

He Restores My Soul

Psalm 23

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Well, we can turn again to Psalm 23, the Psalm we have been considering, and this evening we look at verse 3. Psalm 23:.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

So in verse 1, we saw this confession of faith of David that described what God was for him, and he described it in terms of a relationship. "The LORD is my shepherd," and that meant that ultimately he lacked and he will lack nothing. Verse 2, then, described or began to describe what God as shepherd does for him, he makes him to lie down in green pasture and leads him beside the still water. He brings him to places of satisfying rest. And now in verse 3, David continues to describe how the Lord cares for him and leads him, and he does so under this idea of a restoring and that, of course, implies that there has been a straying or a wandering, going into places of danger, but here the Lord is bringing him back again. And I think as you move through the Psalm, there is, as it were, a reflection of the life of the believer himself. The Psalmist is learning more and more about himself or yourself, but also more and more about the shepherd and the ways in which the shepherd leads, how the shepherd leads, where the shepherd leads, why the shepherd leads, and that's a lifelong thing to be learned. So the older David becomes, the older the believer becomes, the more mature they become, the more they walk in the Christian path of righteousness, the more they realize the need of listening carefully and following the good shepherd.

But here in verse 3, then, David is saying the good shepherd restores his wandering sheep to the safe paths of righteousness. The good shepherd restores his wandering sheep to the safe paths of righteousness. And we'll see four things here. Firstly, men, like sheep, wander from God. That's very clearly implied in the idea of being restored. Men, like sheep, wander from God. Secondly, the Lord, as the good shepherd, restores his sheep. "He restoreth my soul." So the Lord, as the good shepherd, restores his sheep. And thirdly, the clear marks of a restored sheep. What do they look like? How do you know a sheep that has been restored? Well, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness." And then lastly, really by way of application, the encouragement this text gives to all of us in these words, "for his name's sake."

So firstly, then, men, like sheep, wander from God. Now, of course, to be compared to a sheep is not very flattering but yet it is a very appropriate picture. Sheep are very foolish creatures, as we've noted, and really there's no animal, no creature as foolish or as stupid as a sheep. Some of you spoke to me after a recent sermon on Psalm 23 and talked about this clip and maybe many of you have seen it, this clip of a sheep that's pulled from some kind of crevice or ditch and with great effort the men pull the sheep out, and then the sheep eventually is free and it goes off running free only to circle back around to try to leap the crevice or the ditch and to fall exactly back into that crevice again. And that's sheep, that's what sheep are like and, indeed, if you would speak to a shepherd, they can tell you endless stories of how foolish sheep are, the stories of the kinds of things that sheep do. And if we just try and summarize it, we can certainly say of sheep that sheep wander. Sheep wander.

They can have the best of shepherds, the best of shepherds can bring them to the best of places, they can bring them to the green grass, they can bring them to the still water, and yet the sheep still wander. They wander to places where there is no grass. They wander to places where there is undrinkable water or no water. And when sheep wander, they have no compass. They have no ability to return. Most of the time, they have no real sense that they're lost, even. They're not like other animals. I remember, for example, when we were young we had a cat and eventually we came to give the cat to someone else and gave it to a farm about 10 or 15 miles away, and then the next morning the cat is there at the door back again. The cat found its way back home. A cat will do that. A dog will do that. Other animals will do that. The dove, for example, can fly miles and miles away and yet it knows its way back but a sheep is so different. A sheep gets a little off the path and it's totally disoriented, it has no compass, it doesn't come back. Sheep wander. Sheep don't know how to get back. Sheep hardly recognize until it's too late that they're lost.

