

(How to Understand the KJV Bible) 03 Psalm 23

by Keith Simons

David writes about his trust in God as his shepherd, who provides for his needs, guides him in the right way to live, and protects him from harm, and promises to dwell with God in heaven forever.

Duration: 23:02

Scripture: Psalm 23:1

Topics: "KJV Bible", "God's Provision", "Comfort in Trials"

Description

Keith Simons teaches on Psalm 23, emphasizing the profound relationship between God and His people, where God is depicted as the Good Shepherd who provides, protects, and leads. David, the shepherd king, humbly identifies himself as a sheep, acknowledging his dependence on God's care and guidance. The sermon explores the imagery of green pastures and still waters, illustrating God's provision and restoration in times of distress. Simons highlights the comfort found in God's presence, even in the darkest valleys, and concludes with the assurance of God's goodness and mercy following us throughout our lives, culminating in eternal fellowship with Him. This psalm serves as a reminder of God's unwavering support and love for His people.

Transcript

Welcome, my name is Keith Symons, I'm a Bible teacher from England and today we're looking at everyone's favourite psalm. And which psalm is that? Well the psalm that people always turn to, the psalm that people always choose, is Psalm 23. We're going to go through it as we do in all these talks, verse by verse and word by word, looking at the meanings of each phrase throughout.

So we begin with the title which is simply Psalm 23, a psalm of David. This was written by David, the king. In fact we could call him the shepherd king, for two reasons.

As a young man, David did work as a shepherd. He actually looked after sheep. And the second reason is this, that a shepherd's job is to look after sheep and a king's job is to look after people.

And David took very seriously his job of looking after the people in Israel over whom he ruled. So in two ways we could say that David was a shepherd. But David does not begin by saying, I am a shepherd.

No, because his psalm, his poem, is about God and God's greatness and the wonders of the things that God has done for him. So David humbly, he was a king, but he thinks of himself as a sheep. And he

begins verse one with, the Lord is my shepherd.

You'll see that the word Lord there is in capital letters throughout. That represents the Hebrew name of God in the Old Testament, the most holy name which the Jewish people don't even pronounce out of reverence and respect for the great God who made heaven and earth by his power and who alone is Israel's true God. It's this God whom David declares to be his shepherd.

And he knew how a shepherd leads his sheep. He knew the care that a shepherd needed to have for his sheep. And yet David declares, the Lord is my shepherd.

That's the care that God has for me. He cares about every part of my life, everything that I'm doing. Just as a shepherd has to watch constantly over his sheep to make sure they're not getting in danger or in trouble, to make sure they're adequately provided for, to look after them, to heal their wounds.

So the Lord is my shepherd. It's God who's looking after me. And God is a good shepherd because David declares at the end of verse one, I shall not want.

Now the word want is a word that has changed its meaning over the years. Today when people talk of wants, they're talking about things they desire. Children say, I want to have this for Christmas.

They mean, of course, they desire it. But in former times, the word want referred to things that people need. And to declare, I shall not want, is the same in meaning as to say, I need nothing.

But someone says, isn't it a proud thing to say, I need nothing? Ah, but you've got to link this to the beginning of the verse. David is not saying because I am such a wealthy man and such a successful king, I need nothing. No, he's saying, I need nothing because the Lord is my shepherd.

I need nothing because God provides for me everything that I truly need. I need nothing because God is looking after me. Verse two, he maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

He leadeth me beside the still waters. So David, describing himself as like a sheep, he declares that he truly has everything that he needs. What does a sheep need? Well, a sheep needs green pastures, a place where grass grows abundantly.

Oh, Israel can be a very dry country. And a sheep needs a good shepherd to know where there are green pastures, where the grass is growing well at any time of year, especially in the dry season, when there is six months in Israel, when there is hardly any rain. He needs a shepherd who is going to lead him and take him to the place where the grass is still growing, where he can feed abundantly.

And although sheep don't need a lot of water, yet they need some. And this good shepherd leadeth me beside the still waters, not beside noisy waters, not besides rushing rivers that could frighten up poor sheep. No, still waters, a comfortable place, a pleasant place, a peaceful place where he can get, the sheep can get, the water that he needs, and then return to the pasture to feed more.

