

The Lord Is My Shepherd

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Bible Verse: Psalm 23
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Well, as we come to Psalm 23, I'd like to say this about this familiar Psalm as we begin. It's such a familiar Psalm that it would be easy for us to be satisfied just with the general sentiment that it creates as we read it, but tonight we don't want to be content with that, we want to be able to consider the Psalm to understand some of the propositions of truth that David is expressing in this Psalm, and then be able to draw some personal application from it, application that is fitting for this immediate crisis that our nation and even the world finds itself in, but also application that is personal and direct for each one of us because this is David saying, "The Lord is my shepherd," first person singular, and that is the way that each one of us as a believer in Christ is to understand and to think about our Lord Jesus Christ. He is my shepherd. Scripture says he loved me and gave himself up for me, first person singular, such an intimate relationship that we have with Christ, Psalm 23 speaks of that and that's what we're going to look at here this evening.

David is saying that God is like a shepherd to him, not that God's a literal shepherd, of course, but God functions to him like a shepherd functions toward sheep that he takes care of, and what Psalm 23 is expressing is that trust is foundational to your walk with Jesus Christ as a Christian. It is implicit to everything about your relationship with him. Indeed, I like to say that trusting God, trusting Christ is the reason for your existence. It is why you exist in every detail of life, that you would trust Christ to lead you through them and that applies whether things are serene and peaceful and we know what tomorrow holds, so we think, or in times like these where we don't know what our politicians and leaders are going to decide for us tomorrow. Well, that's part of what David is expressing here as we'll see as we go through the text.

You know, for those of us that live in Western culture, certainly in America, most of us are not familiar intimately with what a shepherd does. There is a resource that expresses a shepherd like this and I'm going to quote from it for just a moment. It says, "By day and by night, the shepherd is always with his sheep and he is constantly providing for them. He is not only ready to protect them but he conducts them to the most suitable ground by the best way. He leads them at noon to the shelter of a cliff or the shade of a tree beside the well or brook, and in every possible way lives among them and for them. At sunset, he conducts them back to the fold where during the night they may lie down in safety. The shepherd comes to know his sheep very intimately."

So the shepherd is like that. He takes care of the sheep. He directs them moment by moment, season by season to where they need to be, where they will be properly fed, properly watered, properly cared for, and he's watching over them with a careful eye to make sure that they are protected from all manner of danger, and that he brings them back home to the fold safely at night. That's what a real shepherd does with real sheep as it was known in the time and age and land in which David lived when he wrote this some 3,000 years ago. Well, the enduring truth of that for us is this: David says, "Yahweh," God for us in the New Testament time, the Lord Jesus Christ, he's saying, "Yahweh is like that to me," and that's what we want to see as we unfold the Psalm here for you this evening, is that God is one who is leading, he is guiding, and he is protecting his people through all manner of circumstance and he never stops doing that. It doesn't matter whether the noon sun is beating down in heat, or whether the cool night air is causing a place for comfortable rest, God is always with his sheep, always guiding them, always protecting them, and that's what we need to remember, that familiar truth in these unfamiliar times.

So with that in mind and with that introduction, let's look at the text in more particularity here. We're going to break it down into three sections here this evening and, first of all, we're going to just expand on this particular point: God is your shepherd. God is your shepherd, and of course, I'm speaking to true Christians as I say this. If you're not a Christian, you need to understand that you're separated from God, that you are currently under the domination of the devil, and that he is your father and you are lost without him, without Christ, that is. And so we're speaking particularly to those who know Christ in true saving faith and as we're speaking here tonight to those of you that do not know Christ, this is an extended invitation to you to come to Christ humbly, to ask him to be your shepherd and to save you from your sin, that you might enter into this kind of rest that he gives to all of his people freely and without cost.

So with those things in mind, point 1: God is your shepherd. And David is speaking in confidence here of the care that the Lord will give to him. Look at the first two verses with me as we review them again. He says,

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.

And so David is saying, "I am never going to have a place where I have unmet needs and where I am on my own alone and separated and vulnerable to the forces around me." He says, "The LORD is my shepherd," and the shepherd is always with his sheep. "How could I ever be in a place of unsecured danger?" And that's the confidence that he is expressing here and you see him saying three things in these opening four verses. First of all, he's saying that God provides for us. God provides for us and these green pastures of which he speaks in verse 2 were a seasonal phenomenon. You know, the land in Israel would sometimes be brown and barren in most places for months at a time, the seasonal rains would come and green grass would sprout up. It's reminiscent of Southern California that way for those of you that are familiar with the topography there. The land in Israel was green during winter and spring, but brown in summer and fall, and yet the

shepherd knew the lay of the land, he knew the needs of the sheep, and he knew how to take them to places where they could find the provision that they needed in the midst of the changing seasons of life and in the midst of the changing seasons of weather.

