



The Lord is My Shepherd

The Story of Scripture – Part 13

My major in college was in communications. It was rhetoric and political culture. I studied the art of persuasion and took some advertising classes. When you think about businesses, companies and products we consume, there is chain of partnership. There are all these different departments that get you to purchase what you do and part of that is advertising.

How many of you knew that advertisers are actually in the manufacturing business? What do they manufacture? They manufacture need. Their job is to make us feel as though we need what they have to sell. I am 100% convinced that I need to save money by switching to GEICO. That's how effective they are. My wife is watching. I need a Tesla! It's not going to happen. I can't afford it and I wouldn't do it, because the elders would probably fire me.

Advertisers manufacture need and we are bombarded in our culture with these things people are saying we need. But we're also bombarded from inside, because there are things we ourselves feel like we need. What if I told you there was one thing you needed more than anything else, that if you had this one thing, it would change everything?

I think that's what we see here in the 23rd Psalm. It's one of the most well-known and beloved passages in the entire Bible. It was written by David, whom we've been reading about in our Bible Reading Plan in 1 and 2 Samuel. We don't know specifically when or in what situation he wrote it. Maybe he wrote it when he was a political refugee and had to flee from King Saul. Remember that story? Maybe he wrote it later as an older man, after he had been king of Israel. Whenever he wrote it, this Psalm expresses a seasoned relationship with God that has weathered the storms of life. I want us to read this Psalm together:

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
3 He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
4 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.*

⁵ *You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

⁶ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*

Amen. This is God's Word.

In verse one, David says, "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*" That's basically the topic sentence of this Psalm. He's saying, "Because the Lord is my Shepherd, because I have this intimate relationship with God, I have everything I need. My Shepherd will not withhold anything I need in order to enjoy the abundant life He has made possible for me to live." The rest of the Psalm basically expounds on and illustrates verse one.

You might remember that David was a shepherd as a young boy. When we think of shepherds, we don't think of anyone special, but throughout the Old Testament, "shepherd" is often used as a royal title. That's why the kings of Israel are often described as shepherds and that's why God Himself is described as a Shepherd throughout the Old Testament. Listen to Isaiah 40:10-11:

Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

See, God is a King, but this King leads like a Shepherd, not like a tyrant. In a sense, through his own personal testimony, David is answering the question: what is it like to live under the authority of God? What is it like to live in covenant relationship with *Yahweh*? He's the Lord. He has all power. No one and nothing can thwart His will. He has absolute, unrivaled authority over everything in the universe. This would be terrifying if we were just talking about a human king or a human president; if we were just talking about a sinful or selfish king.

But this King is the King of kings; He's the Lord of lords. And He is good. He is gracious. He will exercise His power and authority for the good benefit of His people. As we've been reading through the Old Testament so far, we've seen God leading His people just like this. He liberated them from oppression in Egypt. He cared for them in the wilderness, protecting them from enemy armies.

But what makes this particular Psalm so breathtaking is that David is not just saying the Lord is a Shepherd or even the Shepherd. David says with full confidence and overflowing joy, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” He uses very personal language throughout this Psalm. “He leads me. He restores my soul.”

As I reflected on this Psalm and prayed about what God wants to say to us through it, an idea kept coming to mind. Remember how I said, “What if I told you that you need one thing more than you need anything else, and if you have this one thing, it would change everything?” You might be tempted to give me the Sunday School answer. You might be tempted to say, “Yeah, that one thing is God,” and you would be correct. But I want to press beyond that, because I think what God says to us in Psalm 23 and throughout the rest of the Bible is that you don’t just need God. That’s not the one thing you need—you need intimacy with God. You need an intimate relationship with God. That’s the thought that kept coming to my mind as I was reading this Psalm.

I need intimacy with God more than I need anything else.