So sheep wander. Sheep follow. Sheep follow other sheep. Of course, it's good that the sheep follow the shepherd but the shepherd needs sheep dogs for a reason, because the sheep follow others. The sheep stop following the shepherd and they begin to follow other sheep or goats or whatever it is, and sheep therefore can be very easily misled. I was reading, maybe some of you know this, but of Judas goats, that's what they call them. Judas goats, after Judas, the traitor, as it were, and the goat is trained to associate with a flock of sheep in order to lead the sheep wherever the shepherd or the people want to lead them. On some farms, these Judas goats will lead the sheep all the way up to the slaughter and the Judas goat at the last minute will turn away and the sheep will go to their slaughter. But that sheep, sheep follow foolishly and stupidly even a Judas goat that's leading them to a slaughterhouse. They wander. They follow others.

But then sheep are very vulnerable when they're isolated. They're very exposed. Not only can they not get back but they're exposed to many dangers. Shepherds will speak of cast sheep. I think it has the idea of being cast down and so they speak of certain sheep called cast sheep. Now what happens is this, the sheep wander, the sheep finds some grass, the sheep eats the grass, the sheep lie down and rest on some nice piece of grass, the sheep become imbalanced, they fall over, and when they fall over, especially if they fall onto

their back, they can't get up again. And then panic sets in and they desperately kick their legs but it only makes things worse, and the shepherd says that when they do that, they end up with a lot of gas in their stomach and the circulation to their legs very quickly cuts out and so that they lose the ability to use their feet. And so they're in a deadly situation, these cast sheep, cast down and fallen on their backs. And in that situation, of course, they're easy prey for a wolf, a vulture, or some other predator.

But what we're saying here is this is sheep. Sheep wander. Sheep follow others. And the moment they're away from the shepherd, they're in great danger. Well, it's not a flattering comparison but it is an accurate one. Isaiah says, "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one of us to his own way." David in Psalm 119 says, "I have strayed like a lost sheep." Peter says, "You were like sheep going astray." That's what sheep do. That's what we do. That's why it's a fitting comparison.

Men, like sheep, wander from God. And every believer will confess this. "This is what I'm like even after grace. I am prone to wander." You think again of Peter, he loved the Lord, he said he would never deny him, and yet he wandered. He denied him three times with cursing and swearing and threats. David knew this himself. He wandered away from God. David, the shepherd king, how foolish he was when he had wandered to the land of the Philistines and he eventually pretended to be insane. How foolish he was when he wandered with his eyes with Bathsheba. He knew what it was to have wandered from God. You can think also, we recently looked at the book of Ruth and you remember Naomi and Elimelech, what a picture of people wandering, leaving Bethlehem, the house of bread, the place where God's glory is, the place where the worship of God is. Leaving the house of bread and going all the way to Moab where there's only death, where there's no green pasture, where there's no still water. What a wandering that was. But really you can go all the way back from Peter to David to Naomi, but you can all the way back to Adam himself, how Adam wandered from the good pasture of paradise. Was it not good pasture? Was it not still water? God had placed him in this place of tranquility and this place of blessedness. God had said, "It's very good." But what a wandering sin brought.

That's the great wandering, isn't it, the wandering of sin, and how then we have all wandered ever since. "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one of us to our own way." And the nature of that wandering comes in the next part of the verse when it says, "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Wandering is iniquity. Wandering is not just being clumsy like sheep, wandering is sin. Wandering from God is evil. Wandering from God is iniquity.

Now this is certainly true, then, of all unbelievers, of all of us as we come into this world. We are wanderers. We are on the mountains of vanity. We are without God and therefore we are without hope in this world. Solomon says in Proverbs, "There's a way that seems right to a man." They think it's good. They would never say, "We're wandering in life." They would never say, "We're straying in life." No, that's not true. They would say, "There's a way that seems right to man but the end thereof is the way of death." Those who are without God are wandering hopelessly on the mountains of vanity.