So the shepherd led his sheep to many different places so that they could have the food and the provision that they needed in the midst of their existence, and there's an implicit thing that is happening in the midst of that relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. The sheep come to have an implicit trust in the shepherd. Where the shepherd goes, where the shepherd calls them, they follow and they follow knowing that the shepherd has them protected. The shepherd will provide for them and – watch this – as long as they are with the shepherd, they will be cared for. The sheep know that implicitly and so the shepherd calls them to follow, the sheep follow him wherever he leads them, and wherever the shepherd is, the provision is regardless of what the outward circumstances may have been, and that means this, it means that the sheep relied on the shepherd especially in their times of need.

Look at verse 2 with me and, you know, I have this sense that I'm preaching an individual sermon to each person that's watching. It's not a group experience here. Somehow I'm having an opportunity to preach to individuals or small pockets of people gathered together so that we're able to enjoy this in a uniquely intimate way as we share this time together and I'm really grateful for that. I'm so thankful for all of you that have joined in over the live stream.

The sheep relied on the shepherd especially in times of need and look at what the outcome of that is in verse 2. "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters." Quiet waters, referring to the springs of water, the flowing springs of water where the sheep could satisfy their thirst; the place where they could drink from without being rushed by anything around them. And this picture of a thirsty sheep going to refreshing water, being able to drink his fill as the shepherd watches over him and protects him, all of that is a picture of the refreshing way that God cares for us as believers in him, as the people of God. You know, even in the midst of all of this remarkably fast flowing information and new information that's coming about the crisis that is around us, in the midst of it, my friends, you and I are like sheep drinking quietly from a water, so perfect, so precise is God's care for us that you and I are able to drink from water no matter what's happening around us and find that not a physical thirst is satisfied but a spiritual thirst is satisfied as we rest and as we trust in the care of the God who provides for us. You see, it could be no other way. It could be no other way because that's what the shepherd does. That's the reason for the shepherd's existence. He cares for his sheep and God being like a shepherd, then, he cares for his own. God is perfectly caring for the universal church of Jesus Christ throughout this worldwide crisis right now. He's doing it in a collective sense, somehow in a way that we can't see or trace, God is advancing the Gospel through what is happening in the world today, and that's wonderful and we praise him for that because we would want more and more voices added to the hallelujah choir singing praise to God, and if this crisis becomes a means by which people in desperation see their need, see their vulnerability and cry out to Christ for salvation, all of this would be worth it in an internal sense. But in addition to that

collective sense, my friend, what I would want you to see, what I would want you to know, what I would want you to rest in based on God's word is that this is the way that God provides for us individually.

Look at verse 1 with me again. David says, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters." All throughout this Psalm you see that first person singular emphasis. This is something that you and I are meant to take to heart personally. This is a precious gift from the Holy Spirit for each one of us as we go through difficult times. And so the power of this truth, God is our shepherd and God provides for us, the power of this truth is an absolutely wonderful thing for us. It is stunning in what it means for us. It means this and this has a particular emphasis where life in the world is literally changing day by day in a way that is unprecedented, at least in the past 20 years since the 9/11 attacks on New York City; what this truth means for us is this and what it reminds us of is this, is that as believers in Jesus Christ, our confidence, our serenity, our security comes from knowing who our shepherd is and knowing what he does for his sheep. It does not rest in what's going to happen in the political world tomorrow. We have no confidence in that and that proof is being pressed home upon us in an undeniable way. There is nothing in our outer circumstances that give us any certainty about what's going to happen tomorrow. For us as Christians, we can step back, we can look down at our Bibles and look at Psalm 23 and say, "Do you know what? That's okay because my security isn't resting in the circumstances around me, my confidence comes from knowing who my God is and what my God does. My God is Yahweh. My God is the Lord Jesus Christ. My God is the God of the Bible and the God of the Bible is like a shepherd to me. He protects me. He provides for me even when the land is barren all around me. He is leading me even though I don't know where the next step is, the shepherd knows the path, the shepherd knows the lay of the land, and in the care of the shepherd I am perfectly safe no matter what is happening around me. It could be no other way." And so, my friend, your confidence comes not from knowing what the future is, your confidence comes from knowing who your God is and David says, "The LORD, He's my shepherd."

So this crisis of life that is happening around us right now gives us the opportunity to examine ourselves, doesn't it? It gives you and I an opportunity to kind of look inside our hearts and say, "Do I know God like this or am I deeply troubled and anxious and fearful over what's going to happen?" Well, to the extent that it's fear and anxiety that you find as you reflect on the world around you, or let's go another direction with it, to the extent that it's frustration and skepticism that you have, wondering if all of this political action is actually necessary, we're all in the same position. Whether it's fear or frustration that you feel, anger or anxiety, the response to all of that is the same. Wherever you're at on the spectrum of that, my friend, the answer is for you to come back to what Psalm 23 is teaching and for you to get to know your God better because this is the security in which we are meant to dwell. Beloved, this is the security which is the reason that you exist, that you would know God like this, that you would rest in him like this, and thereby glorify God by returning to him a heart that rests in him despite what is happening in the world around you.

