

## **A Chronicle of Redemption**

Chapter 16: The Shepherd Who Satisfies

Dr. David Platt

May 2, 2010



### **CHAPTER 16: THE SHEPHERD WHO SATISFIES** **Psalm 23**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Psalm 23. We're going to jump into the Word a little earlier tonight so that we have good time to respond to the Word. Psalm 23.

The first funeral that I ever remember going to was, as a kid, going to my granddad's funeral. It was my dad's dad, and I remember it vividly as if it were yesterday...two things in particular. I remember where I was standing looking at my dad. It was the first time I'd ever seen my dad cry, and just seeing him so broken and the effect that had on me. Then, I remember later that afternoon back at my grandmother's house sitting in her living room with a Bible and a piece of paper and just writing out Psalm 23...this particular psalm.

Then, when I was in college, I preached my first funeral, and it was a funeral for my grandmother on my mom's side. I didn't know what to do. How do you preach a funeral? I knew that this was her favorite psalm; that when her husband, my other grandfather, had passed away a couple of years before, she had just quoted this psalm to him as he was sick over and over and over again. So, naturally, it was the place where I went when thinking about preaching her funeral, and preached this psalm then.

Then, after my father passed away, I was serving part-time in a church in New Orleans and was asked to preach on this psalm as I was walking through just grief in my own spiritual journey. So, this psalm has been, at some of the most difficult and challenging times in my own spiritual life, an incredible source of strength and comfort and encouragement, and I'm guessing that my story is not unique there.

I'm guessing that this psalm, for many people across this room, has been a source of comfort and encouragement and strength in difficult times. Not long after I got here a couple of years ago as pastor, a member of our faith family...you may remember him...his name was Casey Black, and Casey was in his young 30s, extremely healthy from all appearances on the outside but was diagnosed with stomach cancer.

Within a month, they took him in and operated on him, and when they opened him up, the cancer had just spread everywhere. Like, they closed him up without doing anything; there was absolutely nothing they could do. Within a few weeks...I mean it was a two-month span from diagnosis to Casey passing away, and he wrote in his journal soon after he found all this out, and he said, "I was diagnosed with stomach cancer, and now they say it has spread to my liver, lymph nodes, and lungs. If I didn't know the Lord, I would probably be scared, but instead," Casey said, "I have such peace." Then, he said, "Psalm 23 sums it all up."

So, what is it about this psalm that has provided such comfort and strength and hope and encouragement to generations of God's people throughout redemptive history when they

have walked through difficult times? It's that question that I want us to attempt to at least answer in part.

This psalm is so popular. There are entire books written on this single psalm; every word dissected, every image explored, and, without question, there is so much content here; there is a wealth of content in every single phrase we see in this psalm. At the same time, I think we need to be careful, when we come to this psalm, not to dissect it so much that we miss the gentle beauty that just flows through this psalm.

So, what I want us to do tonight, I certainly want us to see what this Word says and what this Word means. However, at the same time, I want us to study it less than we simply meditate on it, and I want us to let the words of this psalm simply soak into our hearts right where we are. I want to speak, tonight, especially to people in this room who are walking through a difficult time in your life, maybe a challenging time in your life, and I'm guessing that includes a variety of people all across this room in a variety of different types of circumstances. If you're walking through a difficult, challenging time, I want to speak specifically to you tonight, based on this psalm. If you're not walking through a difficult time right now, the chances are that around the corner, a difficult time is waiting, and I want you to be prepared when you come around that corner to walk with strength and confidence and comfort and encouragement and hope.

So, I want us to walk through Psalm 23...just soak it in. This is like the exact opposite of what we do at, say, Secret Church. Like, Secret Church, as one person put it Friday night, is "open mouth, insert fire hose," like, that's Secret Church; just information, information, information. As much as we can take, more than we can take, for six hours or seven hours, if we're going to be honest. So, whereas Secret Church is like an intense marathon, tonight I want us to take a quiet walk, and I want us to see what this psalm means and how it applies to the deepest recesses of our heart and soul.

Psalm 23:1,

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Even 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 overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

I want us to see there's two really distinct sections in this psalm. So, I want us to look at the first section, and then I want us to pause, meditate, let these truths soak in. Then, we'll look at the second section, and in the process, I want to show you just eight simple, gentle, glorious truths, especially, for those who are walking through difficult times.