In Jeremiah's prophecy, there's a very sobering verse that says that you're to give glory to the Lord your God before he causes darkness, before your feet stumble on the dark mountains. It speaks of the danger of being far off from God. If you are far off from God this evening, you are in great great danger, but people don't think about this. They don't, they would never say this of themselves, and yet if you ask them these kinds of questions, "Do you love God? Is there a delighting of God in your soul? Do you love holiness? Do you think about eternity? Do you think about what happens when you die? Do you have love for God? Do you have love for the word? Do you have love for his day? Do you have love for his worship?" And they say, "Well, no, not really." Well, that's wandering. That's being far off. That means you've wandered from your Creator. That means you've wandered from your God. That means you're like a lost sheep on the mountains of vanity. You are a cast sheep. God created you, God's your Creator but you are a cast sheep. Spiritually you're on your back and there's a roaring lion walking about seeking whom he may devour.

But it's true not only of unbelievers, it's also true of those who by grace have come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now of course, in a more limited way but it's still true. And again, it's not simply being clumsy. To stray or wander from God is certainly dangerous but it's also wicked. Again, if you'd go to Jeremiah, the Lord through Jeremiah speaks of his covenant people and listen to the way he describes them in Jeremiah 50:6, "My people have been like lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace." Now that can be true of the people of God. That's why to the people of God, the writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 3, verse 12, be careful, "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." It's something that can happen gradually. It's something that can happen imperceptibly to you or to others around you so be careful, the writer says.

But it doesn't happen imperceptibly to the good shepherd mercifully. He says, "I know your works." He says to Ephesus remember in Revelation 3, the church in Ephesus, "I have something against you. Other people look at your church and they think this is good, but I have something against you. You have left your first love. You've lost your sense of God. You've lost the devotion you had to God. Your love for God has become cold and feeble." And maybe you're saying, "Well, I know there's something wrong in my spiritual experience. I'm not where I should be. I'm not where I was before." This can be a gradual thing just as spiritual growth, so often, feels so slow, so can spiritual decay be slow. You can hardly notice it. People don't see it, elders don't see it, but the good shepherd does mercifully. "I have this against you, you've wandered, you've left your first love."

But other times you do notice and you do realize, and maybe that's you this evening, even, you're here and you say, "Well, if anything describes me this evening it's this, I'm like that cast down sheep. I'm like that one who has got myself into this situation where I'm on my back, I've been kicking my legs, it's not working and, oh, how I wish I was where I used to be but I'm helpless. I've wandered. I've wandered from that quiet place of prayer. I've wandered from that sense of the presence of the Lord in reading and now it's cold, it's formal, it's lifeless. I've wandered from the gathering together of the people of

God." And in its place has come some temptation, some idol, some thing that is now there instead where before there was fellowship with God. Now there's this and it's a wandering and you know it because the Lord won't let you remain there without feeling it, and this is your prayer, this is your desire, this is your need, "I need to be restored. I need to be brought back. I need to be able to say my soul he doth restore again."

So we ask this evening: have you, have we grieved for our wanderings? Are we conscious of wanderings? Because we all wander. It's really a case of are we conscious of it? Do we pray with the saints in all ages prayers that speak to our need for being kept from wandering? Would you pray with David, "Hold up my goings in thy paths that my footsteps would not slide because sliding is what I do and I need to be held up, I need to be kept." Do you pray with David in Psalm 19:13, "Keep your servant from presumptuous sins. Don't let them have dominion over me. If you will not keep me, if you will not hold me back, they will have dominion. I will go into the way of this sin."

There is in every child of God, Octavius Winslow writes, that innate principle of departure. It's what we do because we are sheep. Even the best of us here, we're like sheep. There is this principle in us of departure notwithstanding the wonders of grace that God has done in the soul. Though he has elected, called, renewed, washed, clothed the believer, yet if he does not check and rein him in, he would depart and he would depart forever. Is that true for you? Would you say, "Yes, that's right. That's what would happen. If God would for a moment take away his restraining grace, I would be like a lost sheep. I would go astray. And so I need to be kept."

And is there a sorrow at wandering? Is there a grief at wandering? "God has been so good, God has been so kind, he has been a loving Father, and this is what I do in return? Why would I wander from him? Has he been unkind? Has he been unfaithful? Did he not give me everything that I really needed? Was his discipline too harsh? Is that the reason? No," you would say. "No, it's me. I wandered like a lost sheep."