You might remember back in January, David preached a message kicking off a time of prayer. He was preaching about prayer and fasting, and he said this: “The most important thing in your world is not your family, not your husband, not your wife, not your kids, not your job, not your finances, not your health. The most important thing in the world is your personal relationship, your personal intimacy, with God.” It’s true!

David isn’t just declaring truths about God here in Psalm 23. David is describing his personal experience with God, this day-by-day, situation-by-situation, season-by-season personal intimacy with God. Here’s why this is so important for you. If you’re not a Christian and you’re just exploring Christianity, or if you are a Christian, this is so important. If you’re a follower of Jesus, wherever God has you or wherever God calls you, it is your intimacy with Him that will ultimately satisfy and sustain you.

This is good news, because no matter what happens, nobody can take that from you. Is this not the witness, the testimony, that we see throughout church history? We read about brothers and sisters in Christ who have been persecuted in different parts of the world, yet they have this deep well of joy even in prison. Even when they’re standing literally at their death, there’s this intimacy they have with God. David is describing four benefits that he experiences as he walks in intimacy with God.

As we walk in intimacy with God, He will restore us.

Psalm 23:2 says, “*He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.*” It’s the picture of a shepherd leading his sheep. If you think about the conditions in Israel at that time, or even if you visit there today, it can be super hot and dry. The terrain is rocky and hilly. It’s not easy. So

this is a picture of respite and recuperation for the sheep who have been wearied on their journey. That's why David applies the shepherding analogy to his soul. He's saying, "Just like a shepherd provides respite and recuperation for his sheep, so also my Shepherd restores my soul."

Some people would say David might be talking about forgiveness, the work of God drawing us to repentance. It's true that when we stray into disobedience, God will draw us into repentance. We see that in Jesus' parable in Luke 15 with the story of a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep in the flock to pursue the one who strayed away. But that's not the picture David is painting here. This is a picture, not of God rescuing wayward sheep, but of God refreshing and replenishing weary sheep. The gospel is not just good news about our sinfulness; the gospel is also good news about our weariness.

Have you ever been emotionally or spiritually drained? Have you ever felt completely depleted, as though your capacity for joy was spent? The inner strength you needed to trust God was gone and you were running on empty. You had nothing left to give. Maybe you came here today and you feel like that right now. Let's be honest, sometimes life wears you down. Sometimes even following Jesus wears you down. The overwhelming stress and strain of work or a frustrating job environment. The sleepless nights and non-stop needs of young children. The emotional weariness that sets in when you've been battling a struggle that seems like it will never end. A difficult or hurtful relationship. Maybe it's a health challenge.

A lot of people don't know this, but my wife and I started dating in college and ever since college—literally, up until this past Friday night—my wife has had these sudden unbearable cold chills. They come out of nowhere and I've never in my life seen someone in more anguish than in those moments. When it happens, everything shuts down. I'm grabbing blankets, whatever I can find. Sometimes I literally cover her with myself, just so my body heat can somehow help regulate her temperature. We can't figure out why. She would say even though the physical pain is bad, the emotional toll may be worse. The fear of the next experience wears down her soul.

All of us have situations in life that leave our souls weary, wounded and drained. Before we move forward, the first thing I want to say is we have to get over the shame of admitting that's where we are. I'm especially speaking to men. We have to get over our pride that keeps us from saying, "I'm spent. I'm done. My soul is weary. I don't have anything more. I don't have it in me to trust God right now." We have to get to the point where we can be completely honest and admit we are spent, using that to turn to God.

I remember taking my kids for a walk one day last summer. It was blazing hot and before we even got out of the driveway, they were thirsty. We didn't make it down the block and they were acting like they were near death. It was crazy. They could look at me in one of two ways in that moment. They could think to themselves, "What kind of parent are you, that you brought us out here in this heat? How

could you be good and let us get this thirsty? Are you trying to kill us? This is why Mom has always been my favorite parent.” They wouldn’t say that, but they could look at me and think that.

