

“A Promise: God is Shepherding Us Everyday”

Psalm 23:2-3

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We are working through the 23rd Psalm in a short series. We have studied the life of David on Sunday evening for many months now, and David was a believer who had ups and downs, but he trusted in the Lord and he saw in all of his life God was his shepherd. Not only that, but God promised David a son to build an eternal kingdom and to establish an eternal throne in his kingship. All through the Old Testament prophets this righteous branch of David was promised to come forth, and he would be a shepherd, *the* shepherd, to shepherd the sheep. So, David wrote this Psalm, I believe, toward the latter part of his life after he had endured many sorrows and many consequences of his own sin. Yet, in all of it, in all of his life, he believed God was the good shepherd caring for him, feeding him, guiding him, protecting him, and providing for him. So I believe this is the psalm of a mature Christian, a psalm of faith, it is a belief: this is the God I worship, this is what He is like: he is my shepherd. We are all called to believe that if we come to the Lord Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, we are to believe that he is like this to us.

This psalm is to be read in worship by Christians. It is to be sung by Christians in worship. It is to be believed. Let us hear the word of God:

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me. They rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou does prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou has anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

When we look at the Old Testament and the New Testament what we find are scriptures as a whole, both fully the word of God, both fully Christian books. Our Lord Jesus Christ told us that the Old Testament was written about Him. The Apostles told us that the scriptures of the Old Testament were to be read by Christians to understand that these things are written for our instruction. All through the Old Testament we have this picture of what was to happen in the future: after the fall of Adam and Eve a promise was given that a Son would be born to Eve, a descendent of Eve, a seed of the women, who would come and destroy Satan and his seed; and we have this picture that is starting to come into focus as we go through the history of the Old Testament: that this one would be a son of Abraham as well, that He would be a son of David; in fact He would be a King on the throne of David. But also, it tells us that He would be a shepherd, a shepherd king, who would come and be a better king than all of the false shepherds of Israel.

Ezekeil 34 and Psalm 23 and many other passages in the prophets tell of this shepherd to come, this Son of David; that after they returned from captivity, that at that time when they were restored from Babylon at some period a shepherd would come. Our Lord Jesus Christ came on the scene 400 years later, and from the very beginning of his ministry he explained that he was the one, the anointed one, the Messiah, the Shepherd of Israel; the good shepherd that had been prophesied all through the Old Testament to come; and that He would from the very beginning of His ministry, lay down His life for the sheep; that He came to be crucified as Isaiah 53 predicted to establish a different kind of kingdom.

“My kingdom is not of this world,” he said, “you must be born from above to see and enter the kingdom of God.”

He established that kingdom by His own blood and all the way told the disciples: I am the good shepherd, the shepherd of David, who is David’s son. I believe that we should read Psalm 23 as David’s growing picture, not only of what God had done in his life in the past, but what he would do in the future. Through many trials God had brought him—ups and downs, rebellions of his own children trying to overcome his kingship and establish their own—and yet through it all, God protected him, God provided for him, and God kept him as the king of Israel. He knew this was of God and not of himself. He lived his life, and toward the end of his life, he could say, “The Lord is my shepherd, I do not lack.” My shepherd, my personal shepherd, over my life and over my days, there is not a thing presently or in the future that I have lacked from the Lord. I shall not want.

He believed that God was there. This is not a psalm that we read and say: I hope God will be a shepherd to me one day or I hope that he will bring to pass these promises to be with me as I go through the valleys of the shadows of death; but this is a confession of faith. This is what faith is: to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord means to accept Him for who He is and what He has done and live in submission to him, trusting in his ability to save, his ability to keep us, and his ability to help us. This is a confession of faith of an older Christian who has seen much, and seen that God is faithful. He is a shepherd to His sheep.

In other places David prayed things like this: I would have despaired had I not believed that I would not see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. He believed in God’s present care. Only the eye of faith can see the comfort of this psalm. It is one of those things that we learn when we are children. It is recited at weddings and funerals. If you ask people if there is any Old Testament passage that you like, many times they will say the 23rd Psalm. But the meaning of this psalm is only for those who are covered by the blood of Christ, who have come to Him and submitted themselves to Him as their shepherd; able to forgive and cover their sins, able to help them: not only to enter into heaven but to love this life; that His faithfulness is the substance of their faith, not the strength of their faith, but the strength of His faithfulness. That is what enables them to live.