The Lord is your shepherd. He provides for you and that's what we see in those first two verses, but it's more than that, it's more than just provision that God provides as your shepherd, the Lord also does this: he guides you. He guides you. He provides for you as your shepherd, he guides you as your shepherd.

Look at verse 3 with me. David says,

3 He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

And you see there in that opening phrase there, "He restores my soul," he's talking about a spiritual reality there, isn't he? We may go through times of physical need but David is talking about the provision for his soul, a spiritual provision that restores him and makes him whole, that gives him a sense of, in the Hebrew word "shalom," it gives him a sense of peace, of overall wellness that is found in where he rests his confidence and where he rests his trust, and as he trusts in the Lord like that, not only does the Lord give him a sense of fullness and well-being in his soul deep in his inner man, he also guides him and he guides him through the changing circumstances of life.

You see that phrase there, "He guides me in the paths of righteousness," that can be understood rightly as he guides me the right paths, he guides me in the paths that properly take me to the correct destination, they take me where I am supposed to go. And so the shepherd, here's the thing, remembering that the shepherd knows the lay of the land, speaking about the literal shepherd as he guides literal sheep amongst the hillsides to take them where they need to go, the shepherd knows the lay of the land and even if the sheep can't see exactly where they're going, the shepherd knows in advance what the right path is to get them to the place of provision, to the place where their well-being will be secured. That's what the shepherd does, that's what he knows how to do, he leads the sheep to the right destination.

Now beloved, that gives us an opportunity to remember something about the nature of God. The nature of the God of the Bible is that he is omniscient. God knows the end from the beginning, the Bible says. God knows the future as if it were present in front of him right now. It's hidden from us. We don't know what our lives will be like tomorrow but God does, and as he providentially guides us, as he orchestrates the circumstances of our lives, he is directing his people into the circumstances that he wants them to be and the circumstances of where he wants them to be will be a place of blessing because that's what the shepherd does. The shepherd loves his sheep, he cares for them, and he provides for them. And so as part of the provision, he guides them to where that provision is to be found. For you and me in these unfamiliar times in which we're living and, you know, none of us really know how to, you know, we don't have any experience of living in a worldwide pandemic and so our leaders and both, you know, both politically and spiritually, you know, just speaking, you know, humbly as a pastor, you know, we're kind of finding our way along as we go and make day by day decisions on a human level, but for God it's not like that. God is not sorting this out in his mind and saying, "Wow, what do I do next? What comes next?" God was planning for this all along and so for the world

in general, for his people more particularly, and for you individually, God is guiding you in the right path and somehow in his wisdom, somehow in the eternal plan that he is working out through his providence, God finds it wise, finds it good, finds it fitting, finds it best to have us right where we're at right now. That's what God does for his sheep.

So God hasn't lost control, even though it looks a lot different to us and we're uncertain. God does not dwell in the realm of uncertainty. Everything is certain with our eternal God, everything is certain with our sovereign God, everything is good with our loving God, and that is the God who is guiding our paths. So when David says, "The LORD is my shepherd," and when he says, "The LORD guides me in the paths of righteousness," he is expressing utter security, saying there is not the possibility of a misstep along the way because the shepherd is guiding along the path that leads to the right destination.

Friends, isn't that a wonderful comfort in times like this? And what you need to understand, and I say this sympathetically to you in what I'm saying as I, you know, look into your living room, so to speak, and look, you know, and we meet face-to-face, eye-to-eye in this uniquely intimate way that we're talking to each other, what we need to understand is that God has you exactly where he wants you right now but our confidence comes from an invisible realm that is revealed to us in the pages of Scripture, it's not something that we're going to detect – let me say that more carefully – it's not something that we are going to detect by looking at the circumstances around us. We are all finding out that there is no security, no stability in the world around us. For the Christian, we say, "Okay, that's alright because that's never where I found my stability to begin with. That's never where my security was, my security was never in this world, it could never have been in this world because this world is passing away and I'm just a pilgrim passing through." Now is your opportunity, my friend, even as you're sitting in the quiet of your own room, maybe sitting with some family or friends, now is the opportunity for you to make a decision of faith, to have a clarity of faith understanding in this brief episode of life that we're living through, and to say, "I see it clearly now in an undeniable way and I am going to make a faith commitment to find my security in who my God is rather than being so wrapped up in the circumstances or the relationships that are around me." This Psalm is designed to make us look up, to make us trust up, as it were, understanding that God is caring down for us as we walk through our life.