Or they could look at me and say, “Dad, I’m thirsty.” That’s all they would have to say. It doesn’t always happen this way, but I had already prepared for what they needed—I had some water bottles with me so they could be refreshed.

Sometimes God will call you to do things that He knows will drain you. But God promises to be the One Who will replenish you, Who will restore your soul. David knew that and in difficult times he asked for that. Psalm 119:25 says, “*My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to your word.*” I’m not just saying that when we’re weary or burned out that all we need is a devotional time. We do need a devotional time. We do need to sit with God in prayer and in His Word. God refreshes and restores us in that way.

Sometimes you need some sleep. Sometimes you need a counselor. Sometimes you need to laugh or watch a good movie or get out and enjoy the beauty of nature. But here’s the difference. When you’re walking in intimacy with God, when you’re viewing life through the lens of God’s Word, you receive those very practical physical blessings as good gifts from your Shepherd, from your Heavenly Father, the God Who knows how you’re wired. He knows exactly what you need in order to replenish your soul.

Jesus Himself says in Matthew 11:28, “*Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*” As we walk in intimacy with God, God will restore us.

As we walk in intimacy with God, He will guide us.

Psalm 23:3 says, “*He leads me in paths of righteousness...*” You could also translate this, “He leads me in right paths,” the paths that are right. There’s a moral dimension to this, in that God’s guidance will always align with His will. No matter what we think, what we feel or what the people around us claim, God will never lead us to violate His Word. If you “feel led” to do something or believe something that violates Scripture, you are not being led by God; you’re being led by someone else or something else. God will only lead you in right paths, righteous paths.

Even outside of black-and-white, right-or-wrong issues, God guides us when we just need wisdom. He promises that in James 1:5: “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*” God does not delight in you being confused. He wants to guide you, whether you’re trying to figure out which job offer to take or who to date or which school your kid should go to. Whenever you’re not sure what to do, you can seek His guidance through prayer and Scripture and godly advice, then He will show you the best path to take.

This gives us confidence that God wants to and will lead us in right paths. But I think this also means that the paths God leads us on are the right paths. In other words, we can have confidence that God is at work on the path that He has us on right now. God is guiding us through His providence. God's providence means God is at work through the circumstances of life. God will guide us. In fact, God is guiding us.

I can see God's guidance in my own life. Remember I told you my wife and I were dating in college, but then I graduated before she did. Right after college, my first job was in ministry. I worked for an evangelist named Luis Palau, which is actually how I heard about McLean Bible Church. I was working here in DC, then they asked me to move to Orlando to do some work with the Luis Palau team in Orlando. So I had a decision to make. Do I move to Florida or do I stay here? Were my wife and I going to date long distance? What should I do? So I got some godly advice. I was reading Scripture and praying, then based on everything and seeing that God opened that door, I was moving to Florida. The night before I was to move, I was packing and cleaning my room, then was going to start driving at 4:00 in the morning. . At 2:00 —I found a dusty shoebox underneath my bed. I opened the shoebox and was going through the memory stuff in it and there I found a little folded-up sheet of paper. I opened it and do you know what was on that paper?

Well, let me rewind a little. As a college student, the first time Ashley and I ever hung out together was on a trip to DC to visit the monuments. I picked her up from campus, along with her friend Mary who said, "I had a dream last night, Mike, that you moved to Florida." I wrote that dream down. Years later, that was what I read on the little piece of paper that was in the shoebox underneath my bed.

Now, you might think to yourself that it was just coincidence. I mean, why did I even write the dream down? Why did I never read it again until the night before moving to Florida? Maybe it's coincidence—or maybe it's God establishing my steps. Maybe it's God confirming His guidance in my life. "Son, I've been at work in your life before you even knew you had a decision to make."