Our shepherd knows where the waters are. That too is a challenge in Israel during the dry season, when the rivers, many of them, dry up completely. But this shepherd knows where the pools of water remain, even through the driest and hottest of summers.

And that's why David can say in verse 3, He, God, restoreth my soul. The soul means the inner life, and to restore means to return it, to bring back. Oh, I felt in such a desperate situation, I felt there was no hope

for me, but God has brought back my life.

He's restored my life. When I was disturbed, when I was distressed, I turned to him, and he turned me back to a state of health and a state of peace, because he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. The paths of righteousness.

Righteousness means right, goodness. He leads me in the way of life that is good and right. Now, if we're thinking about our sheep still, we could translate this in a different way.

We could say, he leads me in the right paths. Yes, the sheep needs to go in the right paths to go to the right places. God leads us through life, if we follow him, in the right paths.

He leads us in the way that we should go. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except by me.

Yes, our good shepherd leads us in the right paths, but he also leads us in paths of righteousness. He teaches us how to live, how to behave in the way that pleases him, in the way that is right and good. And he does it for his name's sake.

God looks after his people for the honour of his own name, because his name, his character, his reputation is totally good and this must be seen, and it must be seen, in the way he leads his people. That phrase, he leadeth me, has a strong reference to how shepherds behaved in ancient Israel and in the surrounding region. They would teach their sheep to follow after them.

And so the shepherd would walk ahead and his little, his little flock of sheep, his group of sheep would follow after him obediently. Now in England today, that's not what shepherds do. They have much bigger flocks and they drive on the flocks ahead of them.

The sheep go in front of them and the shepherd walks behind, catching up with any stragglers and making sure they move on. But no, in ancient Israel, the shepherd taught the sheep to follow him and so he led the sheep. And isn't that what we must do as God's people? Mustn't we follow after the way that God's leading us? Mustn't we go in the way that he's chosen? But sometimes we don't.

That was a confession that occurs at the end of the Great Psalm, Psalm 119, verse 176, says, I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments. Oh yes, God is a good shepherd.

God leads us. But that doesn't stop us sometimes wandering away and going in all sorts of paths where we shouldn't go. Maybe that's referred to in verse 4 because it doesn't say God leads me through the valley of the shadow of death.

It says, yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I've gone into a place and it's a place of great danger. Now, some modern translations don't say the valley of the shadow of death. They say the valley of deeper starkness.

Oh, there's valleys like that in Israel. There's valleys, deep gorges we call them, where the cliffs rise high on both sides and the bottom of the valley is in permanent deep darkness because of the shade of the cliffs. But the Hebrew word, sorry, combines the words for shadow and death.

It's describing a place of great danger, of great trouble. And this sheep is going through this valley of the shadow of death, a valley where it seems in danger of death, where the darkness seems to overwhelm it and to cover it over. Yet this sheep need not fear, even in this danger.

What does David say? I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Yes, David may have wandered away from God, but God, the good shepherd, goes after his lost sheep to reclaim that lost sheep. I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.

Yes, the shepherd is again with his sheep, looking after sheep, even in that darkest valley, even in the valley of the shadow of death. And so David declares, I will fear no evil. The evil one cannot defeat me.

Death cannot have power over me because the Lord is my shepherd. And the Lord brings me back. Oh, once I was frightened of his rod and his staff, his club, his stick.

We have a shepherd's crook in England today, which we display and which they say that old-fashioned shepherds still have. A long, long stick with a hook on the end with which he can grab back a sheep by its neck to bring it back to a place of safety. Oh, I should think the shepherd's rod and the shepherd's staff usually put a sheep in the state of fear.

Is the shepherd really going to use those to grab me back? But no, David's been in great danger. He's been in the valley of the shadow of death. He's been in a situation where maybe he's wandered far from God.

But now he knows the purpose of the rod and the staff. He knows why the shepherd carries these things. It's to bring back the sheep to the shepherd.

Thy rod and staff, they don't make me afraid. They comfort me. They bring peace to me.

