

- 1 **The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.**
 2 **He makes me lie down in green pastures,
 he leads me beside quiet waters,
 3 he restores my soul.
 He guides 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 love will follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
 forever. (NIV84)**

Jesus Christ: Our Gracious Shepherd.

Psalm 23 is one most well-known and cherished Psalms. It is read at many funerals and committals and many Christians know this Psalm by heart—or at least a line or two they can recite. There are six hymns in our hymnal that are based on this psalm, and countless stanzas of other hymns that recall the words of this Psalm.

This past week at our VBS the children have memorized most of the words of Psalm 23 as we used them as an outline to talk about all the great blessings the Lord has given us. Today, we do the same thing: we take a look at all the blessings we receive from Jesus Christ, our gracious Good Shepherd.

We have a lot of things going on in our lives today. We're busy with work, kids, family, friends, and so on. You work long hours, get home

with barely enough time to eat before you have to take your kids to the next game or practice. On the rare occasion that you don't work or have any place to take the kids, you find yourself trying to catch-up on all the things you have to do around the house—but that list seems to be getting longer and longer.

You finally get some free time but then family comes to visit. You get to take a vacation every so often, but with traveling, kids, and everything else vacations are often more tiring than your everyday life. It is hard to find some peace and rest—especially when you really need it.

And to top it all off, there is everything else you have to deal with while living in this world full of sin and its effects. There are sicknesses and diseases. You may have some financial problems, issues with family members, problems at work. This person stabbed you in the back, that one said something about you that simply isn't true. You have to deal with so much right now, that you're not sure what you are going to do, you aren't sure how you can handle it.

The Lord provides for all that we need. He gives us plenty of food to eat and water to drink; and everything else we need to live. And then some, **My cup overflows**, David says, with all the physical blessings God gives us. But David has something else in mind. The emphasis of these words isn't on the pastures or water, but on the peace and rest. Peace and rest—that is what our Good Shepherd gives to us. Verse two reads, **He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.** A more literal translation would be, "He causes me to lie down in resting places of green grass and leads me to waters [which provide] resting places." These sheep aren't searching for anything, they are not in want—for the Lord has provided everything for them. They are completely satisfied and content with what they have. In the same way, we are too. For the Lord provides for us all that we need to live. He gives us more than what we need to survive, giving us so many blessings that is hard for us to keep track. Yes, we all should be completely satisfied and content with what the Lord has given us and so we are at peace and we find rest.

But there is a different kind—a great kind of peace and rest that the Lord gives us. That is rest for our souls. How do we know? Because our Shepherd is none other than Jesus Christ himself. He is the Good Shepherd, he knows us by name and we know him through faith.

And because the Lord is our Shepherd we are confident that everything is provided for us that we need for both body and soul. He not only feeds and cares for us physically, but more importantly he feeds and cares for us spiritually. He does this through his Holy Word. The “green pastures” and “quiet waters” are the truths of the gospel which give us spiritual life and peace.

When we are overwhelmed, when we face the burdens in this life—which seem almost too heavy to bear, when we are overcome with the guilt of sin, we turn to the Lord in his Word. **He says, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.** His Word revives our souls, and brings us true spiritual peace. In Psalm 62 David also wrote, **My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.** Yes, it is the Lord, our Good Shepherd who alone is able to truly give us peace and rest for our souls.

But there are other issues that we face while living in this world of sin. And the largest issue has to do with ourselves. We live in a world of sin, and we are not exception. Sin was ingrained in us when we were conceived by our sinful parents. There was a time that we could do nothing but sin, and even now as Christians our sinful natures still get the best of us. There are times when we fail to obey God’s commands. We often fail to put him first in our lives, we choose friends, family, or our own happiness over and against what the Lord wants. We are selfish and hateful and fail to live a perfect life that the Lord demands of us. We are sinners, and sin separates us from God and all sin deserves nothing but eternal punishment.

And we aren’t alone in this sinful world. There are sinners all around us. And because of that, we don’t always get along with others—we don’t always see eye to eye. Because of sin, people will hate us, they may mistreat us. Others will spread lies about us; some will complain behind our backs. Maybe it’s a family member, a neighbor, or a co-worker—someone somewhere doesn’t like you and they are looking for a way to “get” you. There are entire groups of people that hate us for our beliefs, and others who want to see us dead. Yes, we have enemies in this world.

Let’s tackle our sin first. The Lord **leads me on paths of righteousness.** To be righteous means to be holy, to be without sin. There is only one person who was without sin—and that was Jesus, our Good Shepherd. He lived a perfect life that we could not sin. But

he became a sinner for us as he took our sins upon himself and died. As Jesus said in verse 11 of our gospel, **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** On the cross he gave us his perfect life so that the Lord would look at us and declare us not guilty. Paul talks about that in 2 Corinthians, **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** So Jesus leads us on paths of righteousness. It is Jesus who makes us pure and holy by forgiving us through his death and resurrection.

In the same way, the Lord restores my soul. This is more than simply reviving us, or restoring our spirit. He restores our souls. Sin separates us from God, but Christ has removed our sin. He removed the dividing wall of hostility between us and God and restores us to a right relationship with our creator. We are united once again with our God—we are at-one with him as we were at creation. Our soul, which was on the way to hell, has been restored, for Christ has paid our eternal price. We are now God’s own children, sheep of his pen. We are so confident in the care and protection of our Lord, that we eat in front of our enemies. He has prepared a table in front our enemies. We eat, not with one eye on our food and the other waiting for those to attack us. We eat in peace and comfort. We know that the almighty and powerful God is watching over us for he has already defeated our most powerful enemies—sin, death, and the power of the devil. Those who hate us may attack us, they may call us names, imprison us, or even kill us. But they can do us no real harm. For no matter what happens, our Lord is with us and he will make everything turn out for our eternal well-being. No matter what happens to us on earth, we know that we’ll be in heaven, enjoying a perfect life free from sin and its effects. And so we can say along with the Writer of Psalm 118, **The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?**

And yet, there is one more thing we face on this sin-filled earth. It is something we cannot escape, no matter how hard we try. Death—we all face it, is it the price of sin. First our loved-ones die, and then we face our own death. David describes it as walking **through the valley of the shadow of death.**

Many people fear death because it is the great unknown. But, as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we don’t have to fear,

because we don't walk alone. The Lord, our Good Shepherd is always with us. He walks beside us and guards and protects us from all harm and danger. His pure goodness and ever abounding love follow along with us. As a shepherd guards and defends his sheep against all attacks from predators, so the Lord guards and protects us from all harm and danger and from all who attack us. A few verses after our gospel Jesus says, **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.**

But the Lord isn't just with us in our walk through death's valley, he turns death around. He turns death into something positive. Three days after he died, Christ rose from the dead. He won the victory over death and he gave us that victory. He is the resurrection and the life and all who believe in him will live even though they die.

Death then isn't simply an end, but it is the beginning of eternal life.

A life in heaven is what awaits us because of Christ. And that life is a perfect life, free from sin and its effects—a life with our Savior which lasts forever. It is a life in the house of the Lord. A house free from death and free from danger. That is why so many love this Psalm. It ends on a high note—on a note of comfort and encouragement, not just for this life, but in the life to come. **Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

With all the hustle and bustle of this world, with everything that we have going on every day, with all that we suffer through and have to endure as life goes on, it is important to get some rest. And not just physically, but more importantly, spiritually. There is nowhere else to turn to for rest but our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Turn to him in his Word and he will lead you through green pastures and quiet waters, on the path of righteousness to his heavenly home forever. Amen.