That doesn't even end the story. I moved to Florida and was living in Orlando. I had another decision to make at that point. I moved from Orlando to Tampa but was still in Florida. Then McLean Bible Church invites me to come here to preach. I had only preached two sermons in my entire life. I was 24 and that was not a wise decision on the part of Lon Solomon or the elders. But I came and stood right here. I preached my first sermon in this church right here—and do you know what my first sermon was about? It was about God's guidance, about how God led Moses and the children of Israel out of Egypt. Instead of Him taking them the short route, which was northeast to the Promised Land, He took them south through the wilderness to Mt. Sinai, then all the way around up to the Promised Land. Why would He do that?

And what was the application for that sermon? I told them, “I feel like God called and wired me to reach emerging generations in the DC area, so honestly, I don’t know why God has me in Florida right now.”

How could I ever have known that 14 years later I would be standing in this same spot, after having been a pastor in this church for 12 years? I didn’t know that, but God did. He was guiding me the whole time; I just had to follow Him one step at a time.

Let me ask you something: How has God guided you up to this point? When you look back over the course of your life, if you are really a child of God and a follower of Jesus, can you say—even if you’re in difficulty right now—“God has been faithful. I’ve seen His hand at work in my life at different points.” Why does He guide us? David says it right here: *“He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”* He guides us for His name’s sake.

When I was growing up, some of the older women in our family would look at us as kids and would say, “You’re looking like a motherless child.” It wasn’t really a nice thing to say, but what they were acknowledging is a very good point. A child’s wellbeing is ultimately the responsibility of and a reflection on that child’s parents. God does not want us running around looking like fatherless kids. When it says He leads us for His name’s sake, it means God has tied His reputation to the wellbeing of His people. He guides us because He wants what’s best for us, but He also wants to demonstrate and display His goodness, wisdom and graciousness to us and through us. God’s guidance will always lead us on paths that bring Him glory and ultimately bring us good. The reason I stress ultimately is because sometimes God guides us through bad situations.

As we walk in intimacy with God, He will reassure us.

As we walk in intimacy with God, even in some dark times, God will reassure us. We see this in Psalm 23:4: *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”* Remember how I said that the paths He leads us on are the right paths, but here’s the problem. The paths He leads us on are not always the paths we would have chosen for ourselves.

In fact, sometimes we find ourselves in dark and difficult circumstances. If we’re not careful, we wonder, “Where is God?” I’m sure the Apostle Paul sometimes felt that way about the thorn in his side (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). The problem is that we often equate God’s goodness and presence with Psalm 23:1-3. God is leading us on paths of righteousness; even through the valley of the shadow of death, He’s still leading.

Three weeks ago my wife and I got to hang out with some friends when we met a vibrant, godly young couple. I just saw a social media post this week that the wife posted. It was a picture of a curtain, kind of like the privacy curtain a nurse will pull at a hospital. This is what she wrote: “Two and half

weeks ago, I stepped behind this curtain after a routine mammogram.” She said, “I stepped behind this curtain, waiting for the radiologist to tell me if more imaging would be needed. I snapped this picture, because I thought it would be a moment I would need to remember.”

She continued, “Although it took about a week for the doctors to confirm it, after the first mention of a biopsy, I knew I had cancer. Though there are some remaining tests, the doctors have currently classified it as Stage 1-A Invasive Carcinoma.” Some of us know what that feels like. Whether it’s a devastating diagnosis or a devastating circumstance that takes the wind out of you, that is not the path, not the situation, not the circumstance you would have chosen for yourself. And here’s the very next thing she wrote: “The Lord has given me so much peace and grace to trust in Him and His goodness with this diagnosis. I know this is no surprise to Him and that He works all things together for our good.”

Listen, this is why I say you need intimacy with God more than you need anything else. You cannot have that kind of reassurance, that kind of joyful confidence in God’s goodness, if you’re not walking in close intimacy with Him. That’s what David experiences when he says, “I’m walking through the valley of the shadow of death.” We don’t know the situation. Was he fleeing from Saul? We don’t know exactly what he was talking about. But he says, “Even in the midst of that, I will fear no evil.” Why? “Because, God, You are with me.”

