

PSALM 23 vs 1

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There is no inspired title to this Psalm, and none is needed, for it records no special events. Sitting under a spreading tree, with his flock around him, we picture David singing this unrivalled pastoral with a heart as full of gladness as it could be.

The position of this Psalm is worthy of notice. There are no green pastures; no still waters on the other side of Psalm 22. It is only after we have read, My God, my God, why had You forsaken me? That we come to, "The Lord is my shepherd". We must by experience know the value of the blood-shedding, and see the sword awakened against the Shepherd, before we will be able to know the good Shepherd's care – Charles Spurgeon.



A Psalm of David

¹ **The LORD is my Shepherd** / ra'ah; it's a verb; an action word in the present tense. Here King David compares himself to sheep -- to a creature... weak, defenseless, and foolish, and he takes God to be his Provider, Preserver, Director, and indeed, his everything. Throughout this psalm, you know what our great Shepherd is busy doing as He cares for His sheep; and no, we're not learning about the ornery goats or vicious wolves. That's a different story... though the goats and wolves always find God's sheep a delicious lunch to munch on.



The LORD shepherding me I lack nothing! / If He is the Shepherd of nobody else; King David says, He is mine! He cares for me! And right now... that is what He is doing! I have no needs. His grace is sufficient. The LORD says, As your day; so will your strength be. Others, far wealthier and wiser than I, may want; but I do not. Oh, I may have wishes; I might want otherwise; If famine should devastate the land, or calamity destroys the city... but for now... I lack nothing!



² **In green pastures laying down** / the word means: to stretch out; to crouch or to recline and find rest; as green grassy vegetation is nutritious for sheep; so likewise... the Shepherd causes His sheep to find rest and refreshment, food fit for the soul. Jeremiah says, Thy words I found and I did eat them... and Thy word became for me the joy and rejoicing of my heart... for I am called by Thy Name, O LORD God of hosts. Jesus said, My sheep hear My Voice and they follow Me!

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The Shepherd leads and His sheep find His tender promises; new... every morning. Great is His faithfulness:

beside the still waters... He leads me / there are some distracted souls who would give worlds if they could but find this rest; if they could stretch out and hear the restful, peaceful, refreshing waters. Jesus says, **Come to Me! Learn from Me! And you will find rest for your soul.**

Charles Spurgeon writes, Nothing is more noisy than an empty drum. Still waters run deep. Notice, the Shepherd is doing His job: He leads and gives rest. It is legalists, those lovers of man's traditions and rules and regulations, who love to harass and drive others.



That is not the Shepherd's way. He always leads by example: and His example is always filled with love for God; as well as love for His sheep. He is so different than us: **His voice is not heard in the streets; a bruised reed will He not break; and a smoldering wick will He not extinguish.**

³ My soul He restores / when my soul grows weary, He revives me. It is where we get our word for: restaurant! He's a good Chef; He serves good food! When the world would pound me to the ground; He gives me back my breath. Only He can do that:

He leads me in the right paths,
/ His ways are always right. Psalm 103 says, **Moses came to know His ways;** like when we say, That's the way he is! Moses didn't want to know endless rules and regulations: he wanted to know the LORD who was leading. And Moses could say of the LORD, That's the way He is!



And the sheep -- at least His sheep... don't get to sit in judgment in order to pick and choose; evaluating the **right paths**... which are the good ones... and which are the bad ones. The Shepherd is leading... and His sheep will hear His voice and follow -- if they have any good sense! In Nahum 2 the prophet says, The lion tore in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his hole with prey, and his dens with raven. Obviously, they were following a hireling; definitely the wrong shepherd!

He leads me in right paths...

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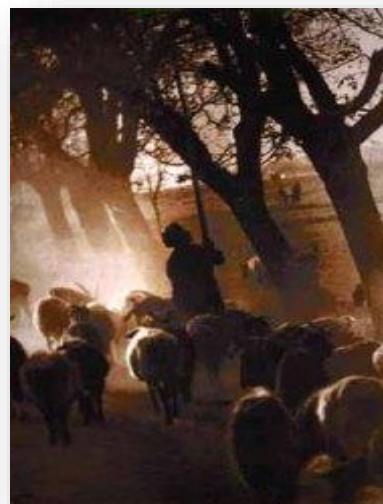
for the sake of His name / to that purpose; to that end. The people of God adopted into His family have been called by His name: they are given His name... not to sit around and brag how wonderful the choice was that God made. Rather, His people are expected to walk in the same grace and dignity of the Shepherd who is leading them, knowing one day, when we see Him face to face... **then we will be like Him**. He has an honorable name... a name above every name... in heaven and earth. It is a name of great value.

4 Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death / notice the translators tell us, through the valley of darkness. If the Shepherd leads us, we will get through the valley. Just don't sit down. Winston Churchill once said, If you are going through hell, **keep going!** Isaiah 50 asks: **Who is there among you... who listens to the voice of the Lord... who obeys... and is walking in darkness... and has no light?** Sometimes, darkness is part of the trip. Let him trust in the name of the LORD and be anchored on our God.

Yes, though I walk... as the individual did not quicken the pace, but is seen calmly walking with the Shepherd. To walk indicates the steady advance of a soul, which knows its road and knows its end and feels quite safe. This one is not baffled, there is no need to run as if alarmed; there is no need to stand still as though he would go no further. He is not confused; he keeps his same steady pace, with the Shepherd.