### **Your Shepherd's care is extremely personal.**

Now, we don't know the background behind this psalm. Different scholars have different conjecture about what the background is, but we, obviously, know that it's based out of David's experiences as a shepherd, and probably written during a time that he was experiencing difficulty and challenge and trial. So, these words flow out of him, out of his heart: "*The Lord is my shepherd...*" Truth number one that I want you to see, especially if

you're walking through a difficult time; truth number one: your Shepherd's care is extremely personal.

Your Shepherd's care is extremely personal. You know, when you look at Psalms and Old Testament writings as a whole, you see a strong emphasis on community, on the people of God. God throughout the Old Testament...and all of Scripture, really...is forming a community of people for Himself. So, you see the plural everywhere. "He is our God. We are His people." So, you see that predominately.

However, when you get to Psalm 23, you are almost startled by the individualistic emphasis here. Notice that you don't see a plural pronoun. It's not about the Lord is our shepherd, we shall not want. We're going to fly through this, but just circle every time you see the first person pronoun "I" or "me" or "my." Circle every time you see it. "*The LORD is my shepherd...*" circle my there. "*I shall not want...*" circle "I."

*He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Even 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 overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Count them...17 different times, first person pronoun used. The picture is not that the Lord is a shepherd or the Lord is the shepherd. The picture is the Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is your shepherd. Not just the person beside you or in front of you, behind you in this room; brother or sister in Christ, the Lord is your shepherd. He knows you. Just feel the weight and the wonder of this.

Yahweh on high knows you right where you are sitting; He knows you, and He cares about you, and He loves you. He is intimately aware of every detail in your life. This is the challenge, isn't it, when we walk through difficult times? Valleys are lonely places, aren't they? Sometimes, we're lonely in valleys because we are alone. Sometimes there seems to be no one around us, but even in times when we have people around us, people who love us and care for us, they still don't know what it's like to be in our shoes. They're not sensing, experiencing the exact same things we are, as much as they want to. They don't see you in those times when no one else is around. They're not in the inner recesses of your mind as you're thinking and wrestling in your soul, as you're hurting in different things.

However, the beauty is in those moments when no one else is around the Lord is there. When you walk through a valley, the reality is, brother or sister, you are never alone. Your Shepherd is always with you. You're never alone. Paul, in 1 Timothy 4: "everyone deserted me, but the Lord was with me." This is big.

I remember when I was walking through grief of losing my dad, and I got an email from a friend, who I think meant well, but he emails me, and he tells me how I should walk through the grief process. He didn't know what was going on in my heart, but the Lord knew exactly what was going on in my heart, and I can depend on the Lord. You can depend on the Lord. Know this: as you're walking through whatever you're walking through, brother or sister, your Shepherd's care for you is extremely personal. He does not just care for all of His people in this room and all of His people in the world. He cares for you.

### **Your Shepherd never stops giving to you.**

Second truth: your Shepherd never stops giving to you. "*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*" Literally, I shall not lack. Now, this is interesting, because difficulty and suffering usually is a product of lack in our lives, isn't it? Like, we walk through grief...we lack fellowship with someone we love who we want to be there, and they're not there. There is lack there. When you are struggling physically...illness, disease, sickness, pain...there's lack there. There's lack of good health. When you are walking through difficult times relationally, there is a lack there, there's a void there. When you're walking through a difficult time in your family, there's a lack of peace and harmony that you desire. So, how can you say, "I shall not lack" when you walk through difficult times? This is where I think about Job and the end of Job 1, when Job has just lost all of his children. Lacking all of his children whom he loved, and just about everything else he owned, gone.

Yet, you know what he says? He falls down in worship, and he says, "*The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*" Here's the beauty and here's what unfolds all throughout the book of Job: even when the Lord takes away...don't miss it, mark it down, brothers and sisters...even when the Lord takes away, He never stops giving. Yes, we experience lack, and the Lord is sovereign over our lacking a variety of things.

He's sovereign over these things, but even when we experience pain from lack, He is giving peace. When we experience hurt, He is giving healing. When we experience weakness, He is giving strength, and when we experience confusion, He is giving wisdom. He is constantly giving to us. Your Shepherd never stops nourishing you. Even in the midst of lack, even in the midst of loss, you can say, "I shall not want," because your Shepherd never stops giving to you. He's always giving to me.

