

The Shepherd of My Soul

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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PSALM 23
(A Psalm of David)

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

*He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
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 for ever.*

INTRODUCTION

Through the Holy Spirit, the born-again Christian has the Chief Shepherd in his soul: the Great Pastor, the Great Bishop—Jesus Christ. One of the worst things that can happen to a Christian is when he takes counsel from the mind and the emotions of his soul apart from the Word of God and the leading of the Spirit.

Instead of submitting to the Bishop of their soul, however, most people are living in the counsel of their soul. King David was not such a person. He always put the Lord before his face. We read in his psalms how the power of the Great Shepherd got him through want, defeat, and despair.

In this booklet, we will examine Psalm 23, which the Holy Spirit gave to David at a particularly difficult time in his life. Each line of this psalm reveals deep truths that show how Christ shepherds His people through the valleys. He brings us to quiet resting places of doctrine

where we can weather any storm.

Chapter One

THE SHEPHERD ABIDES INSIDE

“How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?” (Psalm 13:2).

“I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee” (Psalm 41:4).

“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23*b*).

“For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25).

God designed man to function as a trichotomous being—spirit, soul, and body—reflecting the image of the Trinity (Genesis 1:26-27). But when Adam fell, his spirit died, and the human race was left to function with only a fallen nature governing the five parts of the soul (the conscience, self-consciousness, emotions, free voli-

tion, and mind). Now, if he does not choose to receive godly counsel, a man's own soul will counsel him.

Through redemption, when we received Jesus Christ as our Savior, He gave us the Holy Spirit. Breathing new life into our human spirit, He enabled us to receive heavenly counsel, leading us with His still, small voice. Yet, we see good, sincere people struggle because they take counsel in their own souls. This means that instead of receiving the counsel from the Great Bishop who lives in their soul, they are counseled by their feelings and their own understanding of God.

Hearing His Still, Small Voice

When a person is saved, the Holy Spirit dwells within him, and it is possible for Jesus to pastor his soul. The still, small voice we hear is Jesus' voice. Inside our soul is the Great Bishop. Our pastor and our friends can't be everywhere we go, but the Great Bishop is, and He wants to counsel us.

King David had lost just about everything he could lose. Out in the Judean hills, he was fighting a war against his son Absalom. With David's army outnumbered, he didn't expect to

return from the hills. David believed he would be defeated—that he would never again hold out his scepter nor wear the shiny armor of a king.

What was David to do now? He had made mistakes, but he had been used of God mightily. He went off by himself, telling his six hundred men that he needed to be alone with God. Then, David declared, “The Lord is continually shepherding me, and I shall not want” (see Psalm 23:1).

The Touch of the Holy Spirit

Do not be familiar with this psalm. Allow the Holy Spirit to touch you, and do not be occupied with people and circumstances. So often we have wept, feeling hurt and defeated because of people. But every time, God says, “I am shepherding you. I am the Great Bishop of your soul. You shall not want anything.” The intense witness of the Spirit agrees, saying, “This is right.” We enter into a “faith-rest drill”: resting in His love, resting in His promises, and resting in the Person of the Great Bishop who lives inside of us.

There may be times when we think we don’t have any friends and things seem worse than

they actually are. Then we hear the still, small voice: “The Lord is shepherding you; you shall not want anything.” Oh, we could spend hours in fellowship with the Great Bishop. He will supply everything we want that we truly need—no matter the circumstance.

David didn’t know how it was going to go with Absalom, but he did know that inside His soul was the Great Bishop. The Great Bishop has vowed never to leave nor forsake us. The Great Bishop promised that He wouldn’t let us hit the bottom, because underneath are His everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27). The Great Bishop has vowed that sin shall never be imputed to us (Colossians 2:13-14). The Great Bishop has promised that we won’t have to pay for our sins (though we may be disciplined if we refuse to get right).

I can picture David on a starry night in those Judean hills, looking out into the sky, wondering what will happen. Either he could cry and become depressed, or he could go to God. David made the choice to go to the Lord.

Chapter Two

RESTING IN MERCY
AND DOCTRINE

Matthew 11:28-30 speaks of the Great Bishop: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

The Holy Spirit has used these words throughout the ages: “The Lord is shepherding me; I shall not want anything. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures” (see Psalm 23:2). “Green” is a picture of mercy and rest in “pastures” of doctrine. He makes us lie down in doctrines of mercy; the Word of God becomes our pasture. Notice that we are to “lie down” there—to have faith rest in the love, the promises, and the Person of Jesus Christ.

Every Christian has the Great Bishop inside

of his soul. We don't need our soul to counsel us—why would we ever want that? We have the Great Bishop who shepherds us, the Word from the pulpit that teaches us, and our friends who edify us. God makes us to lie down in green pastures by the motivation of love. Then, "He leads me beside still waters." The "still waters" refer to God's righteousness. The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of God's righteousness is quietness and assurance forever (Isaiah 32:17).

First, He shepherds me continually—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Secondly, I shall not lack anything.

Discuss the Shepherd, not what you "want." Discuss what God says, not how you feel. Discuss what He has done for you, not what is happening to you. Discuss the provision, not your problem. Discuss His power, not your weakness.

Restoration Within

God is shepherding me, I shall not want anything. His motivation of love makes me lie down to rest in green pastures of merciful doctrine. He leads me in His righteousness which produces quietness and assurance in my soul.

Then, "He restoreth my soul." God keeps on

restoring my soul by leading me in the paths of *His* righteousness for His name's sake.

The issue was never David's righteousness, because that would emphasize what *we* are able to do. The righteousness we have comes from the imparted righteousness of God through doctrine. He leads us in the paths of righteousness "for His name's sake"—because of His nature. His leading has nothing to do with what we do.