The shepherds would lead their sheep to grass and water, but they often led them literally through these ravines or deep, dark valleys. If a flash flood hit, they could be wiped out. In the darkness of these ravines, predators would lie in wait to tear the sheep apart. David says, “That’s what this season of life feels like, but I still fear no evil.” It’s not just that he knows God is with him, it’s that he experiences God’s reassuring presence in the midst of it. He says, “*Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*” A shepherd’s rod was used for protection, to fend off the predators.

If you’re exploring Christianity, if you’ve got questions you have to understand, it is not that God protects us from ever experiencing bad things. Jesus was clear when He said, “In this life you will have trouble” (John 16:33).

This is not fine print in the Bible. This is not the dude talking real fast at the end of the pharmaceutical commercial. “Take this, but you might die.” No, Jesus is not trying to slip this past you. He says this up front. “In this life, you will have trouble.” Christianity is not naïve or misleading. Being a Christian, even a really good Christian, does not exempt you from trouble. But God is still in control when trouble comes and His promise is that our problems will never thwart His purposes—ever. Intimacy with God doesn’t keep you from experiencing the difficulties of life, but it changes how you experience the difficulties of life.

So the shepherd’s rod is used for protection, then the shepherd’s staff is used for correction. The staff is a long stick with a hook on the end that he uses to pull back sheep that were drifting into danger.

The good shepherd protects the sheep from others, but the good shepherd also protects the sheep from themselves. The good shepherd is saying, “No, you’re part of my flock. I’m taking full responsibility for you. I’m not just going to sit back and watch you drift off a cliff.”

This is what God does for us when we drift into sin or a pattern of unwise choices. Because God loves us He corrects or disciplines us when He sees us drifting into danger. In other words, when David says, “Your rod and staff comfort me,” it’s the picture of a Shepherd Who will do whatever is necessary to keep you on the right path, whatever is necessary to keep you in position for Him to accomplish His purposes in your life.

God will reassure you of His presence. Even in the valley, He will assure you that He has not abandoned you, that He has not given up on you. He will assure you that the work He has begun in you He will bring to completion in any and every situation and season of life (Romans 8:28). This is why this Psalm has been so comforting and reassuring to elderly believers throughout Christian history.

As a sidebar to the younger people in our church—teenagers, young adults, young couples—this is part of why it’s so important for us to build meaningful relationships with some older saints in the body of Christ. We need to not just read these things; we need to be able to watch this stuff in real time. So watch some older men and women who have been and are going through some hard things, even those who may be literally be on their deathbeds. Watch the sweet, reassuring intimacy they have in their relationship with God. Praise God for the long witness of these older believers in our church. God will reassure us.

Just last night, my wife and I were on a flight and we hit a little bit of turbulence. I was a little nervous. The plane was shaking a little bit and I was praying, “Lord, provide some foster and adoptive parents for my kids...” But then I noticed the flight attendants were chilling. In fact, the snack carts were still mobile and they were delightfully passing out pretzels and beverages. I wanted to ask them, “Are you aware that we are about to die?” Then it dawned on me that they were not nervous. They know turbulence better than I do, so if I really want to know how things are going, I shouldn’t look out the window; I should look at them. I should listen for the voice of the pilot.

It is the same thing in your relationship with God. God is not nervous. Nothing that comes into your life is a surprise. He is still sovereign and in control. He will reassure, sometimes by moving and changing the situation, but every time—if you’re a child of God—by reminding you and allowing you to experience His reassuring presence. As we walk in intimacy with God, He will reassure us.

As we walk in intimacy with God, He will provide for us.