### **Your Shepherd's provision is based on His grace, not your ability.**

Third: your Shepherd's provision is based on His grace, not your ability. Your Shepherd's provision is based on His grace, not your ability. I love verses 2 and 3...listen to it: "*He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness...*" He's doing all of it. He's doing the work here.

When we're walking through difficult times, sometimes lack the strength to move on, isn't it good to know that it is God Himself who takes responsibility for leading us and guiding us and directing us? If, in difficult times, our enduring was based on our ability, we would be sunk, but His provision is not based on our ability; it's based on His grace. He does these things...you've got in your notes...by His grace, He refreshes you.

"*He makes me lie down in green pastures...leads me beside still waters.*" What imagery...see the lush green and listen to the quiet of glassy, still waters. Know that the Lord on high has taken responsibility for refreshing your soul. This is astounding. By His grace, He restores you. "*He restores my soul.*" Your Shepherd...brother or sister, your Shepherd delights in taking that which is broken and restoring it.

He refreshes you, He restores you, and by His grace, He makes me righteous. "*He leads me in paths of righteousness...*" He enables me to walk in righteousness through the middle of it all. He does this. He does all of this. Your Shepherd's provision is based on His grace, not your ability.

### **Your Shepherd's grace results in your Shepherd's glory.**

This leads to the fourth truth: your Shepherd's grace results in your Shepherd's glory. "*He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his...*" what? "*...for his name's sake.*" I love this.

Now, some might wonder about this, maybe even balk at it. Some might say, "You mean God leads me beside still waters, makes me lie down in green pastures, for Himself? You mean to say that God has an ulterior motive in guiding me? That what He's doing in my life in difficulty, He's actually doing it for Himself, for His own name? That I'm not ultimate in this thing? That I'm not the center in this thing? He's actually doing all of this for Himself? Is that a good thing?"

Brothers and sisters, this is absolutely a good thing. This is a wonderful thing. Don't miss it...what this text is showing us. Our God has bound up His glory and His honor and His reputation and His name in faithfully providing for you in the midst of difficulty. He is love. His name is love. Therefore, when you walk through difficulty, He is going to show Himself as love. It's going to be clear that He is loving in the way that He provides for you.

When you walk through difficulty, He is Jehovah Jireh, and He is going to show Himself as your provider every step of the way. He is Jehovah Shalom, and He is going to show Himself as your peace every step of the way. He is Jehovah Tsidkenu, and He's going to show Himself as your righteousness every step of the way. God is going to show Himself strong on behalf of His people when they walk through difficult times, and it's going to be clear that He is great in the way He provides for you.

That's really good news, to know that God is as committed to our good as He is to His own name. He's going to exalt His name in the way He provides for you. God gives grace, God gets glory, and we experience good. That makes Him leading us and guiding us for His name's sake wonderful news for us.

### **Because your Shepherd gives you everything, He leaves you nothing to fear.**

Next truth, and then we're going to pause: He leaves you nothing to fear. Because your Shepherd gives you everything, He leaves you nothing to fear. There's a shift in verse 4...see if you can notice it with me. "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.*" It's a bold statement there. No evil. I will fear nothing, even when it comes to death. "*For...*" and here's the shift, "*for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*"

You notice the shift there? Up until this point, David has been talking about God in the third person. "The Lord is my shepherd. He leads me. He guides me. He does these things..." Third person. Then, you get to verse 4, and it doesn't say, "I will fear no evil, for He is with me. His rod and his staff, they comfort me." Instead, he switches to the second person pronoun, and he says, "You are with me. Your rod and your staff..." and this talking about God turns into a cry out to God.

That makes sense, doesn't it...when in green pastures and beside still waters, to talk about the goodness and the grace of God, but when we find ourselves in the midst of deep darkness...the valley of the shadow of death...when we walk through deep and difficult times, instead of talking about God, it makes a lot more sense in those situations that we might cry out to God. "You are with me. Your rod, your staff, they are a protection and provision and comfort for me. I need you." Because your Shepherd gives you everything, even in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death, you have nothing to fear.