You see that and you say, "That's where I'm going to put my trust," and there's something else in the passage here that gives us an even greater sense of certainty about the outcome. You know, I have no idea what the political outcome is going to be, where the financial markets are going to go. I have no idea what's going to happen in the world in the next 30 days and neither do you, but we have an absolute certainty, I can say based on the revealed word of God that there is absolute certainty about what God is going to do for his people. He is going to provide for us. He is going to guide us and there's something tucked away there at the end of verse 3 that makes this even more certain in our thinking.

Look at the end of verse 3 with me, he says, David says, "He guides me in the paths of righteousness," look at those four words in English, "For His name's sake." For his

name's sake. Do you realize what that means? It's stunning. It gives me chills even as I'm standing here talking to you from this pulpit. The phrase "For His name's sake" amplifies the certainty of everything that I've been saying here and everything that David has been saying in the Psalm up to this point. Beloved, understand what this means: God stakes his own honor on how he leads you. For his true people, God stakes his reputation on what he does for them over the course of time. He guides us for his name's sake. In other words, he guides us for his own glory and therefore it is certain that the way that God is guiding us even through these unfamiliar times, is going to be something that, one and most importantly, will redound to his glory and what we will see certainly in retrospect if not on a day-by-day basis, that as we look back over the course of God's dealings with us, we will look back and say with the hymn-writer, "Jesus led me all the way." Like a shepherd, my Savior leads me. What have I to fear? What have I to wish besides that? Jesus, like a shepherd, leads us. He stakes his own reputation on it and that means when it's all said and done, no one, no one will look on the lives of the redeemed and say that God somehow failed in his promise to care for them, that God somehow failed to provide for them. That is not even in the realm of possibility because God will certainly care for his own glory, God will display his own honor to perfection, and that means that he will guide us to perfection through the circumstances that we face in this life.

And beloved, that is no different today than it was one week ago when we were able to all meet together in this room, those of you that are members of Truth Community Church and are with us week by week. You know, it was only seven days ago, kind of stepping back from the text for just a minute, it's remarkable to realize it was only a week ago that we were gathered together in this room and I was teaching on the question that will change your life. One week ago. Seven days, 168 hours, and now here we are, we have a new phrase in our vocabulary, social distancing. We're not able to gather together. The government is increasingly mandating smaller and smaller groups as a maximum in order to control the spread of this deadly virus that is, you know, working in the world, and so everything has changed outwardly in the past week. But for you and I as Christians, you should have the capacity, you should be able to understand enough to step back and say, "Wait a minute, there's a sense in which nothing has changed at all because the One who is directing my steps is completely unchanged. The immutable God who has an eternal purpose that He's working out in time, who cares for me, who guides me, who provides for me, this God has not changed and therefore my security has not changed at all even though the circumstances surrounding me have been altered."

So when you come to see that, when you come to understand God is your shepherd, God is in providential control of everything in your life, there's a sense in which, I don't want to overstate it because there is a human experience of our day-to-day circumstances, right, but there is an abiding sense in which nothing changes about the fundamentally most important thing. When you are a Christian, the fundamentally important thing is that you are in union with Christ, that he loves you, that he has you in his hand and that he will never let you go, and that most important fundamental reality that ultimately climaxes in our arrival to heaven where one day we will gather at the heavenly banquet and celebrate the reign of our bridegroom king, that doesn't change and it cannot change and it's there that we find our stability as the times swirl around and change all around us.

We have an anchor in the midst of the storm. We have an anchor that holds. We have an anchor that will not let our ship be tossed to and fro amongst the waves upon which it is sitting, and that's where our security is, beloved, that's where your security is, my friend. The Lord is your shepherd. He provides for you. He guides you for his own name's sake. And when all of these circumstances are over, when it's all done and forgotten whether we're in heaven or, you know, months, years down the road we look back on this and stability has returned, we're going to look back on it and say the Lord provided for me, the Lord provided for us in a remarkable way. Praise his name. Give glory to him. He did not let his people go. That's the only way it can be. That's the only way it can be. It's the only way that it will be.

