

## Yahweh Is My Shepherd

Psalm 23

February 7, 2021

“The Lord is my shepherd...” This is probably the most well-known and most familiar phrase in the Bible: the twenty-third psalm. People in every generation have memorized it and recited it in Sunday School or in the presence of parents or grandparents. This is the psalm that has brought comfort for the grieving, hope for the hopeless, strength for the powerless, and encouragement for the disheartened.

It is a wonderful affirmation of our faith in God’s ability to protect and to provide. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is cherished by the Jews, the Roman Catholics, and the Protestants alike. Its wonderful simplicity touches all of us, and gives us comfort and reassurance.

The first verse of this Psalm, which declares, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” or “I shall not lack anything.” This verse is the foundational verse not only for this psalm but also for our faith. There are at least two reasons why this is the foundation for our faith.

First, the shepherd is totally responsible for his sheep. This psalm depicts the relationship between God and his people as the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. The imagery of the Lord being the shepherd and the people being his sheep is not unique to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. But it is found throughout the Bible. For example:

From Isaiah 40:11 we read, “He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.”

And from Psalm 100:3 we read, “Know that the LORD is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”

The word “sheep” is mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible. Throughout the Bible, God refers his people as sheep who need a shepherd. And God is compared to a shepherd. In the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep, the shepherd is totally responsible for his sheep’s well-being. The shepherd provides food, water, shelter, and for protection for the sheep. Without the shepherd, the sheep cannot survive.

This shepherd is addressed as “the Lord.” In the Hebrew Bible, the word that is translated as “the Lord” is actually a name. This name is used more than 4000 times in the Bible. And that name is “Jehovah” or “Yahweh” in Hebrew. The name “Yahweh” is a combination of three tenses of the Hebrew verb “to be.” There is the verb “yehi,” which means “He will be.” There is the verb “hoveh,” which means “He is.” And there is the verb “hahyah,” which means “He was.” And the combination of these three verbs is the name, Yahweh, the name of God. So, the name Yahweh or Jehovah literally means “I was, I am, I will be.” or “I am, I always have been, and I always will be.”

This name “Yahweh” is so sacred for the Hebrew people that whenever they see the name Yahweh, instead of reading it as Yahweh, they always read it as “the Lord.”

Now, the first verse of this psalm says, “Yahweh is my shepherd, I shall not lack anything.” The well-being of the sheep is the work of the shepherd. The sheep are not responsible to, and perhaps not able to, meet their needs; that is the responsibility of the shepherd. God has made himself responsible to meet our needs. He is the omnipotent God, who is almighty. He is omniscient God, who knows all things. And he is omnipresent God, who is everywhere all at once. That God has chosen to be our shepherd.

But this shepherd is not an ordinary shepherd. In John 10:11, Jesus called himself as “the good shepherd.” In Hebrews 13:20, he is called “the great shepherd.” And in 1 Peter 5:4, he is called “the Chief Shepherd.” When Jesus becomes our Savior, Yahweh becomes our shepherd.

I read about a Sunday School teacher who decided have her first-grade class memorize the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and have them recite it in front of the church. She gave them one week to memorize it. The following Sunday, the kids stood in front of the church reciting the Psalm one by one. There was a little boy name Bobby. When it was his turn, he was so nervous that he could not remember anything other than the first phrase. So, he said, “The Lord is my shepherd...and that’s all I need to know!”<sup>1</sup>

Well, Bobby is right. “The Lord is my shepherd” and that’s all we need to know, because that is the foundation of our faith. The Lord will take care of us.

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<sup>1</sup> From James Merritt’s sermon “He Is Everything I Need”, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).

There is another reason why the first verse of this Psalm is the foundation of our faith. The second reason is that the shepherd is intimately connected to the sheep.

There is one word that describes our relationship with the Lord. It is a very personal and intimate word. That word is “my.” “The Lord is MY shepherd.” You may know God as a shepherd; you may even believe God is the shepherd. But is the Lord YOUR shepherd?

There is a story about a party that took place in London many years ago. There were many people. Among them was a well-known actor and an old preacher. The actor had a beautiful voice and perfect articulation. People loved the way he recited some Bible verses in his performances. So, someone asked the gifted actor to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. He recited the Psalm with a great emotion. He was expressive, eloquent and powerful. When he finished it, the crowd exploded with applause!

Then someone asked the old preacher to recite the Psalm. The old preacher knew he would not be a match to the gifted actor. He did not want to embarrass himself in front of everyone. So, he declined. But people insisted. He finally yielded to the pressure and recited the Psalm. The preacher did not have the actor’s elocution nor did he have the actor’s dramatic flair. But as began to recite the Psalm, it was obvious he wasn’t talking from his head, he was talking from his heart. It was his expression of faith, love and admiration for the Lord. When he finished no one clapped, but there was hardly anyone who did not have tears in their eyes.

The actor got up and made a statement. He said, “My friends, I appreciate your applause, but there was one big difference between me and this dear man. I know the Psalm; he knows the Shepherd.”<sup>2</sup>

When you say, “The Lord is my shepherd,” the Lord says, “You are my sheep.” Calling him “MY SHEPHERD” is an act of faith. When the Lord calls you “MY SHEEP,” that is an act of grace and love.

This shepherd doesn’t just give us what we need. He is everything we need. When you are hungry, he is the Bread of Life. When you are thirsty, he is the Living Water. When you are in the dark, he is the Light of the World. When you

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

are sick, he is the Healer. When you are lost, he is the Way. Whatever you need, he provides it. Whenever you need him, he is there for you.

There was a boy who was gravely ill. The doctors did all they could, and there wasn't anything more they could do. They sent the boy home to die. The parents called their pastor and he came over. The boy was in and out of consciousness. The pastor spent time with the boy alone for about an hour and left.

The following day, the pastor received a call that the boy had died. He went over to the house to console the parents and prayed with them.

While he was there the parents told him that the boy was holding his left ring finger with his right hand. They did not know why he did that.

Then the pastor explained saying, "I wanted to reassure your son that the Lord would take care of him, when he would pass. I knew he could still hear me. So, I took his left thumb and said, 'The.' Then I held his index finger and said, 'Lord.' For the middle finger I said, 'is.' For the ring finger I said, 'my.' And for the last finger, I said 'shepherd.' I repeated it over and over again. And I told him that the Lord was right here to bring him home to his place. Then I told him to repeat that. He didn't say anything but he was holding his fingers one at a time. I knew he was repeating and claiming that the Lord is his shepherd." The boy was literally saying, "The Lord is my shepherd."

My friends, when Yahweh, the Lord, who was, is and will be, is your shepherd, you have no need to worry or to fear about anything. For he is all you need.