

## Trusting the Shepherd

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Robert P. Myers

**Psalms 23:1 A Psalm of David.** The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. David, without doubt, had memories of the days he spent in the fields and mountains with a herd of sheep. He uses these memories, and the knowledge of having shepherded his sheep, to build this metaphor about the relationship between the Lord and himself. It is very applicable and shows the great capacity of God to care for His people. In the presence of God, we can be compared to sheep. Compared to God, we have no more capability to care for ourselves than sheep do when compared to man. So, David uses this fact to teach this lesson. What do we see in the lesson?

I. First, we see two actors in this relationship: the overseer (shepherd), and those who need oversight (my, I)

- By itself, identifying such a relationship might be meaningless, but if we put it in the context of an actual human shepherd and a sheep being guarded, then we have a plethora of lessons to be learned.
- In such a relationship there is responsibility on the part of the shepherd
  - ▶ David casts the Lord as his Shepherd, because he knows that the Lord has ASSUMED the responsibility as spiritual Shepherd (relate to the assumption of the responsibility taken on by a shepherd toward his flock of sheep)
- Then there is dependence on the part of the sheep
  - ▶ David has cast himself as a sheep who has this Shepherd because he knows his total dependence on the Lord for the things He provides
- There is capacity to provide what the shepherd is able to provide on his part
  - ▶ This metaphor ASSUMES the ability of the Shepherd to provide what is needed
- Then there is the need on the part of the sheep
  - ▶ As the Lord's sheep, our needs span the entire spectrum

II. Then there is the larger lesson taught by the very way the statement is made - The statement is a declaration of trust on the part of the writer

- This is the great message of our text. Let's look at it.
  - ▶ There is clarity in who is seen as the Shepherd ("the Lord")
  - ▶ There is personal appropriation here ("my Shepherd")
    - Jesus spoke of this: **John 10:14** - "I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine."
    - **John 10:27** - "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:"
    - Two verses show: personal knowledge [known of mine],
    - attentiveness [hear my voice] and
    - allegiance and dependence [they follow me]
    - There is implicit trust here ("I shall not want")
    - Let's notice first that this statement of trust is about not being in actual need

(“not **want**”)

- In entitlement-minded America, many people think of want in the popular way. That is, as examples, “I want a new Mercedes or Jaguar,” or “I want a billion dollars,” or “I want a new cell phone,” or “I want a 24 ounce prime rib steak.”
- But want in our verse is the same as “be in need.” So this is, “I shall not be in need.”
- Knowing that, we then need to think reasonably about what “need” is.
  - ✓ If I am in a state of starvation because no food is available, I am in need
  - ✓ If I am outside in the elements with no place to have shelter (not so much as a cardboard box or a dumpster, or a borrowed back room, or an empty building), I am in need
  - ✓ If I have no clothes to cover myself with, and can’t get any, I am in need
  - ✓ If I am emotionally destitute and have no one to help me, I am in need
  - ✓ If death threatens me and I have no defender or comforter, I am in need
- So, David says essentially, “Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want (or be in need)”
- Let’s realize that this is solely a statement of faith; the reason we can know that is we also know David cannot see his own future, yet he dares to say this.
  - ▶ The voice of faith comes from those who trust in God despite the uncertainty of the future
    - Illustrate: Tomorrow some country will start a war somewhere, some innocent bystander will be taken hostage or prisoner, or be killed. Tomorrow, you may get a call from someone with bad news that affects your life. Tomorrow you may hear about someone you know winning or losing a fortune. But, in the midst of all this, tomorrow morning you will get out of bed with a certainty that around 7:00 am the sun will begin to rise; and it will rise in the east; and as the day goes along, it will set in the west around 4:45 pm. This expectation you have about the sun, you know, will not be changed because of things that might happen in your future. So it is with our unchanging Lord...and believers trust in that. The future will always be uncertain, but that uncertainty should never drive or influence our trust in God.
    - ▶ That trust comes, not from predicting or knowing the future, but from knowing the attitude of God toward His people, and how He acts.
      - Illustrate: You get up in the morning and turn on a water faucet because you know how the water faucet will perform - you trust that water will come out. Are you skeptical every time you turn one on? No! Do you doubt every time that it will do just what it is designed to do?

III. Last, David explores all the provisions of the Lord, covering both the external and physical, the spiritual and emotional, and the temporal and eternal

- **Psalms 23:2** He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
  - ▶ Physical needs for sustaining bodily life (hint: sheep only need good pasture and water without disturbance to lead a normal stable life)
- **Psalms 23:3** He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his

name's sake.

- ▶ Spiritual provision for emotional needs and spiritual progress
- **Psalms 23:4** 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.
  - ▶ Although we are often prone to use this statement when dealing with someone lying on a deathbed, here, I believe David was testifying to the fact that the Lord's people are always in a state of dying physically; and that walking in that perpetual state the provisions of the Lord are sufficient for it
  - ▶ It is the fear of bad things associated with death that take away the soul's comfort; but David testifies that he will not suffer a need for comfort about that, because a) the Lord is with him in that dying state, and the guiding (rod) and strengthening (staff) influence of the Good Shepherd comfort him in it.
- **Psalms 23:5** Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
  - ▶ Protection and reward
    - Most of us remember the story of Mordecai in the book of Esther . Haman was dead set on killing Mordecai and every Jew he could get to. But, the king of the land couldn't sleep one night (Esther, Ch. 6) and he had one of his court servants start reading to him out of the history accounts kept in the archives. In that reading, the king was made aware that at a time in the past Mordecai had saved the kings life by revealing to him how two of his princes were planning to betray him and have him killed. He then had Haman to be overseer of a whole day of bestowing honors upon Mordecai. He was allowed to ride the kings horse, and wear the kings crown and have it announced far and wide that he was a man of great honor. This is a temporal illustration of how the Lord blesses us despite the most damaging intents of our enemies.
- **Psalms 23:6** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. (Remember that "follow me" here in Old English is equivalent to "go along with me, or accompany me" in today's language)
  - ▶ Benevolence from the Lord in our natural lifetime, and eternal security all the while