So as we take those broad perspectives, those broad biblical principles and bring them into life for ourselves here this evening, it means this: when the Lord is your shepherd, the place that he has guided you is the place where he will bless you. Stated differently: it is the right place. And what that means for us, and I say this without fear of biblical contradiction, what that means for the people of God, what that means for you as an individual Christian is this: this day in which you live is precisely the day that God has appointed for you, and because God has appointed it, it is the right place for you. This is where we are meant to be right now because all of our life is under the providential, sovereign, wise, gracious, loving hand of God and sometimes he brings great uncertainty and trials to us, sometimes he lets the waves come upon us, the waves always designed to bring us back to the safe shore of a fresh recognition of his sovereign love and care for us and that's where he restores our soul. That's what lies ahead. This is the spiritual opportunity for you here tonight, beloved, in the midst of this time, my friends. This is the spiritual opportunity for you to rise above the ever-changing news reports, the ever new, changing mandates from our government, to rise above all of that and say with clarity, say by faith, say with earnest sincerity, "I'm above all of this because the Lord is my shepherd. I, for one, I, I shall not want. He will care for me." And this is the only proper response for a Christian to make in the midst of these unfamiliar times.

So that understanding keeps us from panic, it keeps us from making hasty decisions, it keeps us from all manner of impulsive response to the circumstances around us because it fills our heart with stability and the ability to rest our head, as it were, on the pillow of our Lord's care for us, and so it has the effect of changing the entire way that you think. You no longer think on the level of, "I don't like this. I disagree with these decisions that are being made. I'm afraid." Or you know, you get angry and you lash out at people that for unrelated reasons. You get away from all of that, instead you think like this, you think, "No, no, no, no, God is my shepherd. God led me here. There must be something for me to learn here. There must be something for me to appropriate here." Indeed, you start to think, "Do you know what I want more than anything? What I want more than stability in the political and financial and outward circumstances of my life, you know what I want more than that? What I want is I want to glorify my God here. God is my shepherd here and I want to honor Him by being peaceful in the midst of these unsettling circumstances. I want to manifest in my heart and in my circle of influence I truly trust my God. I truly believe what I say I believe and it will affect the way that I think, the way

that I react henceforth and forevermore." That's the commitment of a believing heart in response to Psalm 23.

Well, we go on. The Lord is your shepherd. He provides for you. He guides you. There's a third aspect that I think we see from verse 4 and it's this, it's that he protects you. He protects you. He watches over you and guards you from danger, in other words.

Look at verse 4. What a great verse for us to be able to look together in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. I am so grateful to God for the opportunity that we have to consider this verse here this evening. Verse 4,

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me;

The valley of the shadow of death. The hill country of Israel is marked by steep ravines, by caves where beasts and robbers would hide and to walk through those places is to expose yourself to danger, as the danger lurks in hidden places that you cannot see, the danger lurks there and for all you know the danger could jump out and harm you at any moment. It was a dangerous place to pass through. Well, what the Psalmist here, what the Psalmist David is saying here is that – watch this – is that the paths that God leads us on, the paths that God leads us on sometimes go through dark places where there is imminent danger all around us, and that danger can even include the possibility of physical death, and what David is saying here is, "I acknowledge the danger that's all around me but I'm not afraid. My heart is not governed by fear. I am not afraid here." And what he says is, "I'm not afraid because You are with me. You see, the shepherd is with me," he says, and that is his comfort and his confidence. He's not responsible, he can't guarantee, a sheep cannot guarantee its own safety when wolves come to attack it, rather the sheep's safety is vested in the one who is responsible for its care. For us, our safety is guaranteed by the one who is vested in our care. That's what this passage is telling us.

Your shepherd will protect you and David goes on and he expresses that care with familiar, the familiar tools of a shepherd, the familiar instruments of a shepherd, you could say. Look at there at the end of verse 4, he says,

4 ... Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

He's referring to the tools of the trade that a shepherd has. The shepherd carried a rod. The rod was a heavy club-like weapon that would have embedded metal or embedded nails in it. It was a weapon that he would use and the shepherd would use his rod to beat back wild animals if they tried to attack the sheep. Those wild animals would find that the shepherd would intervene to protect the sheep and would beat them back. To attack the sheep, those wild animals learned was to invite the wrath of the shepherd upon them. He would bring his weapon of defense upon those who were trying to harm his sheep and he would defend them with the rod, and the sheep, as it were, could look at that rod and in the hand of the shepherd realize that there was an instrument of protection that was

right upon them, and that they were safe even though they were in the midst of a place where danger lurked in every shadow.

By contrast the staff that David refers to, the staff was that shepherd's staff that you sometimes have seen depicted, kind of a long pole with a curved hook on the end of it. It was about six feet long with a crook at the end and the shepherd would use this if the sheep started to get off the path, starting to stray away from the direction he wanted them to go, the shepherd would gently use that staff to reach out, put it maybe around the sheep's neck and pull that sheep back gently into the place that he was going to go, and back in the direction that the shepherd wanted him to follow.