And at that point, how needful, how wonderful this confession, "He restoreth my soul." He restoreth my soul. That brings us here, secondly, to see the Lord, as the good shepherd, restores his sheep. And again to just notice the care and the love of the shepherd as he makes his sheep aware of their condition. Christ will never leave his people on the mountains of vanity without touching them, without rebuking them. Again if you go to Ephesus, he says, "I have this against you, you have left your first love. You have wandered." Or you think of the next, one of the next churches, Pergamos in Revelation 2:14. He says, "I have a few things against you because you have them there that hold the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel and to eat things sacrificed to idols, to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which thing I hate." He's saying, "You've wandered, Pergamos. You've wandered. You've gone astray." Or Laodicea, "You're saying you're rich and you're increased with goods and you don't need anything but, no, you've wandered. You are naked. You are blind. You are destitute. You are wretched. You are miserable." But what we want to show you here is that this is love. This is kindness. It's no kindness, is it, for a shepherd to leave a sheep on its back, to

leave a sheep to wander. And the sheep want the shepherd to be honest with them. The sheep want the shepherd to diagnose them. The sheep want to hear the voice of the shepherd.

Remember Hezekiah when Isaiah comes to him and we read of this in chapter 38 of Isaiah, the Lord comes to him and says, "Set your house in order for you will die." It seems a very hard thing to have to hear, does it not? And yet Hezekiah, he weeps, he mourns, and after the Lord extends his life by 15 years, Hezekiah says, "You have in love to my soul," you have in love to my soul, "delivered it from the pit of corruption for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Love to my soul. It was a hard thing to hear but it was love to my soul.

And so you're on your back and the Lord sometimes speaks very strong words to his people but with this purpose: to recover them. The Lord will do whatever he needs to, to bring his wandering sheep back, and it brings the sheep to cry out to the shepherd like David does in Psalm 42, feeling now far away, "As thirsts the hart for water brooks, so thirsts my soul, O God, for thee. It seeks for God and ever looks and longs the living God to see. Far from the courts of God, my tears have been my food by night and day while constantly with bitter sneers, where is thy God, the scoffers say?" That's the way he feels when he's far off from God, but here's the confession, "He restoreth my soul." He does it.

Now David knew this work of the shepherd. David knew what it was for the shepherd to restore a sheep. Remember, children, he says that to Saul when he's going to go and fight Goliath. He says, "I took the sheep from the mouth of the bear and from the mouth of the wolf. I restored the sheep." The sheep couldn't save itself from the wolf, the sheep couldn't save itself from the bear but the shepherd did. That's the work of the good shepherd. David knew what that was in his early days and Christ, then, the good shepherd, not only risks his life like David did for the sheep, he gives his life for the sheep.

Or think of that beautiful picture in Luke 15. There's a missing sheep. There's 99 here in the wilderness but there's one of them that's missing and the shepherd knows it's missing. The shepherd knows if there's one sheep here this evening that's far away, strayed away. The shepherd knows. He knows it's missing and so what does he do? He leaves the 99 in the fold and he goes off into this dangerous place and he doesn't stop until he finds the sheep, and when he finds the sheep, you have these most beautiful words in Luke 15:5, when he found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. He lays it on the shoulder and he rejoices. What a picture of the gentleness. What a picture of the love of the good shepherd. He doesn't save miserly. He does everything, he lays it on the shoulders and he rejoices. He has come to seek and he has come to save that which was lost. "Behold," he says in Ezekiel, "I, even I will both search my sheep and seek them out. I'm going to do it."

Then you go on and you read all these beautiful "I wills" throughout the rest of Ezekiel. There was a man who wrote of the "I wills" of Christ. Well, you could read of the "I wills" of the good shepherd in Ezekiel 34. "I will search my sheep. I will seek them out. I

will seek out my sheep. I will deliver them. I will bring them back. I will bring them to the land. I will feed them in good pasture. I will feed my flock. I will cause them to lie down. I will seek that which was lost. I will bring again that which was driven down. I will bind up that which was broken. I will strengthen that which was sick." And so on.