Only those who believe that God is good and wise all the time in all that He does and all that He permits for His sheep, that He has the power to cause all things to work together for good to those who love Him. Only those find the comfort of this psalm. It is a psalm about living by faith, not just at funerals, but today and tomorrow; and to live without fear of the future, because we know who has the future in His hands, who is leading His sheep. It is a psalm to think about all the time and to consider that God’s compassion and pity and mercy and attention is the same that a shepherd gives to sheep, only vastly greater.

The Lord, my shepherd, I do not, I shall not lack anything. J. A. Alexander was a wonderful commentator of this psalm. He said that the first verse is the main verse and the rest of the psalm is an explanation in how God is the shepherd of His people. Now verses two and three of this psalm makes four statements about how God shepherds his sheep and it lists four things: he makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads me besides waters of rest, he restores my soul, and he leads me in the paths of righteousness for His names sake. These are statements of things that God does, not things that we wait on, not things that we hope will happen, not conditions that we fulfill and therefore He shall fulfill

these promises; but these are things that God does and we are called to believe so that we will understand the work of God in our lives today as well as tomorrow.

Christians are often hoping in the future, hoping things will get better, hoping God will answer this prayer or that prayer, hoping for the situation to change, and hoping for people to change. This psalm tells us that today God has made you lie down in green pastures. Today He is leading you beside waters of rest. Today He is restoring your soul. Today he is leading you in paths of righteousness. These things are happening all the time for the believer. This is a call for us to wake up and understand this and to live by faith in the truth of it. It makes a difference in the comfort we have, in the strength we have, even in the ability we have to respond with faith and hope to circumstances that we face today.

If you do not believe these things are true of you today, then that is probably why you have little peace of mind or comfort or hope, because you don't yet understand that God's will for you and God's guidance of you and God's shepherding of your life has already happened and is happening today. This is a call for us to respond to that faithfulness of God in the way we think, the way we feel, and what we choose to do today.

I want to cover the first three of these things this morning, and Lord willing, we will come back to the fourth one, because it deserves a whole time of attention. So, what I want to do this morning is to look at the first three things that God does as a shepherd for all of his people every single day. The first one is this: He makes his people to lie down in green pastures. This phrase apparently refers to the shepherd practice of leading his sheep to graze in the morning, especially when the grass is tender and the dew is there. When they have had an opportunity to feed, at around noon time, he finds a place of cool green grass, perhaps even under shade, for them to lie down and to rest.

I have always been intrigued of this phrase: he makes me to lie down in green pastures. It doesn't say brown pastures or blue pastures. When I was in college one of my crazy psychology courses studied colors and the effect of colors on the human mind. One of the things always impressed me was that the color green is the most restful color to the mind of man. It is the color that relieves stress in your environment more than any other. God has given us blue skies, but all around us is green: the vegetation of God's growth. His ability to make things pleasant: things to eat, things to enjoy, things to rest our eyes better than any other color: it is all green. I believe David is trying to convey that he liked green as a shepherd, and he knew that God had led him to green pastures.

He has made him to lie down in green pastures. Ezekiel 34:15 says that God, after Israel's return, says that He will come and shepherd his people: I will feed my flock and cause them to lie down. I will seek the lost and bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick. Our Lord Jesus Christ came to the hills of Galilee and then of Judea and he said, "I am the good shepherd. I am that one: the shepherd who gathers his lambs in his bosom of Isaiah 40 and feeds his flock. I am the good shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep. I know my own and my own know me and no one shall snatch them from my hand."

He was trying to tell these disciples that He is the one. He is the 23rd Psalm shepherd that makes his people, his sheep, to lie down in green pastures. Now this psalm is a metaphor at the beginning: a shepherd, sheep, pastures, calm waters, and it get more specific to clear promises and teachings as it goes on. But I ask myself, "What are the green pastures? What does he make me to lie down in, this green that is restful that feeds me?"

Well, it is no accident that before the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven he gathered his disciples and he said to Peter, “Peter do you love me?”

Peter said, “Lord, you know that I love you.”

Three times Jesus said to Peter, “Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs.”