Here’s the picture of God’s provision in verse five: “*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*” Some scholars argue that

David is still continuing the shepherding theme here and that the table refers to a tableland, a plush plain that the shepherd leads his sheep to. They say the oil is either medicine to address their scratches and wounds, or the oil might have served as a bug spray they would put on the sheep to keep away parasites and pests. In either case, it's a beautiful picture and flows well with the first half of the Psalm. Days or weeks before, the shepherd would have scouted out this tableland. He would have made up this oil preparation ahead of time.

Most Bible scholars, however, think David is switching analogies at this point to God being like someone hosting a feast or a banquet in their home. That seems to make sense too, since David continues that thought in verse six when he says, "*I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*" Really, both points are communicating the same thing: this Shepherd prepares for us, even in the presence of threats and enemies.

Meditating on that word "prepare" has been such a blessing to me this week. I'll be completely honest. We had 1 and 2 Samuel and Psalms in our Bible Reading Plan, so I could have preached anything. Part of the reason I preached this is because God has been using it so much in my life this week. I've been thinking about that word "prepare" and the thought that God has made preparation for me. Think about a Michelin Star Chef preparing, not just a meal, but a dining experience for you, with every detail impeccably designed, every ingredient specifically selected for you.

I remember being with my whole family at a really fancy white-tablecloth kind of restaurant when I was a little bit younger. . I'm a little more cultured now, but back then I was on a college student budget. I remember that after the appetizer, they brought each of us some bowls of sorbet. First of all, I don't know the difference between sorbet and sherbet. For me, sherbet was the climax of a birthday party I didn't know. So my thought was, "Listen, I know dinner is not over. I know that little goat cheese drop we had for an appetizer was not the whole meal. Why are they bringing us dessert?" Thankfully someone in my family whispered in my ear, "No, no, no. They bring you this to cleanse your palate." Don't act like you've known that your whole life! They bring you sorbet to cleanse your palate. I was thinking, "This whole restaurant is out of my league. This is crazy."

Just think about this chef, this restaurant, this staff having prepared all of this for us—literally they have prepared a way for us to wash our taste buds so that we could fully enjoy all the flavors during the rest of the meal. It was a seven-course meal and we'd only finished the first course!

Listen. God Himself has prepared for you. He has made preparation for you—exquisite preparation. This picture is not just of a table, but of a lavish feast. The anointing oil was part of ancient hospitality. There are still some cultures in the world today that place a very high value on hospitality. To not be hospitable is like blasphemy; it's sin if you come over to my house and I have no food ready. That's how it was in this ancient culture. Hospitality was major.

So you would come in and there was preparation for you made in advance. Or if you just showed up and knocked on the door, they would stop everything and prepare for you. If you needed to freshen up from a weary journey, they would anoint your head with oil. It's almost like a perfume to kind of freshen you up a little bit. And the cup is not just a little sip given to quench your thirst. No, the cup is overflowing. He's keeping the party going. Every time it looks like your cup is going to be empty, God the good Shepherd is filling it up again.

This is a picture of God's overwhelming, overflowing grace and generosity that flows from His nature and character as a good and gracious God. Wherever God leads us, He has already made provision for us. Think about this. You need to hear this. You need to trust this. God has already made provision for you.

I think about Nate and Kristen Crew, who are about to plant a church this fall. I think about a couple at our Montgomery County campus who heard the call to missions and are in the process right now of selling their house and moving their young family to Southeast Asia this summer.

Listen, you may not know the future; you may not be able to foresee all the challenges. But here's what you can know 100%: God has already made provision for you. If you make the choice and the sincere commitment, "I'm going to follow You. It doesn't matter what You call me to do. It doesn't matter what You tell me to do," you have a 100% guarantee, because God the good Shepherd has taken full responsibility for your life. You have the 100% guarantee that whatever God calls you to, He has already made provision for you. He has already prepared everything you need in order to live the abundant life He's made possible for you to live.

