

Introduction:

If you've ever memorized just one psalm, I would bet it is Psalm 23: "The Lord is My Shepherd." It is a beloved psalm. It is especially comforting as we consider lying down in green pastures and being led beside still waters. We long for the idyllic scenes of the shepherd with his lambs, caring for them, providing for them, protecting them, feeding them. It is completely awesome to consider Jesus Christ as our Shepherd caring for us just like this. However, if we stop at this imagery, we'll miss the main thrust of this idyll.

Discussion:

I. The two scenes of Psalm 23.

- A. I admit that in the past, I've been enamored with viewing this entire psalm as a picture of a shepherd with his sheep. David Holder, gospel preacher from Texas, however disabused me of this notion. And I'm thankful because so much more has been opened up by recognizing there are two different scenes in this psalm.
- B. Scene 1 (**vss. 1-4**): A sheep with his Shepherd in the pasture
 1. David adores his Shepherd. In **vss. 1-3**, David praises his Shepherd to other sheep, and then in **vs. 4**, he talks directly to his Great Shepherd.
 2. In **vss. 1-3**, David praises his Shepherd to other sheep as a great provider. David will not want because the Lord is his Shepherd. He will not lack any needs because his Shepherd provides him rest in green pastures, slakes his thirst with still waters. He rejuvenates and strengthens him, not merely physically but in his soul. He leads David along paths that are right for the sake of the Shepherd's name. Notice the great confidence David had. He knew God's paths were right because God was concerned about upholding His name, not merely about uplifting David.
 3. In **vs. 4**, David turns to his Shepherd and explains his confidence. Though David is a weak and defenseless sheep, he knows his Shepherd will care for him. He will travel under the watchful eye of predators, but he doesn't fear because the Shepherd's staff and rod are with him. Of course, this connects to being led in right paths. David's Shepherd uses His rod and staff to direct, discipline, and protect him. Even the rod of correction is a comfort to David.
- C. Scene 2 (**vss. 5-6**): A guest with his Host in a palace.
 1. While it is tempting to see this second scene as that of a sheep on a seasonal table land, the picture is more in keeping with moving indoors. We have moved from the field to a house, from a pasture to a palace. We have moved from a sheep praising his Shepherd to a guest praising his Host.
 2. Though moving from the field to a house, David reverses his audiences. In the first section, he first praised his Shepherd to other sheep and then directly spoke to his Shepherd. In this second scene, he begins by directly addressing his Host and ends by praising his Host to other guests.
 3. In **vs. 5**, as David continues to address his Shepherd/Host, he repeats his confidence. Though enemies look on, he has refuge from them because of his gracious Host. Additionally, the hospitality of his Host is highlighted by anointing his head with oil and giving him a cup that overflows. Regarding the anointing, remember that Jesus rebuked Simon the Pharisee for his poor hospitality in **Luke 7:48** because he didn't anoint Jesus's head. And an overflowing cup is a picture of a guest who has a never-ending drink (reminiscent of the still waters).
 4. In **vs. 6**, David turns to the other guests to repeat that he will never lack anything. Goodness and mercy will follow him. So why would he go to any other house? He will stay in the Lord's house forever. Why trade hosts when you already have the best one?

II. The autobiography of David.

- A. Of course, we can stop with just an explanation of David's praise of his Shepherd and Host and get a great deal of comfort. However, we can take this another step and gain some really great encouragement. **Psalm 23** is more than an idyllic and pastoral poem. It is actually an autobiography of David. I am convinced that **Psalm 23** was not the work of a shepherd boy out in the sheepfolds, but of an experienced king who had been moved from pasture to palace. In fact, I'm convinced that the psalm was written if not at the time of, at least based on the experience of, **II Samuel 7**. Read the chapter.