Have No Fear

Consider what had to be going through King David's mind. "My son is fighting me. He has me outnumbered, and he hates me. I may never go back to the throne; I may never be king again. Many of my intimate friends have turned against me. But here, on these hills, the Lord is shepherding me. And He keeps right on shepherding me, therefore I shall not want *anything*."

Notice what it means to have God counsel the soul. David was made to lie down in green pastures. He was led beside still waters, where there is no want, but only green pastures and quietness. Still waters were there, not troubled waters. It is the same for us. Our soul is restored as we are led in paths of righteousness because of His nature and the gifts of grace and right-

eousness (Romans 5:17).

“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” (Psalm 23:4).

In the original text, the word is “valleys” plural. David faced more than one valley, and this was another valley for him. It was wrong for him to keep Absalom from the palace after Absalom killed his half-brother (2 Samuel 13). It was too late to undo the damage that was done there. But now, God was telling David not to fear the evil works of Absalom. The rod of power and the staff of comfort remained with David.

Feasting from the Prepared Table

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5).

In his situation, there were pastures where David could lie down. David could rest in green pastures of doctrine that are filled with mercy and grace. There is a table in front of David, put there by God. “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (Psalm 78:19). Yes, He can. There is always a table prepared.

When the Chief Shepherd, the Great Bishop, does the counseling of our soul, there is always a table, and it is always prepared. Whatever comes our way—the sting of the death of a loved one, the failure of a family member you love with all of your heart—and no matter what happens, there is a prepared table. God sets it before us with the green pastures of His Word. He keeps restoring our soul, so there is no fear of evil, and we are comforted. He anoints our head with oil, and our cup (referring to our capacity) runs over.

Chapter Three
FOLLOWED BY GOODNESS
AND MERCY

The night in the Judean hills was coming to an end for David. This man of God was growing, maturing, and becoming very stable. He ended up believing. David was a faithful man who overcame with victory after victory. The secret of his overcoming was this: He knew God.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life....” (Psalm 23:6). Picture David, a man who thinks at this point that he will never be king again, speaking the psalm in the night. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...”—what an amazing, precious statement this is in the midst of this beautiful psalm—“...and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

Assurance, confidence, and peace were David’s. There was a prepared table, and he wanted nothing, even in the worst adversity.

David felt guilt *and* love toward Absalom: Guilt for keeping him out of the palace for two years, and love because Absalom was his son. David was very sorry for not making things right before it was too late. In 2 Samuel 18, he wept when he heard that Absalom had died, saying “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! I would God I had died for thee....” This was David’s heart. When King Saul was pursuing David, determined to kill him, David refused to touch God’s anointed, even in self-defense. David’s heart was after God.

The heart of David was not the heart that failed—it was the heart that overcame. The Great Bishop controlled his soul. He enjoyed the table that God prepared. He knew mercy; he knew the comfort of grace. He knew how to handle the valleys, because he followed the pathway of righteousness provided by the nature of God.

Positive Faith, Positive Power

There is nothing negative in Psalm 23. Everything you could want can be found there. The beauty of this psalm is sometimes missed when people quote it at funerals and do not understand the historical setting that motivated

David to write it by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at the situation: a son warring against his father; the father's army outnumbered; a father's heart of love, knowing that he failed. He longed to have it to do all over again—but he knew he could not. Yet, David recognized that God forgave him, so he put it all behind him. Instead of focusing on what happened during those two years apart from Absalom, David saw goodness and mercy following him. He set the Lord *before* his face; goodness and mercy were *behind* him, and the Chief Shepherd was *within* him. Now he wanted nothing.

Oh, it is a beautiful thing to get up in the morning, look at the sky, see the people you love, and realize, "There's nothing more I could want. I have everything because I have Jesus."

Jesus Is All We Need

After sixteen years of problems and battles on the mission field, but growing in the grace of God, Hudson Taylor finally could say, "I have never needed anything but Jesus."

D. L. Moody said, "One day I thought I needed something, but God filled me with His Spirit. I didn't need anything—I just needed the

One I didn't know."

How true and wonderful it is to walk with Him day after day, to talk with Him month after month, and to know Him more, year after year. Realize that He will *never* fail you and that He will always have a plan that is better than yours. God always works things together for good; He is always there to counsel us. The Great Bishop, the Chief Shepherd of our soul, will never leave us, and His goodness and mercy will follow us wherever we go.

CONCLUSION

Psalm 23 is for every one of us. Jesus Christ, our Great Bishop, will make it real. We do not need to have our soul counsel us. Even though we may sin, our soul can be healed (Psalm 13:2; Psalm 41:14; 1 Peter 2:25). There is no need to fear; our sin is not following us. It was paid for on Calvary, and goodness and mercy are following us all the days of our lives. Mistakes are not following us; goodness and mercy are following us. If we take a look behind us, we should not see people but only the goodness and mercy of God.

David always set the Lord before his face (Psalm 16:8). This truth means so much to me. By putting the Lord before my face, I have the Lord between me and everyone else. Before my face is my death, burial, and resurrection with Him. If I come up against anything, the Lord of Resurrection is there, and the Great Bishop and Chief Shepherd is inside of me, counseling me.

The greatest treasure on earth is to have the Chief Shepherd inside, controlling our soul. It is so wonderful, so sacred, and so real. While others are saying things, He is restoring. While people are pointing fingers, Jesus is comforting. While others are making evaluations, Christ is bringing us into rest.

The Great Bishop who created the universe knows how to handle it all. He knows how to counsel our souls. Thanks be to God, He redeemed our souls from destruction and set us in the path of righteousness—because of who He is.