I mentioned Casey Black. When Casey was in the hospital, I had the opportunity to go to the hospital on the day where he passed away. When you go to the hospital in a situation like that, as pastor, as friend, you know, you wrestle with what do you say? All of the sudden, so seemingly tragic, and so what do you say? "I'm sorry. I wish it wasn't happening." However, for anyone who went to visit Casey on that day, when they rounded the corner into his room, they received a surprise. Because there sitting on a hospital bed in the valley of the shadow of death was a man sitting up and smiling, and before you had an opportunity to say anything to him, he would look at you with a smile on his face, point up to heaven, and say, "I'm going to be with Jesus today!"

Suddenly, "I'm sorry" no longer seems appropriate in that setting. No, like, you find yourself wanting to go with him. This is the beauty, brothers and sisters: no matter how deep or dark or difficult it gets, you have nothing to fear, even in the valley of the shadow of death. For the Lord on high, Yahweh, your Shepherd is right there with you. It's good news. Your Shepherd's care is extremely personal. He never stops giving to you.

Grace, not your ability, that will get you through. Your Shepherd is doing this in a way that shows His glory on your behalf. Therefore, you have nothing to fear. When you get to verse 5, there is a shift in the imagery of the psalm. We've still got the imagery of the Lord as shepherd who cares for His sheep, but then in verse 5, we see a new image of the Lord as a host preparing a banquet. *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."*

### **Your Shepherd not only sustains you; He satisfies you.**

Sixth truth to meditate on in Psalm 23: your Shepherd not only sustains you in the midst of difficulty, brother or sister; your Shepherd satisfies you. In the presence of my enemies, surrounded by adversity, inundated with imminent danger, your God prepares a table...a feast for you. You enter into the banquet hall, and like a host would honor a guest by anointing that guest with oil, so you are welcomed in by the Lord on high to feast on the bread of the King of kings and the Lord of lords, such that your cup overflows. That's not just enduring in the middle of your enemies; that's enjoying in the middle of your enemies. Not just sustenance; this is satisfaction; that God designs even suffering for our joy.

It's the whole picture. It's the same picture, remarkably similar, in Romans 5. *"We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."* Cup overflowing with the love that God pours out in our hearts. God, your Shepherd, not only sustains you; He satisfies you, that as you bask in His presence, even in the middle of enemies raging around you, you receive His satisfaction in such a way that your cup overflows.

### **Your Shepherd pursues You with His love.**

Next truth: then, your Shepherd pursues you with His love. *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me..."* Now this word "follow" can be a little misleading. When we think of following, we might think of kind of lagging behind. If you are following someone, maybe you keep some distance, a little healthy distance between you and that person you are following. You're not, like, right on top of them. You're lagging behind some. Or maybe, it's when Caleb and Joshua are out in the yard playing, and I come out and say, "It is time to come in and take a bath." Following in that circumstance is going to look a lot like lagging behind; like meandering in a roundabout way as they follow to the bathroom to take a bath.

That is not what follow in Psalm 23 means. This "follow" is an active pursuit. This is an all-out pursuit. This is more like me deciding that I would like to date Heather, and therefore, I undergo pursuit, and no matter what obstacles were in the way, including the guy she was dating, pursuit. I was not lagging behind. Like, I was right there in the middle, such that, at any point she turned, I would be right there. Pursuit. This is how goodness and mercy follow us...not lagging behind. That's oftentimes how we think about God's goodness and mercy, especially in the middle of difficulty. We think, "Well, it's there somewhere...back there somewhere, but I just don't know. I don't see it right around me."

That's not true. Goodness and mercy are pursuing you at every moment, and here's the beauty: it's not goodness and mercy pursuing you because there is something in you to draw goodness and mercy towards you. That's why it's mercy. You and I have done nothing to earn this, merit this. In fact, we are oftentimes...let's admit it...dumb sheep, prone to wander. Are we not, when times are good, prone to wander...when times are bad, prone to wander?

In the middle of our struggles with faith, in the middle of our constant tendency to not trust our God, He has shown Himself faithful time and time and time again. Yet, we still...don't we still wrestle with trusting Him and trusting His goodness? So, we're prone to turn away, and yet, even then, His goodness and mercy are still in an all-out pursuit of us, so that at every moment where we turn, goodness and mercy are right there.

