

Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study of Psalm 23 – Part 1

I. Introduction: Today we begin our study through the 23rd Psalm. This Psalm is probably the most well-known of all the Psalms. It is a Psalm that has brought comfort and encouragement to many when they are facing difficult times.

II. What is a Psalm? Scholar James Smith writes: **“The term *psalmos* was used in the Greek translation to render the Hebrew *mizmor*, the technical term for a song sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments.”**¹ The actual Hebrew word, however, is *tehillim*, which means; **“praises” or “songs of praise.”**² The book of Psalms is sometimes called the song book of the Old Testament. Another very important fact about the book of Psalms is the fact that it is a book about the Lord Jesus Christ. Roger Ellsworth writes; **“And what is its message? The Book of Psalms, as is the case with every other book of the Bible, is a message about the Lord Jesus Christ. We must find the Lord Jesus here because he found himself here. As he walked with two of his disciples on the day of his resurrection, Jesus ‘expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself’ (Luke 24:27). Later that day he appeared to other disciples and said: ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me’ (Luke 24:44).”**³

- A. **Psalm 23** is one of three psalms that are arranged together. **Psalm 22, Psalm 23, and Psalm 24.** Each psalm portrays a different work of Christ.
- B. **Psalm 22** gives a prophetic picture of the death of Jesus on the cross. It deals, therefore, with Jesus the **‘good shepherd [who] lays down his life for the sheep’** that we read about in **John 10:11.**
- C. **Psalm 23**, however, deals with the **‘great shepherd’**, resurrected for the sheep, described in **Hebrews 13:20-21.**
- D. **Psalm 24** tells of the chief Shepherd who will return to reward those who care for the sheep, as promised in **I Peter 5:4.**

III. Who wrote Psalm 23?

- A. Most scholars agree that this is a Psalm of David. If you have studied the life of David at all, you know that he was a very complex man. His life was filled with both great joys and great tragedy. It’s safe to say that much of the trouble he saw was due to his own failures, yet God’s grace was always there when he came to the Lord with a heart of repentance.

IV. The Main Theme – The Lord is a caring and gracious God who we can place our trust in. Roger Ellsworth writes: **“David wrote it to express his confidence in the Lord’s care for him. As he reflected on that care, he realized that it was very much like the care of a shepherd for his sheep (vv. 1–4) and the care of a host for his guests (vv. 5–6).”**⁴

V. Exposition.

A. Verse 1 – **“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”**

- 1. **“The LORD...”** – This is the common name for God, *Yahweh* or, *Jehovah*. William Mounce writes; **“the proper name of the one true God; knowledge and use of the name implies personal or covenant relationship; the name pictures God as the one who exists and/or**

¹ James E. Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1996), 183.

² William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2nd Edition, 1996), 430.

³ Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Psalms*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 13.

⁴ Ibid., 43.

causes existence”⁵ There are many compound names with this name attached.

2. **“...my shepherd...”** – This word is defined as; **“care for any needs that flocks of small mammals have, as a herdsman, with a focus on providing grazing pasture for the flock and moving the flocks around to the grazing grounds; a shepherd both cares and tends for sheep, but also has authority over or rules a flock as a superior”**⁶
3. Concerning the Lord being **“my”** Shepherd, Haddon Robinson makes an important statement:

“Millions of religious people know that the Lord is a shepherd, but they really don’t know that He is their Shepherd. How can you know that the God of the universe is actually your shepherd? Well, in John 10:27 Jesus declares: ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.’ Two simple tests can reveal whether you are one of His flock: ‘My sheep hear my voice,’ He said. That is the first test. Do you really listen to what He has to say to you through His Word? Then, Jesus said, ‘They follow me.’ That is the second test. Members of Christ’s flock follow the leadership He gives them through His Word. It’s as simple—and as sublime—as that. Those who belong to the Shepherd from heaven hear His Word and they follow Him.”⁷

4. **“...I shall not want.”** – This is often translated as; **“...I shall not lack.”** This shows God’s desire to provide for those who hear His Word and follow Him. This is a promise for God’s people found throughout the Word of God. In **Psalm 34:9-10**, David declares; **“Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.”** (cf. **Matthew 6:25-33; Deuteronomy 2:7; 8:3-4; 29:5; Psalm 84:11.**)

B. Verse 2 – “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.”

1. **“He makes me to lie down in green pastures...”** – The idea of lying down brings to mind the word, **“rest”**. There are many people who find it hard to rest. The busyness of this world and the pressure to work hard, makes it difficult for people to really rest – and if they do they feel guilty. In **Genesis 2:2**, the Bible states that God rested from the work of creation. He didn’t do this because He was tired, but to set an example for all of us. There are several Scriptures that show God’s desire for us to rest (cf. **Psalm 37:7; Isaiah 30:15**). What about **“...green pastures...”**? This represents food and the **“food”** that will bring us rest is the Word of God! (cf. **I Timothy 4:6; Romans 15:4**). Jesus said;

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” - Matthew 11:28-30.

2. **“...He leads me beside the still waters.”** – The word **“still”** can be translated as; **“repose or peacefully; consolation”**⁸ - The LORD our Shepherd wants to lead us into peace and comfort. He doesn’t want us agitated or fearful. Sheep can be easily skittish, but a good shepherd wants to keep them calm and content. (cf. **John 14:27; Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22; II Timothy 1:7; Philippians 4:6-8**).

⁵ William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 947.

⁶ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁷ Haddon W. Robinson, *Trusting the Shepherd: Insights from Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, rev. ed. 2002)

⁸ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 68.