- B. David wants to build a house for the Lord. But God responds that Solomon will be the one to build a house for God. However, David should not be upset by this because God has built a house for David. Notice, though, some of the specific statements in this chapter that connect to **Psalm 23**. In **II Samuel 7:8**, God says he took David from the pasture and made him a prince. Further, this is a prince for whom God has made a house and a kingdom (**II Samuel 7:16**). Do you see what God did for David? He took him from the field and brought him into a house. He took him from the pasture and brought him into a palace. Notice David's final statement about this in **II Samuel 7:29**? Doesn't that sound a whole lot like "goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (**Psalm 23:6**, ESV).
- C. **Psalm 23** is not merely a pastoral psalm of comfort. It is the God-glorifying autobiography of David. God shepherded David while he was in the pasture and hosted him in the palace. God took David from the pasture to the palace, and was with Him all the way. No wonder David would remain in God's house forever.

III. The biography of Israel.

- A. But there is more. What God did for David the king, He did for Israel the nation. This psalm is the autobiography of David, but it is also the biography of Israel. Notice what God says about Israel in **II Samuel 7:6-7**. They were sheep out in the wilderness. God was shepherding them. They were His flock and He was their shepherd. But they were out in the pasture.
- B. But then in **II Samuel 7:10-11**, God says He will make a place for Israel. He will plant the nation and will give them rest before enemies, reminiscent of the table prepared before enemies in **Psalm 23:5**.
- C. Notice what David responds in **II Samuel 7:23**. God redeemed one nation from before their enemies (specifically Egypt) and He did it making a name for Himself. Doesn't that sound like "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (**Psalm 23:3**, ESV)?
- D. **Psalm 23** is not merely an idyllic psalm of encouragement. It is the God-glorifying biography of Israel. God shepherded Israel while it was in the wilderness and then brought them into their own place, making them a kingdom. God took Israel from the field to the house; He took them from the pasture to the palace.

IV. The destiny of Christ's sheep. That's us, by the way.

- A. So what is the message of **Psalm 23** for us? First, let us remember who is our Shepherd. In **John 10:11**, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." As Jehovah was David and Israel's shepherd, Jesus is ours.
- B. We are able to look at **Psalm 23** and learn about life with our Shepherd. And what does it tell us? It certainly tells us that our Shepherd cares for us. He provides for us. He protects us. He will lead us in right paths for the sake of His name. We can have confidence because He is concerned about His reputation before the world. When He gives us direction and instruction, we know it will be for our good because Jesus does not want anyone saying, "Look, they obeyed Jesus and look at what a terrible mess it made of their lives." We are in the presence of our enemies, but Jesus is with us. He will guide us under their predatorial eyes, using His staff and rod (that is, His Word) to guide and comfort us.
- C. But, and this is the important part, it doesn't stop there. The Shepherd of David and Israel, took them from the pasture and brought them to the palace. What will our Shepherd do? The exact same thing. In **John 14:1-7**, Jesus is not only the Good Shepherd, He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He went through the crucifixion to prepare a place for us in the house of God. And He will return and take us to the many-roomed palace. He is preparing a feast for His bride (**Revelation 19:9**). Can you imagine what kind of feast that will be between Christ and His church? A feast with overflowing cups as we drink freely from the river of life.
- D. What is Jesus doing? He is shepherding us while we are in the pasture land of this wilderness. But where is He leading us? He is leading us to victory. He is leading us to the palace. Just as He did with David and Israel, He will do with us. Yes, **Psalm 23** is a psalm of comfort in this wilderness pastureland. But more than that it is a promise. We who are His sheep, who hear His voice, who follow His lead, we will be taken to heaven where we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Praise the Lord!!!

Conclusion:

I get it. You are in the pasture, which sometimes feels more like a wilderness. But Jesus really is taking care of you. However, don't just rest in His comforting arms. Follow His righteous paths to the eternal palace where He has prepared a room for you and is planning on blessing you with goodness and mercy for all eternity. Don't stall out in the pasture, follow Jesus to the palace.