

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside the still waters, He restores my soul. He leads 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 You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Text: Psalm 23 A 4/30/17 Hebrews 4:1-13 John 10:1-11 Psalm 27 Psalm 146 (Resp.)
Hymns: 190, 783, 784, 785

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Dear fellow believers in Christ, our Good Shepherd,

The twenty-third Psalm is one of the most beloved sections in all of Scripture, and it's easy to see why. It's full of beautifully-comforting promises from our Lord of His presence and help and blessings in life and in death, and eternal life with Him one day in heaven!

"The LORD is my shepherd." "LORD" in the original text is Jehovah, the covenant God of grace. Jesus is no uncaring, harsh "LORD" and Master. He is our almighty, wise, loving "LORD." With Jesus as our "LORD" we have a rock-solid source of security in life. Our "LORD" Jesus, through His will and His Word, gives our lives certain and sure direction. To know Jesus Christ as our "LORD" and God by faith is to find life's true purpose and meaning.

"The LORD is my shepherd." To call the Lord our "Shepherd" is to say that we are His sheep. To put it nicely, sheep don't have much sense. Sheep are very dependent on their shepherd. Like sheep, we have a tendency to wander from Jesus, our Good Shepherd, and get hurt or in trouble. The Lord knows this about us, yet He still loves us. We are sheep belonging to Jesus, our Good Shepherd, who assures us, *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine"* (Is. 43:1)

Jesus is both our "LORD" – our almighty God, and our "shepherd" – our loving, caring Friend. A faithful shepherd protects his sheep against whatever would hurt them or kill them. Through His Word Jesus protects us from anything that would hurt or destroy our faith. Through His Word Jesus keeps us as His own dear sheep. He tells us, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."* *"Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers"* (Jn. 10:27, 5).

The Bible says, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (Is. 53:6). No sheep is worth the sacrifice of a shepherd's life. Yet that is exactly what Jesus, our Good Shepherd, did for you and for me. Jesus says, *"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep"* (Jn. 10:11). Jesus loves us all so much that He willingly gave His life on the cross to save us!

Because *"the LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want"* (*"I shall not lack," "I shall not be in want"*). The Bible says, *"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all,*

how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Ro. 8:32). Since Jesus was willing to give His life for us, He takes care of all of our other needs as well. And Jesus gives us so much more than we need because He loves us and likes to make us happy.

“He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters” (from the original, *“He carefully leads me to **resting places** of green grass and water”*). *“He restores my soul”* (from the original: *“He repairs my soul, He refreshes my soul”*). A faithful shepherd takes care of his sheep, leading them where there is good grass to eat and water to drink and safety from danger. The shepherd’s presence calms his sheep. There are so many things in life that can trouble us and rob us of peace. Sometimes it can seem as though we can’t go on any more. Scripture assures us, *“God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able, but with the trial will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (1 Cor. 10:13). Jesus, our Good Shepherd, promises us, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (He. 13:5b). He sees us through times of trial and suffering. He invites us, *“Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ...rest for your souls”* (Mt. 11:28, 29b). Jesus promises that in heaven He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, giving our souls perfect rest for all eternity (Rev. 7:17b).

“He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” God doesn’t save us because **we** are so good. God saves us because **He** is so good: *“for **His** name’s sake.”* We’re sinners just like everyone else. We don’t know why God chose us to be among His saved people. We simply thank Him with all our heart that He did! If we had to keep ourselves walking closely with Jesus on the narrow path to heaven, we couldn’t do it. But **Jesus** is leading us *“in the paths of righteousness for **His** name’s sake.”* Our salvation doesn’t depend on how strongly we can hold onto Jesus, but on how strongly Jesus is holding onto us! Jesus promises us, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand”* (Jn. 10:27-28).

“Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod” (the shepherd’s club to protect his sheep against wild animals) *“and Your staff”* (the shepherd’s crook to guide and help and support his sheep) *“they comfort me.”* We don’t have to be afraid of dying and being laid in a grave. Jesus went to death and the grave before us, and rose again. Jesus will be with us at the time of our death to take us to heaven.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (from the original: *“those who bind me/tie me up, those who besiege me, those who cause me distress”*). *“You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.”* The picture is of a host providing a banquet table full of good things for his guests to eat. In Old Testament times the guests were anointed by having a little olive oil poured on their heads as a symbol of honor and joy. Our text says literally, *“You pour oil abundantly on my head.”* The idea is that Jesus ‘pours out’ honor and joy on us as His beloved sheep. God has told us that *“we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven”* (Ac. 14:22). The peace Jesus gives is not the absence of problems, but His presence **in the face of** our problems. We don’t have to wait to be at peace until everything is fine in our lives. That’s never going to happen in this life. Jesus spreads His table of blessings before us even in the midst of our troubles. One day Jesus will take us to heaven where we’ll be safe from the devil and all other enemies to our faith forever! The Bible says about heaven: *“Nothing*

impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27).

"Surely goodness and mercy" (from the original, God's *"kindness and grace and faithfulness"* and more!) *"shall follow me"* (literally: *"run after me"*) *"all the days of my life."* James tells us, *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows"* (1:17). God is not the cause of the evil in the world; sin and the devil are. When bad things happen to us, God *"causes all things"* to always and eventually *"work for [our] good"* (Ro. 8:28). *"Surely **goodness and mercy** shall run after me **all the days of my life.**"*

"And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Originally God made us so that we would never have to die. Sadly, because of sin – because we and our bodies aren't perfect – we have to face death. I've been with many believers as they were dying. Not a single one was in despair. Every one died in peace, because Jesus gave them that peace. As we let go of this life, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is right there taking our hand and bringing us into eternal life. He assures us, *"I will ... receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also"* (Jn. 14:3b).

"Thank You, Jesus, Good Shepherd, for graciously making us Your sheep, for willingly sacrificing Your life on the cross to save us, for lovingly providing us with everything we need and even many of our wants, for giving us peace and rest for our souls, for Your goodness and mercy to us sinners, and for seeing us safely through life and death into our eternal home in heaven." **THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD.** Amen.