Goodness and mercy follow you. Your Shepherd...think of it! Yahweh on high pursues you with His love. Look at those truths. Your Shepherd's care is extremely personal. Your Shepherd never stops giving to you. Your Shepherd's provision is based on His grace, not your ability. Your Shepherd's grace results in your Shepherd's glory. Because your Shepherd gives you everything, you have nothing to fear. Your Shepherd not only sustains you, He satisfies you. Your Shepherd pursues you with His love.

### **Your experience with this Shepherd will never end.**

Now, here's the best news of all: your experience with this Shepherd will never end. It will never end. "Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Yes! This is never going to stop...ever! His goodness to you is eternal. For all of eternity, His pursuit of you will continue. His presence with you will continue.

Praise God! But how do we know this? How can you know that? How do you know that there's not go come a point where His pursuit of us stops? How do we know, and how is it possible that we could say...a sinner...how is it possible that I, a sinner, you a sinner, filled with rebellion and wickedness toward our Shepherd, constantly running from our Shepherd...how is it possible to say that you and I can know we're going to dwell in the house of God forever?

How can you know that? I'm glad you asked. Two places I want to show you in the New Testament. First, John 10. Turn with me there. John 10:11 is where we'll start. John 10:11. You know...while you're turning there...the background in John. Jesus, in the book of John, is intentional at strategic times to identify Himself with Yahweh of the Old Testament. Yahweh, I Am, the name for God. Therefore, all throughout the book of John, we see Jesus using these words. "*I am the bread of life.*" "*I am the light of the world.*" "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" John 8:58: "*Before Abraham was born, I am.*" I am. He's identifying Himself intentionally with Yahweh in the Old Testament, the Lord in the Old Testament. He's showing that He is the Lord. John 10:11

brings Psalm 23 to life. *"I am," Jesus says, "the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

*"He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I received from my Father."*

How is it possible for you and I to know that our experience with the Lord, our Shepherd, will never end? Us, sinners, the wickedness throughout us...how can we know we are going to dwell in the house of God forever? Did you see the answer? It's mentioned five times in what we just read. Verse 11: *"the good shepherd lays down his life."* Verse 15: *"I lay down my life for the sheep."* Verse 17: *"I lay down my life."* Verse 18: *"No one takes it from me...I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down."*

The only way that you and I, in our sin, can know that we will be with the Lord as our Shepherd for all of eternity is because the Lord our Shepherd sent His Son to lay down His life for our sins. That's why He came. The cross was not Plan B. The Father's not saying, "Oh, I don't know what's happening here to my Son! Look at what they're doing to my Son!" No, this is the very reason He sent His Son, to lay down His life, and praise God, His Son has authority to pick it right back up again.

The only way you and I can know that we will live forever with our Shepherd, even in our sin and in our death...how can you know you're going to live forever? It's because Christ has laid down His life on our behalf. He has reconciled us to the Father through His death on the cross for our sins. He has risen from the grave in power over sin and death, so that even though we die, we will live. We will live, because our Savior, our Shepherd, has laid down His life and picked it right back up again. That's how we know His goodness to us will be eternal.

Trust in Jesus as your Shepherd. Then, another passage, Revelation 7...last book in the Bible...Revelation 7, Jesus said...we'll start in verse 15, Revelation 7:15. Jesus said, in John 10, *"I have other sheep not of this fold."* He's talking about how He is still gathering sheep to Himself. Revelation 7 is the day, the time when we see the sheep are gathered in, from every tribe and language, people and nation, they're gathered in.

Listen to what Revelation 7:15 says, *"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their..."* what? *"...shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Brother or sister walking through difficult times, this is the hope that you have. No matter how difficult it gets, no matter how dark it gets, no matter how deep the despair, you can know this: there is coming a day when you will see your Shepherd's face. He will personally



wipe every tear from your eyes. We have nothing to fear when that's our destination, guaranteed. His goodness to you is eternal, and your fellowship with him will be everlasting.

For all of eternity, you will feast at His table and experience His pastures, walking beside still waters in complete righteousness before the Lord your Shepherd, and He will get great glory in it all.

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical.  
Website: [Radical.net](http://Radical.net)