So on the one hand, the shepherd is strong, the shepherd is able to protect his sheep and will exercise his power with the weapon at his disposal to protect them from those that are trying to cause harm, on the other hand, the shepherd's gentle, the shepherd's caring, the shepherd reaches out and does not harshly hurt the sheep as he pulls them back, just reaches out and gently directs them back into the path that he wants them to follow, thereby pulling the sheep in the right direction. Well, when David combines these two images, "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me," he's not talking about God with a literal rod and God with a literal staff, the invisible God, he's using metaphors to say, "God, You will use Your strength to protect me if harm comes in my direction. God, You will use Your gentleness to correct me and to bring me back to the right path if I start to stray." Taken together, what David is expressing here is complete and utter security that under the watchful protection and the watchful guidance of God, David is perfectly secure.

God will guide and protect his sheep. Beloved friend, beloved friend in Christ, as you're watching this here this evening, let me just remind you from Scripture that God is watching you with that careful and caring disposition toward you at all times if you are in Christ. That didn't change. That didn't change when this virus was unleashed a few weeks ago. It hasn't changed and it never will change. In fact, let's just remind ourselves of something important here when we talk about the protection of God. This verse, verse 4, "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me," this verse which says that, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," this verse is presupposing that there will be danger that comes to us. You know, living in a fallen world, this verse, this whole Psalm is expressing a recognition that life will sometimes be difficult; that horrible trials and adversity will come upon us; things will come that will knock us off our feet, so to speak, those things are going to come. What David is saying is even as I recognize that, I realize that there is a superintending care from my God that is taking place that leads me safely through it all, even to the point, and I like to make this point, maybe you're joining us recently or for the first time on our live stream, our congregation is used to me saying things like this, what I'm about to say, is that even when that inevitable moment of death encroaches upon us, we still can come back to this time when we know that death is knocking on our doorstep, maybe laying on a deathbed with loved ones gathered around us, maybe something sudden happens and we realize suddenly we only have moments to live, what we understand from Scripture is that in that moment of greatest danger when earthly life itself is about to ebb out of our bodies, out of our physical bodies, that God is

with us even then, and that we do not need to fear even the moment of death. And that is our ultimate, isn't it? That is our ultimate moment of need is when we are on the brink of death and what this passage is saying is that even then, even at my greatest moment of need, I'm not afraid because this God is with me and you will allow no harm to come to me. In an Old Testament veiled sort of way, it's a promise, it's an indication that God would carry us safe from death and into a place of blessedness beyond because that's what a shepherd does, he cares for his sheep all the way.

So with that said, the mature Christian, and we all want to be growing up in Christ, indeed Scripture commands us that, it says grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 2 Peter 3:18, one of the things that you are supposed to do in a time like this is to grow in your maturity and to grow in your assessment of the world around you, and you start not with the circumstances and say, "Everything's out of control." Those words should never come out of the mouth of a Christian. What should always be uppermost in determining the way that we interpret the world around us is, "My shepherd's in control here. I'm therefore safe. God is going to accomplish His purposes. God is my shepherd and He is going to provide for me, He's going to guide me, and He's going to protect me for His name's sake and for my well-being." And that enables me to look to the future with confidence because the shepherd will protect you – watch this – no to exclude you from danger but to protect you in the midst of danger.

One of the things, you know, all of our athletics have been canceled or indefinitely postponed, but one of the things about athletics is and you could say the same thing about a soldier in the midst of the battle, it is when your opponent is strong and when your opponent is skilled and you win and you accomplish victory over a serious opponent, that's when the glory of victory is recognized and achieved. It wouldn't do any good for an NFL football team to beat a Pee Wee team of third graders, would it? Well, in a similar way, Christian victory is shown when we face significant obstacles, when we face significant adversity and we go through them trusting God and come out safe on the other side; we look back at that battle and realize it was a conquest that the Lord had given to us. That's where you find your glory, is when you are most challenged, the opportunity for faith and the victory of faith that overcomes the world is at its greatest potential.

So if you're facing really serious adversity in life right now, probably even going beyond the immediate circumstances that are affecting all the world, beloved, what I want you to see is that God is your shepherd through it all, even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need not fear any evil for God himself, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the indwelling Holy Spirit himself, is with you and he loves you, and he cares for you, and he protects you, and he will lead you safely through no matter what the outcome may be. So that's the opportunity that you have to rest in that, to find your confidence and security in that, and that's why this Psalm was given to the people of God. The Lord, the shepherd orders your life so that no ultimate harm could ever come to you. It could be no other way. The shepherd exists to care for his sheep, God exists for other reasons but in this context of being a shepherd, the shepherd exists to care for his sheep, God is our shepherd, he's gonna care for us. It could be no other way. He would have to violate his own nature, his own promises for the outcome to be any different, and do you

know what? That's not gonna happen. God keeps his word. God keeps his promises. God keeps his covenants. God is faithful. We're safe in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, the Psalmist goes on. He uses a different picture as we move to verse 5. He says God is your shepherd in the first four verses. Not every commentator sees a break in the thought here but I join with those who do. Point 2 here this evening: God is your host. God is your host. As we move into verse 5, David changes the imagery and he is comparing the Lord to the host of a banquet that has been prepared for his guests.