The shepherd does everything. "I will do it all," to the confession of the lost sheep that is now restored as he restores my soul. He's doing everything. He's not coaching the sheep. He's carrying the sheep. He died for the sheep. It's the smitten shepherd that restores the wandering sheep and he does everything that they need, and sometimes it appears like the shepherd is being harsh to them. And if you would look at a shepherd the way a shepherd treats its sheep, you would say, "Well, that's cruelty." You might even say, "That's cruelty to animals." But it's not cruelty, it's love. A sheep that's running away, a shepherd will use the rod and it will trip the sheep up. It will cause it to fall on its back. You say, "Well, that's cruel." It's not cruel. He does it so that he will then pick the sheep up and turn it in the right direction. Or the cast sheep, he'll pick the cast sheep up again, he'll put it between his legs to hold it so it can't run away, and will rub its stomach to get the gasses out, it will rub its legs to get the circulation again, and he'll seem to be very rough to the sheep but it's love. There's sometimes that sheep have too much wool and their wool makes them tip over and the shepherd realizes they're not going to last another month until the time of shearing and so they shear them early and it's painful for the sheep to be sheared early. But the shepherd will do it because the shepherd knows what the sheep needs and the shepherd loves the sheep.

The shepherd does everything for the sheep and Christ, then, restores the souls, the lives of his people. He does that, of course, first of all, in the work of regeneration when he comes by his word and by his Spirit and brings them into the fold. But he does it again and again and again. In the version of Psalm 23, at least I used to sing, "My soul he doth restore again, and me to walk does make." And I looked at the Hebrew and it certainly has that idea. "My soul he doth restore again." And the idea of restoring also has the idea of reviving, of refreshing, of bringing to life again, of renewing your energy. You feel down, you feel flat, and he renews your spiritual life. He gives that energy, that vigor again.

Think of Naomi. She had gone to Moab. She had wandered far. She went out full but she's brought again home empty. And I suppose you might say that she had been following her husband like a straying sheep to Moab. She had wandered with Elimelech. She thought the grass would be better there but instead Moab took everything from her and she comes back and she says, "Don't call me Naomi, pleasant, call me bitter, call me Marah." But by the end of the book, remember, after Boaz has dealings with her, she says of Ruth or it is said of her when Ruth is nursing a little boy, Obed, "He will be to you a restorer of life. A restorer of life. He will encourage you. He will provide for you. He will do everything for you in your old age." There you are, what a beautiful picture of restoration, of bringing back into the fold all through Boaz.

Think of Peter. Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, after you are converted," it's the same idea at least, if not the same word, the idea of returning, the idea of being brought back. "After

you're converted, strengthen your brethren." Augustine when he writes in Psalm 23, he translates it, "He converts my soul." Well, we think of conversion often as that initial work of grace and, indeed, there is that conversion but there's ongoing conversion, there's daily conversion. There's a constant turning again to the Lord and Peter here, "When you are converted, Peter. You're wandering. I see it now. You're wandering. I'm telling you, you're wandering. But when you're converted, after I do my work of bringing you back." And how does Christ convert? How does he restore Peter? Isn't it beautiful that he does it with a look, not with a harsh word, not with a scolding rebuke. He restored him with a look because in the look there was love, in the look there was pity, in the look there was mercy in his eyes, there was forgiveness in it, there was tenderness, the tenderness of the good shepherd who in his look was saying to Peter, "Peter, you are mine and I have loved you with an everlasting love. And Peter, I am going as the good shepherd to lay down my life for your wanderings and for your iniquity." And that was all, as it were, packed into this look and what melting power, what restoring power was in that look of Christ.

Zechariah had said hundreds of years before about the smitten shepherd that, "They will look upon him whom they have pierced and they will mourn as one mourns for an only son." What power is in the look of the good shepherd. Do you know that look? Do you know these eyes that are so full of love and so full of mercy and pity and forgiveness, that when it looks at you, you, like Peter, go out and you weep bitterly? But you can also say with Peter, "My soul he doth restore again."

