flock before the eyes of enemies. What a strange feast it is! In such a feast, no one can digest food, because enemies usually make their opponents' stomachs upset. But not so at this feast; this feast is a feast of triumph. Enemies who were the haters of God and who were the persecutors of God's people are completely defeated and arrested and condemned. They can no longer harass God's people, who want to live according to God's will. In Psalms 4-41 the psalmists cry out to God to deliver them from their enemies. David was a warrior and always a triumphant general and king. But he was overcome by enemies and became helpless. He could not win the victory over his enemies. But he cried out to God for help. "Arise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For you have struck all my enemies on the jaw; you have broken the teeth of the wicked. From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people." (Ps.3:7,8) God always heard his prayers and gave him victories in his battles. God especially gave him spiritual victories before God, though he lost many things humanly.

In the midst of victories and defeats, he was always victorious because the Lord was his shepherd. He believed that God would give victories, in battles as well as in spiritual battles. Verse 5 is an exquisite description of victory in God. The enemies are bound in chains with no feasting tables. But his cup of victory overflows.

Here we learn an important lesson. As many people say, this is the age of despair. Music, literature, philosophy, even many religious leaders express their despair through their personal lives and way of thinking. No one can have a sense of victory. Defeatism is deeply embedded in the hearts of modern people mainly because they live without God. When they live without God, they cannot but live on the first dimensional level. As we have studied, David did not despair or fall into defeatism. He had the assurance of victory in God because the Lord was his shepherd. David saw the power of evil men and the power of Satan. But he sings a song of victory anticipating that all God's enemies would be captured and condemned and that he would see the victorious feast of the saints. This kind of faith is what we really need.

Look at verse 6. "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Wicked people think that to commit their lives to God is too sacrificial, and that it is foolish to do so. But David did not think so. He believed that goodness and love would follow him all the days of his life, as long as the Lord was his shepherd. What a beautiful assurance it is! As we see, many people wish that something bad would not happen to them. Many people even hope that they can get up the next morning. They are filled with ominous premonitions. Such people cannot sleep well. But David believed that surely goodness and love would follow him, even though he didn't chase them at all. Moreover, when he believed, he did not worry about his future security, because he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Verse 6b says, "...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." What a blessed assurance it is for one to know that he will live in the house of God forever. There are many people who say they are Christians. But they want to live in this world forever. They never think of God's house, which is the last destination of our pilgrimage. Like David, we must be sure that the world is temporal and that God's house is eternal. We live there forever.