Look at verse 5 and notice the first person singular that continues here.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.

And there's a two part meaning to this verse and it's this, is that God as our host, as your host, God welcomes you into his presence and God gives privilege to you. Let's look at those briefly individually together.

God welcomes you. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." It's often been said that in the Middle East culture in that day, and I think it continues to some extent even to the present time but certainly in the time of David, in that culture a homeowner who welcomed a guest into his house had a bond of loyalty to that guest. When that guest came under his roof, the homeowner assumed a responsibility to protect and care for that guest, and one writer on biblical manners and customs says it this way, he says and I quote, "When a host accepts a man to be his guest, he agrees at whatever cost to defend his guest from all possible enemies during the time of his entertainment." And he goes on and he quotes an incident that happened. He said, "An American missionary was entertained by a governor and the host took a piece of roast mutton and handed it to the missionary saying, 'Now do you know what I have done? By that act,'" the handing of the piece of meat to his guest, "'by that act I have pledged to you every drop of my blood that while you are in my territory, no evil shall come to you. For that space of time, we are brothers.'" It's a breathtaking, it's a breathtaking picture of the welcome and kind of a reiteration of that promise of protection, God is a shepherd, God is a host, God's saying, "You are My guest. I will protect you." David recognizing that reality says, "Lord, You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. My enemies may be beating down the door but You have promised to protect me even to the last drop of Your blood." When you look at that through New Testament eyes, you look at that picture through New Testament eyes, it just humbles us to realize that that is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ did. Against our enemies of sin and Satan and the world, against the wrath, the righteous wrath of God against us, against the open mouth of hell that was sucking like a vacuum toward us to pull us into the righteous eternal judgment that our violations of God's law deserved, what did Jesus do? What did our host do? In the presence of all of those enemies, sin within us, the devil invisibly around us, attacking us, the world visibly tempting us and pulling us down, down, down, the Lord Jesus Christ intervened with the shed blood of his own body, intervening for us at the cross, giving us a sense of how much God is a host to us. The Lord Jesus Christ literally,

he really did shed his own blood down to the last drop that was necessary. The Lord Jesus Christ shed his blood to defend us from all of our enemies and delivered us safe to the other side. When you see that and you see how far the implications are of what David said 3,000 years ago, "Yahweh, You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Yahweh, You promised the protection of Your blood." We have the benefit now to look at it and say, "That's exactly what Christ did. O how I love Jesus! How I love the Lord that gave Himself up for me! But even more importantly, how much he loved me and gave Himself up for me."

So when David says, "Yahweh, You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies," he realizes he's in a position of security. God is with him. God will protect him and his security is therefore certain. But you know, as you go on, the depths of this Psalm and what it means for the care of God for his own are just inexhaustible. Once again, I'm inadequately giving voice to what Scripture says here this evening. Verse 5, God is a host, he welcomes you, yes, but he also gives privilege to you.

Look at verse 5, in verse 5 he says, "You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows." Just briefly I'll quote from another, from a different manners and custom resource to explain this. One traveler in the 1800s described this custom of the overflowing cup and the anointing of head with oil. He said, "I once had this ceremony performed on myself in the house of a great and rich Indian in the presence of a large company. The gentleman of the house poured upon my hands and arms a delightful perfume, put a golden cup into my hands, and poured wine into it until it ran over, assuring me that it was a great pleasure to him to receive me and that I should find a rich supply in his house." The pouring on of a delightful oil and perfume in that day being an expression of kindness, a cup, pouring wine into it, a refreshment of welcome and of shared fellowship, and pouring it in to overflowing and it spills out of the cup and some of it goes to waste, an indication from the host saying, "Don't worry about that, there's plenty more where this came from," and it's an expression of the utter generosity of his care and his welcome. "Have with this healthful refreshing oil upon your body, have wine to overflowing and understand that all of the storehouse of what belongs to me now belongs to you and I share it all with you gladly because I am glad to have you in my house."

Well, beloved, think about this again in New Testament terms. Isn't this what Scripture says about the sinner who repents and comes to Christ? What does the Bible say about that? It says that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 men who need no repentance; that the angels in heaven rejoice at the repentance of a single sinner. This gives us a sense of the abundant love of God for those who come to him for salvation and he gladly welcomes us; that God, even for you who are not a Christian as you hear these words here this evening, to understand that if you would only come to Christ, lay aside your rebellion and repent of your sin and come to Christ and humbly cry out to him for forgiveness and to ask him to save you, to realize how much God welcomes that approach from the sinner; that God welcomes the sinner who comes like that and says, "Yes, yes, yes, I will pour out the fullness of My Spirit upon you. I will pour out all of the goodness of Christ upon you." And in his love and generosity, he holds

nothing back from us. In Ephesians 1 it says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has," what? "Has blessed us with," what? "With every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." He gives privilege to you. God has generously, David is saying, "You have given me a position and favor that I don't deserve but, Lord, it's so abundant that I just can't stop praising You and thanking You for it."