The green pastures that our shepherd leads us into is His truth, His word, His gospel of grace, His care of His people, the promises of God, the promises of His faithfulness: these things feed our soul. Our Lord Jesus Christ has already done this for his people. He said, “My words are true. Abide in me. Let my words abide in you. You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

I was happy to worship with John and Jamie and the kids in Hawaii last week. We went to their church. They had searched a long time for a church. The pastor preached on the Lord’s Prayer. He read the Lord’s Prayer and he simply explained the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. It didn’t last very long, but he used the scriptures. He explained the scriptures and he applied the scriptures to the people. I thought how blessed we were that day, because some of you have come to me in the last year and you have told me that you have gone to other places on vacation or travelling and worshipped, but during the whole service no scripture was read; no word of God that feeds the sheep of God was read or explained. These were Christian churches and Baptist churches. Yet, the Lord Jesus Christ makes us to lie down in green pastures. The truth that brings rest to our soul, that feeds our souls and strengthens us and finally gives us rest and peace of mind under a shepherd’s protection and care in green pastures of truth—how blessed we are to have the word of God, the words of God written and inspired in our bibles. We must not neglect them.

We must hear them and read them and then not walk away, but think about them; digest them as we rest that we may have strength for the afternoons walking, as sheep must have. He has taken us out of the world of unbelief. He has caused us to believe in Him. He *makes* me to lie down in green pastures. It is not an accident that God saves His people. It is not because they are more beautiful than others. It certainly isn’t because they are smarter than others. It is not because they are more spiritually minded than others by nature. Then why is it? Why is it that one becomes a sheep of Christ?

In the bible it says, “He *makes* His sheep to lie down in green pastures.”

“All that the Father gives to me,” Jesus says, “come to me, and the one who comes to me (which is our human invitation) I shall in no wise cast out.” But we know deep down that it was not we who first loved God, but He who first loved us, and sent his Son and his Spirit into our hearts, whereby we cried, Abba, Father! He makes me to lie down in green pastures. That is such a blessing.

Have you forgotten how lost you were and confused and afraid and sinful when you were searching and God made you His? When the first light of, “Is it true?” entered your mind. Could Christ really have risen from the dead, this grand miracle that no one has ever done before or since, never to die again, by His own power and by the Spirit’s work in His body? Is it really true? If it is, my whole life and eternity depends upon it.”

How is it that you came to those first thoughts? How is it that you were finally broken and grieving over your sinful acts towards men and God, when you had not been broken before? How is it that you came to look at the cross of Christ and say, “Maybe there is hope for me?”

Was it not God? If it was not God there is no reason to pray to God to save others, but if it is of God and we pray to Him to change the hearts of our friends and family, we have to know and

understand that He moved me to seek Him while He was seeking me. That is a hymn we sing. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

You may envy the Apostle John, the one whom Jesus had a special love for, who leaned back on Jesus' breast at the Lord's Supper and rested there. Sometimes I read that passage and wish it could have been me. To be that close to Him, to see Him, to hear Him, to touch Him, but to those that believe God's word, there is no need to envy John; because all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, he makes them to lie down in the green pastures of His word and truth and bosom. He is the word of God incarnate, and we have everything we need in Him.

The second thing our Shepherd does is that He leads His sheep beside still waters, or literally waters of rest, and the idea certainly has the idea of quenching thirst; and all through the Old Testament and the New Testament even our Lord Himself, used the symbol or the metaphor of water as being that which quenches our Spiritual thirst. He told the woman at the well, "I have water that you know not of, that if you drink this water you will never have to drink it again, because it becomes a well of water springing up to eternal life."

All through the scriptures when Israel was in the wilderness he promised them water in the Promised Land. Water is a blessing. It quenches our thirst, but there is also something about *still* waters, the smoothness, and the quietness. I don't want to get too mystical with you this morning, but I think this is why I love lakes. There is something so wonderful about the early when you come to a lake and there is not a ripple on that water. Everything is still. Mitch could explain to us the science of the molecules being at rest and undisturbed, but there is something special about the way God has made water. It is really the most perfect place of being level and smooth in nature. It is still. It stills our minds as we look at it. It seems peaceful, undisturbed by anything else. It does something to us.

David is using this idea of still which has to be deep, not running, not shallow, but deep enough to be smooth and level and still. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the shepherd of Isaiah 40:11, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with His arm and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." He leads them beside still waters. He is there. He doesn't stand on the hill and points the sheep to the water. He comes with them and leads them to it, and will not leave them or forsake them. He picks them up. He holds them in his arms. We cannot see him with our physical eyes, but this he does for every believer, every day, all the time. We are to believe that.

You may say, "I am a Christian. I don't feel like I am resting by still waters. My life is full of hurry and failure and disappointments, responsibilities that seem overwhelming and never ends, piled one upon the other, day after day after day; where is the still waters of Christ?"

