

ECF 28th October 2018 Follow the Shepherd Psalm 23

13 years ago, a group of shepherds were having breakfast, just outside of the village of Gevas in eastern Turkey. Suddenly, one of their sheep jumped off a 45-foot cliff to its death. Then, another one did the same, and another, and another.

In fact, as the shepherds helplessly looked on, the whole flock of 1,500 sheep mindlessly stumbled off the cliff. The only good news was that only the first 450 sheep died, as the last 1,000 or so were cushioned in their fall by the growing woolly pile of those who jumped first.

Like those sheep, we too are dangerously susceptible to the influence of others. We too are liable to follow the crowd and make disastrous decisions in our lives. And so we can't depend on ourselves and our own ideas, if we are going to live life to the full. Instead, we need to follow the shepherd. This is what David wrote about in Psalm 23. Have a look at this [Video: Psalm 23 Sketch](#)

Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk

through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord

for ever."

1. He Leads

David was the son of a shepherd. And so he started his working life looking after sheep. When David volunteered to face Goliath, he told King Saul that "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep." 1 Samuel 17:34.

And as king, this role continued, but with a different kind of flock. The Lord told him: "You shall shepherd my people Israel, and you shall become their ruler." 2 Samuel 5:2

But David wasn't the only shepherd in Israel. In Jeremiah 23:1, the Lord said, "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" Here, Jeremiah was referring to the religious leaders who'd been given the responsibility to lead and look after the people of God.

But ultimately, David wasn't depending on any of those people to be his shepherd – not his dad, not the other leaders in his nation and not even himself. Instead, David declared: "The Lord is my shepherd." Psalm 23:1.

It is a personal statement of faith! The one that David depended on to lead him, provide for and protect him, was no-one else but the Lord, Yahweh, the Creator of the Universe, the Covenant-keeping God of Israel. This is who David trusted in. This is who he followed.

a) Are We Following?

Could we say the same thing today? Could we honestly say that the Lord is my shepherd?

There are many different people we could choose to follow:

- Some people depend ultimately on their parents to lead them – and to some extent that's ok, as this is their parent's job.
- Others put their faith in political leaders or government institutions. And in a way that's ok too, because "He is God's servant to do you good." Romans 13:4

- Still others look to their religious leaders or pastors to care for them and watch over them. And again, that is not completely wrong, as church leaders are called to [“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care.”](#) 1 Peter 5:2
- And many others don’t want to follow or depend on anyone. They want to follow their own ideas and desires and dreams, and depend on their own strength and initiative.

But sooner or later, we will face circumstances where all those options just aren’t enough. None of those people have the wisdom, understanding, resources or power to provide us with everything that we need.

And so the New Testament makes it clear that there is only one person that we can truly depend on.

- In John 10:11, Jesus said, [“I am the good shepherd.”](#)
- Hebrews 13:20 calls Jesus, [“That great Shepherd.”](#)
- And 1 Peter 5:4 refers to Jesus as [“The Chief Shepherd.”](#)

Jesus is the only one that we can ultimately trust in to lead us in our lives. He is the only one who can guide us properly. He is the only one who can provide everything that we need and protect us from all harm

And so if we want to experience the amazing blessings that this beautiful psalm describes, then first of all we need to be clear about whether we have accepted Christ as our shepherd. Have we submitted to his leadership? Have we put our trust in him?

If not, then you can do this today, with the confidence that Jesus won’t turn you away: [“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”](#) John 6:37

But if we can honestly say this morning that Jesus is my shepherd, then look at what this means.

2. He Provides

First of all, it means that Jesus provides us with everything we need. David said, [“I shall not be in want.”](#) Psalm 23:1 This doesn’t mean that we’ll have everything that we want. Instead it means that we have everything that we need. That’s because ultimately everything that we need is found in Jesus.

Colossians 2:9-10 says, [“For in Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fulness in Christ.”](#) Jesus is fully God. There’s nothing about God that is lacking in him. And if we are in him today, if we’ve trusted in him, then we have been made complete. There is nothing about life with God that is lacking in us.

So Ephesians 1:3 says that God, [“has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”](#) If we’ve Jesus as our Shepherd, then we’ll not be in want, because in him, we’ve been blessed with every spiritual blessing that we need.

We might not always feel like this. But this will be our reality. When Paul when we was suffering in weakness, the Lord said to him: [“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”](#) 2 Corinthians 12:9 Jesus’ grace is enough. We don’t need anything else. To have Jesus as our Shepherd is to have everything we need for now and for eternity!

a) Satisfaction

And David pictures the sufficiency in three ways. First of all: [“He makes me lie down in green pastures.”](#) Psalm 23:2 Seemingly it takes a lot for sheep to lie down. They need to feel safe and content and full. A hungry sheep is always on its feet, searching for another mouth of food, trying to satisfy its gnawing hunger.

But if Jesus is our Shepherd, then he don’t need to go searching for something that will fill our hearts. Instead we can just lie down, in that place of abundance, knowing that Jesus is all that we need. Jesus promised: [“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”](#) John 6:35

b) Refreshment

And that leads us to the second picture: [“He leads me beside quiet waters.”](#) Psalm 22:2.

On our own we have a tendency to drink from all sorts of sources to try and quench our thirst, instead of turning to the only one who can give us the refreshment that we need.