He has taken personal responsibility for everything you need, not just for tomorrow or for the next season of your life, but forever. Psalm 23:6 says, "*Surely goodness and mercy...*" the kindness and covenant steadfast love of God, "*...shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*" Whenever you show up to a situation, you show up with an entourage. You have a Shepherd in front of you, as well as goodness and mercy behind you. In any situation or season you walk into—even death—goodness and mercy will follow you. They will pursue you on the other side of the grave, if you're in Christ, every day of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the Lord—the presence of God—forever.

This is the gospel! It's the gospel that Jesus is our Good Shepherd Who also personally experienced our lives as sheep. He knows what it's like to be weary and burdened. He had to pull away and be replenished in the presence of His Father. Read the Gospels. He humbled Himself in submission to the Father's guidance, to the point that John 17:19 says He could do nothing by Himself; He could only do what He saw His Father doing.

When He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He experienced the reassurance of His heavenly Father in the valley of the shadow of death. He knew the cross was coming. He knew what He was going to go through physically. He knew what He was going to go through spiritually through separation from the Father as He took the wrath we deserve. He said, “Father, if there’s any way for this cup to pass—if there’s any way for You to helicopter in and pluck Me out of the valley of the shadow of death—please do it.”

Something happened in that moment. I think it was just the reassuring presence of His Father, but He shifted and said, “Not My will, but Your will be done. I know this isn’t going to be pleasant, but I have all the reassurance I need that although it’s not pleasant, it’s also not permanent.” In the presence of His enemies—when His enemies were spitting on Him and mocking Him and beating Him and torturing Him and executing Him on the cross—in the presence of His enemy death, in the presence of His enemy Satan, did not God provide?

And He didn’t just provide a meal—He raised Jesus from the grave. He provided to Him the name that is above every name. Imagine Satan’s surprise when he now watches Jesus be honored as the risen Lord, as he watches us through our singing and our living honor of Jesus, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Listen, Jesus, the risen Lord, wants to be your Shepherd. As we close, listen to John 10:10-11,16, where Jesus says this to you and to me:

The thief [Satan] comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his 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.

Jesus has made a way for you to join the flock of God—the family of God. You say, “How do I do it?” By listening to His voice. By hearing Him through the message of the gospel say to you, “You are wayward. You have drifted off the path in your sin and it has worn you out. You are weary. You are lost. You are in danger and you are empty.” Jesus says, “I came and lived a perfectly righteous life that you couldn’t. I died in your place on the cross and rose from the grave in order to be your Shepherd; in order to be the King Who, every day for the rest of your life, demonstrates and reveals My goodness to you and through you.”

If you’re here and you’re not a follower of Jesus, if you’re not a Christian, this is for you. With all your questions and doubts, this is for you. Jesus wants to be your Shepherd. You don’t need me. You don’t need a priest. All you need is the voice of the Lord Jesus saying to you, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13).

So as we close in prayer, right now where you're sitting, you can say to Him, "I know I'm wayward in my sin. I want to turn from my sin. Lord Jesus, I want to completely trust in You. You paid the penalty for my sin, so I want to invite You, not to just be my Savior, but to be my Lord and Leader and Shepherd."

Maybe you're here and there are some other things you need to say to God. Before I close in prayer, I want to give you an opportunity, between you and God, to pray as we close. I want you to pick one of these benefits, one of these promises: I need Your restoration. I need Your guidance. I need Your reassurance. I need Your provision. Or maybe you need to pray, "God, I want You. I need You to become my Shepherd." Take a minute between you and the Lord, and just pour your heart out. Be honest with Him, then I'll close in prayer.

O Father, we thank You so much for Your goodness, grace, wisdom, power and strength that You make available to us. Father, I think the only appropriate response—the most concise and accurate thing I know to say in response to this Psalm—is, "God, I need You. We need You." You know how I've prayed for the people listening to this message. Would You persuade them deep in their souls that they need You? In Your mercy and grace, Lord, would You allow them to experience life under Your leadership and Your care. We pray all this in the name of the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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