The answer of the bible is: you are living by them now. He continually leads us. This is a present tense: He *leads* me beside still waters. From God's eyes all the waves of the sea that scare us to death are calm. That is why Jesus slept in the boat during the storm. Waves are no waves to God, and those who believe that can sleep in the storm. They can rest. There are waters of rest there. We have to live by faith as Christians. Quit looking at the waves as if they are God. Quit looking at the storms as if they are more powerful than God. He does not promise to the Christian or believer in David's day or our day, relief from responsibilities. He certainly does not promise relief from suffering for the name of Christ and persecution. He does not promise that every Christian will be healed from sickness in this life. We know that we will all be healed eventually, but not in this life. That is why we die. He does not promise that we will have bodily rest in this life, except on the Lord's Day; that is why we need to make the most

of it, but He does promise a soul rest, a quenching of spiritual thirst, a confidence that all is well, that the waters are quiet in my life, because the shepherd has led me to this place.

You see you have to have faith in the shepherd. You have to believe in His wisdom and His goodness to have rest of soul. So many in America are still looking for a Christianity of ease, physical ease. It saddens me, honestly, that many times churches put more emphasis in providing physical needs of believers than spiritual needs. We got to have a gymnasium or exercise room or ball fields (I am not saying that it is all wrong to do those things), but it is almost as if sometimes churches have become mini- communities, where Christians can congregate and have their own things, their own restaurants in the church, their own ball fields, their own this and their own that, and be protected from the outside world; but Jesus did not describe Christianity that way. He said you are to go *into* the world and not be of the world; to not congregate into our enclosed boundaries, but to go out into the world and preach the gospel to every creature, to love our enemies, and to do good to those who despitefully use you.

You see rest in God's kingdom is a rest of soul. Jesus said in Matthew 11, a passage that I would like to preach soon, "Come unto me, (He said to his disciples), come to me all who are weary, and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I, personally, will give you rest. He didn't say, "I will arrange your life where it is full of ease and have no troubles," but He promised that he, himself, will give you rest.

And He said, "Take my yolk upon you..." He is using the metaphor here of two oxen carrying a load. Here is Christ, the seasoned, wise, strong ox, and here is the young ox, the believer who is still new, who doesn't understand; he has to learn. He said, "Take my yolk upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you shall find rest for your souls; for my yolk is easy and my burden is light."

Our Lord Jesus Christ: see how gentle he was with his disciples in their ignorance and failings. We need to learn that. It is the rest of heart, trusting in God when others do not act right; that is the rest of soul that he promised to give. When his persecutors came for him and arrested him in the garden, he did not hide and shrink in the shrubbery. He went out to meet them, because he knew that this was God's will for him, and he went out with a rest of soul and mind that God was with him and for him, and this was his purpose and met his enemies. He even healed one of them.

Our Lord Jesus Christ: his rest is not the freedom from responsibility or duty or obedience to his commands or suffering or trial or anything else that Christians down through the centuries have experienced in following the name of Christ. But his promise is the rest of soul that comes in believing that he is leading you beside still waters. There is not too much to handle. There is not more upon you than you can bear. God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond that which you are able, and if you think he has done that to you, it is unbelief; for this is a statement that the shepherd always leads us beside waters of rest.

The third thing the Shepherd does for his people is that he continually restores their souls. This is present tense, he continually "restores my soul." What in the world does that mean? Because David doesn't say, "That I *hope* he will restore my soul. At times in the past he has restored my soul. In certain circumstances and under certain conditions I believe he will restore my soul."

He says that, "He continually restores my soul." It is a fact. A fact of a believer that God is restoring our souls all the time; if you believe that, what would it do for you; what will it do to your mind that you really are not alone and left to yourself? There is an attitude among American Christians. It comes from the last two hundred years of wrong theology that somehow God comes and goes. God

works and then he doesn't work in the believer. None of that is true. God never withdraws his presence from the Christian because His Spirit has been inseparably, spiritually united to our spirit.

There is never a time when God is not at work in the Christian. Remember what Paul said in Philippians 2:12-13? He tells us to work out our salvation in fear and trembling; use every ounce in you to bring glory to God; to love him and keep His commandments, learn his ways, look at your life. Pattern your life after what God has promised and what God has commanded. Do everything you can, within you, for this reason: "for, it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

You may say, "Why doesn't everybody just become perfect if God is at work in us all the time?" And the answer to that question in the bible is this: that Jesus not only died to bring us to heaven, he died us to make us good. He died to change our way of thinking in the new birth, which causes us to take responsibility now for our spiritual growth; and He has promised to every believer, to every sheep of the good shepherd: I will never leave you or forsake you. I am restoring your soul.