They bring me to safety because the Lord, my shepherd, is looking after me, even in a state of danger. Verse 5 changes the character of our psalm very much. For though in verse 5 there's still danger, well, something wonderful has happened to our sheep.

Verse 5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over.

Let's take this as sheep first and then let's see whether we can see another meaning in it. So God is preparing a table. He's spreading out food for the sheep in the presence of the sheep's enemies.

Yes, the sheep did have many enemies in ancient Israel. There were fierce animals like wolves and lions and bears that would chase after sheep and kill them. David records in the episode of David and Goliath, how he, as a young shepherd boy, had killed a lion and a bear in order to protect his sheep.

David says, my enemies can look on, but I, as God's sheep, I live in safety. I feast because God has prepared a table before me. God has set out for me the food that I need.

He's provided for me. And even the rest of that verse can refer to a sheep. Thou anointest my head with oil.

Yes, oil was used to clean sheep's wounds and as a means of healing for the sheep. My cup runneth over. Yes, God abundantly provides what the sheep needs to drink.

But more and more, this verse is sounding not like a sheep, but like what David became, a king. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Yes, David had enemies all around him.

There were foreign nations that hated him. There was King Saul, the previous king, who tried to kill him. That's a subject of many of the Psalms.

Yet God prepared a table for David. God provided for David to live in comfort and in luxury, in Hebron first, and then he gave him Jerusalem, a safe city to live in, where David built a palace. Oh, God had provided, provided luxuriously for David.

Thou anointest my head with oil. That was the ancient ceremony, to appoint a king, to pour oil on his head, as a picture of how he's been separated from other people to do God's special work and to rule over God's people. My cup runneth over.

That means my cup overflows. I have, at the beginning of the Psalm, it was, I shall not want. I lack nothing, but now I have more than I need.

God has provided so much for me. Verse six, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. The Lord is leading me.

Verse three, he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, but there's two things that are following after me. Why? It's like they're running after me and chasing me. It's like I can't get away from them.

It's God's goodness and God's mercy, his great kindness to me. These things accompany me throughout my life and in every situation I see evidence of God's goodness to me. I see evidence of his mercy that he's shown such kindness to me.

He forgives my sins. He gives me a right relationship with himself. He provides for me.

He looks after me. He defends me from those who are my enemies. He places me in a place of honour.

Even in this life, I know honour. David knew honour as he served God, but how much more beyond this life? And David closes with the words, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Some modern translations weaken this.

They say, I will dwell in the house of the Lord as long as I live. And, you know, the Hebrew words could mean that. But look at the whole phrase and you'll see the whole phrase is a reference to being with God in heaven, in the presence of God.

I will dwell, says David, in the house of the Lord forever. In the house of the Lord. That meant in David's day on earth, in the tabernacle, the sacred tent that Moses had made, the place for the worship of God and the place where only the priests could go to minister before God.

And after David's death, when Solomon built the temple, then the house of God referred to the temple which was built on the similar structure to Moses' tabernacle. It was the house of God upon earth. It was a place where only the priests entered.

But David was not a priest of Israel. Yet David declares, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. He's saying, on this earth, I don't have a place in God's house.

On this earth, all I can do is approach it, to draw near, to bring my sacrifices to the priest and to show my prayer and my reverence, my respect for God. But God has a place for me beyond this life. And it is a place with him, a permanent place, not a place of danger.

I will dwell, says David, in the house of the Lord forever. Oh, God is bringing David through this life. He's bringing him through all his troubles.

And David had great troubles and many troubles. But God is bringing him through and leading him through. And David follows God.

He goes in the paths of righteousness, in the right paths. He learns to live as pleases God. God provides for David.

He provides abundantly for David. And David is aware of God's goodness and mercy in every stage of his life. And so he knows that God cares for him.

And he knows that God will continue to care for him beyond this life, but in a much more richer and fuller and more complete way, because David and all God's people will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. In a moment, I'm going to read you the whole psalm. But firstly, let me give you my email address.

It's 333kjb at gmail.com. Please write to me 333kjb at gmail.com. And now here is a whole of Psalm 23. A psalm of David. For his name's sake, 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. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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