Observe: this is not the valley of death; it is **the valley of the shadow... of death**. Death stands by the side of the path; death always stands there... every day. Every day 150,000 people die; so every week that equals nearly 1,000,000 dead people. Yet Spurgeon writes: **Nobody is afraid of a shadow**, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us.

To the Corinthians, Paul asks: **O Death, where is your sting? O Death, where is your victory?** Jesus after He rose from the dead was seen by all His disciples and followers -- about 120 and then over 500 brethren. Knowing Jesus Christ lives today, we too can say:



Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow... of death / knowing a shadow cannot destroy us,

I fear no evil / He does not say... there will be no evil... but Isaiah says of the LORD... **let Him be your fear; let Him be your dread... and He will be your sanctuary** -- your place of safety. I will fear no evil, not even the greatest evil! Instead, I will fear the LORD:

for You are with me / here, David speaks directly to the Shepherd leading him: **YOU are with me**. Psalm 91 tells us... we hear directly from the LORD himself who says, **I Am with you**. Though the whole world had forsaken Him in His time of need; Jesus promised, **I will never leave you; nor forsake you**. Jesus assures us, **I am with you to the end of the world** that means He is present, where you are right now!

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Your rod / the royal rod of authority; the Shepherd uses it when necessary to hit, and even beat to death the enemy, any enemy, foreign or domestic, who attacks His sheep. Know this, the rod is not used on His sheep.

and Your staff / the walking-stick with the large hook on its end; the Shepherd frequently uses it to grab the neck and yank His sheep which are wandering off the path.

they comfort me / David says, knowing the Shepherd watches out for my good, this brings me great relief.

⁵ **You prepare a spread before me** / this word means: **table**... and it also means: **to spread out**. Psalm 78 asks: **Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?** Of course, He can!

Here, most commentaries depart from the allegory of the Shepherd leading His sheep, but that departure is not necessary. With rod and staff in hand and ready, the Shepherd steadily continues to go before his flock... surveying and inspecting the spacious pastures and resting places for his sheep.

As He turns over the rocky fields... preparing the ground for His flock to spread out, He searches for poisonous snakes in the grass... and voracious wolves... and ravenous lions and bears looking for a tasty treat to steal from among His flock:

You prepare a spread before me, in the presence of my enemies / as shepherds abided in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. Spurgeon says, the good man has his enemies. He would not be like his Lord if he had not.



And though the enemy of our soul does not want us to pause and reflect... on just how our Great Shepherd has already provided a table for us... **Jesus, the night He was betrayed**, took bread and took a cup... and said, as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup... remember Him! **Why the bread?** His body was broken for us, that we might be healed. Lift the bread... **there in your home**... and thank Him! **Why the cup?** Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. But His blood was shed, once for all time for us. Lift the cup and thank Him! Like the disciples of old, we can do that in our own homes, or **wherever we are!**

You anoint my head with oil / to the Shepherd, this is called: the rodding of the sheep. When leaving the safety of the sheepfold, the Shepherd always calls his sheep by name. He does not say, Hey you! As he calls them, he inspects them one by one; and He throws them out of the sheep pen, onto the pathway. When returning in the evening to the sheepfold, he again inspects his sheep, and oil is used to anoint each as needed... from its head to hinder-parts... enough oil for all the scrapes and bruises received along the path;

my cup runs over / clearly the oil flows generously; there is always more than enough oil, for all the cuts and scrapes and bruises earned along the way!

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⁶ **Surely** / this word has a variety of meanings. **only**... is its most frequent translation. So, let's try it:

Only goodness and mercy follows me all the days of my life / the word means: **to chase**, to pursue.

Now, we learned the Shepherd leading his sheep, led them in the presence of the enemy, spying on the sheep. **So, what happened to the enemy?** You'd think they would still be in hot pursuit of this one, right? Apparently, the Shepherd is a **good** Shepherd... and not a hireling, like those who are quick to run away! This Shepherd does His job, He cares for His sheep; He used His rod to land a few lumps on their head!

Only goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life / Spurgeon wrote... the dark days as well as the bright days; the days of fasting as well as the days of feasting; the dreary days of winter as well as the bright days of summer:

and I / even me... I will need His goodness and His mercy... the last day of my life; still sweeping up after the mess I make that day;

and I / even me... I will require His goodness and His mercy the last hour I breathe, but that's okay with me! Many years ago our friend... [Jack Coleman](#) said: **You don't ever need to tell me I'm a sinner!** That truth I know all too well. But please: you can remind me every day that I have a great Savior! Can we thank Him? And as King David said, we can say...

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. **Won't that be glory!** We made it!

Ephesians 1 states: **The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to the adoption of children** through this great Shepherd to Himself. So it's no surprise to THEM that one day, all the sons and daughters -- all His adopted kids... will be moving in. Well, that includes me, and I hope it includes you, too! It sounds like THEY have a really big house! Doesn't it? It certainly is going to be exciting!

One final comment: Clearly, only one good Shepherd is needed. In the New Testament, the word used for **shepherd** and **pastor** is the same word: **poimen**. Of the 18 times, the word is used once in Ephesians 4 when it is part of a list with apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers, so it refers to people. No other time is it mentioned in the New Testament; all other times this word only to Jesus, our great **Pastor**. His sheep still hear His voice and follow Him! Wherever His family gathers, we have one Father and He is in heaven; and all of us, we call one another brothers and sisters.

The Lord is My Shepherd | **This is My Father's World** | **JESUS it is YOU**

The sheep hear His voice and they follow Him | **Salvation is Your Name**