This word *restore* is used many times in the Old Testament about Israel who wandered from the path of God's commandments, and God calls them to return to the path of those commandments, to be restored. The idea is that something has gone wrong, but God is continually making it right. Let me put it this way: if you have ever had a prayer to God, sincerely prayed, if you have ever had a conviction of sin that what you said and thought was wrong toward another, if you have ever felt some sort of encouragement of God's Spirit to comfort you and strengthen you in trial; all of that was God restoring your soul—continually restoring you, giving you strength, increasing your faith. He doesn't give faith as a deposit to you when you are saved and then He says, "Now, it is all up to you." He renews your heart and puts in it the principle of faith that He keeps renewing every day.

He is restoring your soul, and you are called to believe that so that you will not enter into a self imposed dependency upon yourself alone where you can actually think that God is not with you. Or think: I hope God will help me wherever He is.

We are called to believe that in the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit in our hearts, he has done something that He will continue until the day we die; that he will never leave us or forsake us; that He will help us in restoring our soul every day.

We cannot be alone anymore. Those who are without Christ, Paul said, are without God in the world and without hope, but those who have come to Christ have the presence and promise of God to continually work in our souls until the day we die. How do you know if God is working in your soul? Let me read what William Plumber said, "In restoring his people, Christ chooses his own time and method, but the process included these things: a conviction of sin and departing from God, deep and heartfelt self-reproach and sorrow, a longing for renewed communion with God, occasional fears of final desertion, great distress of soul from a sense of sin, the pangs of restoration to God often exceed those of a first conversion, (the penitent humbles himself under God's mighty hand as a weaned child).

Jesus becomes the horn of salvation in the house of his servant David, thus the Good Shepherd restores peace to His mourners; for He leads them by faith to a renewed application of His blood for pardon, and He pardons most freely. "I am pacified," says he. "I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done." This melts the heart; such patience, such compassion, such forgiveness, all the springs of contrition are opened at once. Rivers of waters run down our eyes. They throw away with disgust the idols which they laid in their bosom; and turning their feet to the divine testimonies, they say, "Behold we come unto thee for thou art our Lord and our God." They now regain the fellowship of their

Savior and crucify the flesh with the affections and lust.

To a soul thus exercised, Christ and all of His offices, is precious. This restoration is often so marvelous to him who is the subject of it that he cannot get over it. It is followed by the happiest effects and “he leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his names sake.” All of these things are evidences of God’s work in the soul. He is restoring the soul. He will intervene. As Paul said to the Philippians, “I am confident of this very thing: that He, who began a good work in you, will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus.” He is restoring you soul. If you think that you have good thoughts of God by yourself, you are wrong. If you have a desire to obey God, do you think that comes from your own nature? You are wrong. All of these things are God’s work in the heart that we need to recognize that He has not left us or will leave us to ourselves; even those times when you get discouraged you wonder and grieve: could you be a Christian at all? The reason that you grieve is because God has not left you to yourself.

He restores my soul. Who can say it better than David? He fell deeply away from God into sins and immorality and crime, hardness of heart for over a year, and yet, God sent His profit and said, “You are the man!” And God’s spirit opened his heart to repent; and he returned to God and wrote Psalm 51. Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done what is evil in thy sight. Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me!”

Why did he pray that? Because he knew he could not do it himself, and God restored his soul. The Christian walks with promises. Christ has died and shed his blood to justly give us promises we don’t deserve, and David understood that; and he could say, “The Lord, my shepherd, I do not lack! He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He continually leads me beside waters of rest. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name sake.”

Part of faith in Christ is believing these things, and as you believe these things, comfort comes, the hope for the future comes, strength for the present comes. As you awake in the morning and open your eyes, you are looking at God’s world and God’s will for you and God’s presence is there working in you. So, arise and go live with God as your shepherd!

If this is not true of you, because you don’t know Christ as your shepherd, he is so gracious to receive sheep like you and me that he says, “Come to me all you that are weary and heaven laden. I will give you rest.” Those that are sitting in these pews that have walked with him for a few years and found him faithful, may not always understand what is happening in their lives, but as they look back on their paths they can say, “He led me, he made me to lie down in green pastures. He led me beside still waters. He restored my soul.” They can tell you that the only reason they are sitting here today, loving the name of Jesus Christ, is because they have found one who is faithful in this world; faithful to care for His own, faithful to provide what they really need and promise to never leave them or forsake them. That is enough to live on.