You think of David. David had sinned greatly. David had gone far astray. David says in Psalm 32 that his bones were waxing old within him, his heart was melting after his sin. Here comes the Lord after all these months of straying from David and here comes Nathan and Nathan says, "David, it's you. You're the man. Thou art the man." And yes, he has hard words to hear about his house but listen to this, David said to Nathan after months of straying, David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said immediately to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin. Thou shalt not die." And what mercy comes, what restoring grace comes, this loving mercy, this restoring mercy and it was this mercy that made David say, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow." And it was this mercy that made David say, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."

Who here this evening is in need of restoring grace and mercy? Let me ask that question better: who here is not in need of restoring mercy and restoring grace? Who has wandered? Who is spiritually on their back? Who does not need this grace and this mercy? Who can do without this prayer, "Restore me, turn me, convert me whether for the first time or again."

"He restoreth my soul." But we have, thirdly, here the clear marks of a restored sheep. You know, the shepherd used to put marks on his sheep to identify them in a market. The ones with the blue prints, that's my sheep. And the ones with the red prints, that's another shepherd's sheep. But you know, Christ has put marks on his people and often other people see the marks on them more than they see it on themselves. And they used to say that Christ has two marks that he puts on his people. He has an ear mark and he has a foot

mark. "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me." Do you hear the voice of the good shepherd? Do you follow that voice? Do you delight in that voice? These are the marks of the sheep.

And here is a mark in this Psalm, really it's both the ear and the foot mark, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness." This is where you find the sheep of Christ. This is the mark that's on them. Yes, Christians, the best of Christians, the David's, the Peter's, they wander but they have this mark on them that the general course, the general path of their life is the life of obedience. John 14:21, Jesus says, "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me: and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him." He that has my commandments loves me. Then he goes on in verse 23, "If a man love me," what will he do? What's the mark? "He will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loves me not," he that doesn't have this mark, "he doesn't keep my sayings: and the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me."

If you love me, Jesus says, you keep my commandments and you go in the paths of righteousness. Well, paths is plural here. It speaks, I think, of different ways the shepherd leads his sheep. Sometimes it's beside the still water. Sometimes it's in the green pasture. Sometimes it's in the valley of the shadow of death but he's still leading them there. There's different ways in which he brings his people but they're all in the paths of righteousness.

And the word "paths" there, you could even translate it "the ruts; the clearly marked path; the well-worn path," even. The ruts were what the wagon tracks created over time and these paths are marked out by the word of God. They're time tested. The flock of Christ have been walking in them and on them since Adam and all the way down. And so you come and you say like the bride in the Song of Solomon 1:7, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth," O great shepherd, "where you feed, where you make your flock to rest at noon: why should I be one who's not with your flock?" And then in verse 8 the reply comes, "If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock," by the paths of righteousness, by the well-worn ruts that have been made by the flock of Christ.

What are these clearly marked paths? What is the evidence of being restored? There's many, of course. I'll give you three quickly here but the first one is repentance. It's the path of repentance and what is that but having a grief and a hatred of sin. Do you hate sin? Do you hate that you have wandered from the kind and loving shepherd? Do you have grief because of that? Do you have a sense of shame and humiliation? You're sorry for your sin especially when you see how kind, especially when you see how loving, especially when you see the pardoning mercy of the good shepherd, especially when you see the look of the good shepherd. That's in repentance and there is also in it this determination to forsake sin, to turn from it by grace.