So my friend, tonight in these unfamiliar times, let's remember that this is what God does for every Christian. Every Christian that goes to God in prayer has a God like that waiting to welcome him. My Christian friend, understand that even in your imperfect life, even if you come, you know, a little bit stained by sin in your recent life, you come even with your doubts and your fears but you come to his presence trusting the command and promise of Christ that he will receive you, what you need to understand is this, you need to understand that you are welcome in the presence of God. God desires your presence. God welcomes it. It is a delight for him to receive you and he pours out blessing as we come to him in this way. Why do we ever resent the opportunity to pray? Why do we ever shortchange our lives and give such a middling effort toward prayer and a middling time commitment to prayer, why do we do that when a gracious host like this says, "I welcome you," and pours out blessing like that upon us when we do?

Christian friend, that should motivate you to pray, motivate you to love God, motivate you to trust God even in unfamiliar times like this, and we see that by the conclusion that David leads us to in verse 6, our third point here for this evening. The Lord is your shepherd. He provides for you. He guides you. He protects you. The Lord is your host. He welcomes you. He gives privilege to you. And that's who God is to his people, and so the question then is this: what is the response to a God like that? How should his people respond to him? How should you respond to him individually right there in the privacy of your own home, how should you respond to a God that is like that? Point 3: trust is your response. Trust is your response.

Look at verse 6. This is an expression of faith, an expression of trust. David says, "If God is my shepherd," the Christian says, "If the Lord Jesus Christ is my shepherd and He welcomes me like this, then there's only one possible outcome." Look at it there in verse 6.

6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

The picture here is goodness and mercy, goodness and lovingkindness are like attendants that are waiting upon a guest and caring for their needs. It's not occasionally but it's all the days of my life, all the days of my life goodness and lovingkindness are following me and caring for me. God's loyal love, God's grace, God's mercy, God's patience, God's goodness is saturating everything that happens to me and we know that that's true, we know that's the case because God is providentially in control of every detail of your life. And so somehow every detail of your life is invested with the conscious considered plan of God executed in love and mercy and goodness, aimed for your eternal good so that even the worst of adversity that comes to you, God is ultimately working out good and

merciful purposes in it even if you can't see it at the time. You may not see it for years, you certainly may not feel it for a period of time but, you know, just, I know that every Christian that's been a Christian for any period of time could say what I'm about to say about my own life, this is the common experience of the people of God, we can look back over time and realize that some of the suffering that we went through has actually turned into a great blessing, not simply for ourselves but God uses the difficulties that we went through, we learn from them, we grow from them, we receive God's mercy in them, and then that equips and enables us to minister to others. 2 Corinthians 1 talks about that, about how God extends mercy to us so that we would be able to extend similar mercy to those in need with the comfort with which we ourselves have received from God. It is just remarkable.

So what David is saying is that, "Because God is my shepherd, because He is like a host to me, and because He is always with me, I fear no evil, for You are with me, then God, if You're with me, then the manifestations of Your goodness and lovingkindness are going to be a perpetual aspect of my experience as I walk through earth, and then when my time on earth is done, You are going to welcome me into Your eternal home where You will have me dwelling with You forever." Beloved, if you know Christ, that belongs to you. If you know Christ, that's your prerogative to live in light of that confidence. If you know Christ, that's your responsibility to live in light of that confidence. And beloved, I want to say this with all the absolute clarity I can in the midst of the times in which we live, for us as Christians, the future cannot bring us ultimate harm. It cannot bring us ultimate harm because you and I are always with our shepherd.

You know, Jesus Christ in John 10 appropriated this picture and applied it to himself when he said in John 10:11, he said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." At the cross, Jesus was acting as your shepherd. He was laying his life down for you, saving you, shedding that blood for you in order to protect you from the vilest of enemies and the devil himself. The vilest of ultimate destruction under the wrath of God in hell, Christ intervened for us, bore God's wrath against sin for us so that whoever believes might have eternal life and not only have eternal life, but have his abiding protection upon them throughout the course of their earthly days. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and then I'll dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

What a wonderful Psalm. Charles Spurgeon said this and I close with this, he says, "Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. The black 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. Goodness supplies our need and mercy blots out our sins. While I am here, I will be a child at home with my God, and when I die, I shall not change my company nor even change the house, I shall only go to dwell in the upper storey of the house of the Lord forever." Amen.

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