The woman that Jesus met at the well of Sychar had been trying to quench her thirst through a series of broken relationships. She’d had 5 husbands and was now living with another man. But Jesus promised that her thirst could only be

quenched in him. He said to her: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:13–14

If Jesus is our shepherd, he will lead us to experience spiritual refreshment that will last.

c) Restoration

And so David said, “He restores my soul.” Psalm 23:3 Sin burdens and breaks us. It destroys our peace with ourselves, with others and ultimately with God. But if Jesus is our Shepherd, he can bring us the forgiveness and renewal that we need, so we can experience true life and lasting peace.

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” Ephesians 1:7 Through the cross, Jesus has restored us to himself so that we can experience the satisfaction and refreshment that our hearts long for.

So we don’t need to go anywhere else. If Jesus is our Shepherd, then he is all that we need.

3. He Guides

He is also all that we need for guidance. Sheep are well known for their tendency to wander. And so are we. Isaiah 53:6 says: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.” And as a result we make a mess of our lives again and again.

But if we follow Jesus as our Shepherd, then he will guide us in the right way: “He guides me in paths of righteousness.” Psalm 23:3.

How does he do that? Well, it’s not by giving us a manual of rules and regulations for us to follow. Instead, as our Shepherd, he is the one who is walking in that way of righteousness and he simply calls us to “Come, follow me.” Matthew 4:19.

Jesus is the way of righteousness. He is the Teacher that we are to learn from. He is our Counsellor that we are to listen to. He is the Servant that we are to imitate. He is the Leader that we are to follow. He is the Lord that we are to submit to.

a) To Glorify God

And he won’t guide us in the wrong way, because he doesn’t do this primarily for our sake. That would be good enough. But even better than doing it for us, he does this, “For his name’s sake.” Psalm 23:3. He does this so that God’s name will be glorified and honoured – and Jesus is totally committed to honouring his name!

4. He Protects

But of course, this doesn’t mean that our way will be easy or pain-free. David went on to say: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” Psalm 23:4

Following the Shepherd doesn’t mean that we will avoid the difficult and dangerous paths of criticism, persecution, sickness or even death. If we follow Jesus, we will still go through those dark valleys in our lives.

But crucially, we won’t need to be afraid even as we go through them, because the presence of Jesus changes everything.

There’s a story about a young boy who stood in front of his class at school to make a speech about ‘What I want to be when I grow up.’ He said, “I’m going to be a lion tamer and have lots of fierce lions. I’ll walk into the cage and they will roar.” But then he paused for a moment, thinking through the implications of what that would mean. Then he quickly added, “But of course, I’ll have my mum with me.”

But how much more then, will the presence of Jesus change how we go through the dark valleys of our lives. We don’t need to be afraid, because we’ll have the Shepherd with us. Jesus’ final promise to his disciples before ascending into heaven was: “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:20

a) Completely

David detailed what difference this will make when he said, “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4

- The rod was a heavy club for beating off any predator who might attack.
- The staff was a long pole with a crook at one end, used for catching the sheep to protect from danger.

And this comforted him because he knew that the Lord would defeat any attacker, and protect him from wandering.

And likewise Jesus protects us both from external threats and from ourselves. Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand.” John 10:27–28 If Jesus is our Shepherd, then we have eternal life, and even though we walk through the darkest valleys in our lives – no-one can remove us from his protective grasp!

5. He Welcomes

And this picture of safety, even in the face of danger is developed in the next verse: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Psalm 23:5

The scene has changed here. Now Jesus is not the Shepherd leading us to pasture. Instead, he is a host, welcoming us to a wonderful banquet that he has prepared – even although we are surrounded by our enemies.

Today, we are living in the middle of a spiritual battle, where Satan is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. And yet, even in the presence of that enemy, we have been welcomed to the Lord’s table, to take the bread and the cup, to fellowship with each other and to remember our Saviour, the one who said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” John 10:11

a) Warmly

And as the Lord welcomes him, David said, “You anoint my head with oil.” Psalm 23:5

Anointing with oil was an act of love and hospitality to a guest. When Jesus went to the house of Simon the Pharisee, he was treated so coldly by Simon, and yet so lovingly cared for by the sinful woman who had been forgiven. He said to Simon: “You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.” Luke 7:46

But when Jesus welcomes us into his presence, he pours the soothing and refreshing oil on our heads. He anoints us with his love, his joy, his peace – showing how glad he is to welcome us here!

b) Generously

And he does this generously. Nobody likes to sit with a stingy host. Proverbs 23:6-8 says: “Do not eat the food of a stingy man... for he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost. “Eat and drink,” he says to you, but his heart is not with you. ⁸ You will vomit up the little you have eaten and will have wasted your compliments.”

But Jesus is the exact opposite of this. “My cup overflows.” Psalm 23:5. He wants to bless us so much, that he keeps on pouring out his love, even when our cup is full. He gives and he gives and he gives – even although we don’t deserve any of it. Paul wrote to Timothy: “Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man... the grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 1:13–14

6. He Promises

And today we can rejoice in all of these gifts, in the confidence that none of them will be taken from us. David concluded his psalm with a amazing certainty: “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” Psalm 23:6

David was sure that the goodness and steadfast love of the Lord would never be taken from him, no matter what life threw at him. And we too can rest on the promise of our Shepherd: “In my Father’s house are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” John 14:2–3

Conclusion

So this is what Jesus is offering us today. He wants to

- Provide for us everything we need.
- Guide us in the paths of righteousness
- Protect us from the danger from others and from ourselves
- Welcome us into the joy of his presence, for today and forever.

All we need to do, is to give up depending on ourselves or anyone else, and instead put our trust completely in him. Then we will be able to say that Jesus is our Shepherd – he is all that I need!