"Repent then of your sin," Octavius Winslow says, "Think how you have wounded Jesus afresh and repent. Think how you have requited your Father's love and repent. Think how you have grieved the Spirit and repent. Humble yourself in dust and ashes before the cross and through that cross look up again to your forgiving God and Father." That's in repentance too. Repentance is not simply a sheep getting itself on its feet again and getting itself back. Not at all. It's a sheep that has grief and hatred that in its sheer folly it's in this position again and it's crying out to the good shepherd and desires to be back with the fold, and is looking and crying out to the good shepherd the mercy of the shepherd. That's repentance that has an apprehension, a laying hold of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

That's a well-worn path, repentance, but also this path has a great delight in the gospel way of salvation. A great delight in the gospel way of salvation. This well-worn path says, "I desire no Savior but Jesus Christ and him only. Christ alone. And the way the shepherd restores through his blood, the blood of his cross, that is the way I go. I throw away all of my righteousness. I throw away all my efforts at salvation. I take Christ alone." There's no self-help guide for sheep on their back, no efforts we make to get our feet back on the ground. We need the good shepherd and all the sheep of Christ say, "Amen. He restoreth my soul."

But then, thirdly, there's not only repentance and a delight in the gospel way of salvation but there is this concern to keep his commandments. James tells us faith without works is dead. You say you have faith but you don't keep the commandments and you have a disregard for the commandments, your faith is dead, James says. So all religious emotion, all religious experience is empty without the love of God, without love for the commandments, without love for his people. And with a dependence on grace, the sheep desire and are careful with the commandments of God. They say, "O how I love thy law." They say, "Make me, O shepherd, make me to walk in your commandments," Psalm 119.

Let me just give a word of application here because this text gives great encouragement, does it not? There is certainly the danger and the evil of wandering that we've spoken about, and if you are away from God and you're on the mountain of vanity this evening away from God, you're exposed to great danger, you're exposed to Satan as the roaring lion. You cannot be happy. You cannot have peace in your conscience. You're in a dry and a thirsty land but the Lord comes and says that he takes pleasure in those who fear him and in those who hope in his mercy. Psalm 147, he has pleasure in those who hope in his mercy. Isn't that a beautiful expression, those who hope in his mercy? And what that means for you is this: you are one gospel hope away from the fold of the good shepherd. You are a hope away from salvation. You are a gospel hope away from the fold of Christ, from an eternal heaven.

The Lord, the good shepherd, takes pleasure in those who hope in his mercy and all of this is bound up in these beautiful words, "for his name's sake." Not for your name, not for my name because our names are worthless. Our merit is only sin. But his name is full of mercy. In other words, God in the salvation of a sinner is self-moved. "I, even I am he that blots out your iniquity and your transgression for mine own sake and will not

remember your sin." All that God has ever done for his people, he did for his own name's sake. All that God ever did for his people, he did for his own name's sake. What tremendous encouragement. You who feel you don't have a name, you don't have a plea from your own side, you don't need one because this plea has come to you in the gospel, his name's sake.

And of course, you could preach a whole sermon on that, "pardon mine iniquity for thine own name's sake for it is great." You think of all the invitations that God has bound up with his name. "Return unto me," he says in the prophet, "for I am merciful and I will heal your backsliding." You think of the character that's in that name, the character of mercy, the character that finds expression in the prodigal son and who returns to the father and the father runs to him. And the prodigal wants to do something still, "Make me a hired servant. Make me do something. I'll work my way back." And the father says, "No. My name, I am the father, you are the son." And he brings him in and gives him all the blessings of his house.

But think especially of his name. Where do you see the name of God most gloriously but in the cross of Calvary. There is the name of God as the God of mercy. There is the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. There is the door by which if any man enter, he will be saved. There are the arms of mercy flung open. There is the look staring you in the face this evening, the look of love, the look of infinite mercy, the look of infinite grace, the look of a love that is greater than anything in this world. The love of a mother, the love of every mother this world has ever known, you pack it all together and it is as nothing in comparison with the love of the good shepherd for his sheep. And in the gospel, that Christ, that shepherd, is looking with the eyes of love this evening to you and he's saying, "Return unto me." Oh, look back, look back in faith and he will say, "You have smitten me with love with one look of your eyes." And you will have this confession, "He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his glorious name's sake." Amen.

Let's pray.