

# I will fear no evil

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[ 0 : 00 ] And there to Psalm 23, the 23rd Psalm. And we shall read the psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul. He leadeth 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 thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

Thou anointest my head with oil. Thou, my cup, runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

[ 1 : 04 ] And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Probably, no six consecutive verses of Scripture are more familiar to Christian people and to church-going people, and I don't equate these two, than these six verses of this lovely psalm.

In Scotland especially, it is well known for, I would suspect that most of us here, learn this psalm at our mother's need.

It was perhaps the first of all the great biblical songs of praise that we learn. And I would suspect that perhaps there are not many six consecutive verses of Holy Scripture from which we draw so much comfort and consolation, as we do from the verses of this beautiful psalm.

Every one of us would agree, I think, that David, the poet laureate of Holy Scripture, sung his very sweetest when inspired by the Spirit of God, he gave us the Shepherd Psalm.

Very often called the Shepherd Psalm. I would rather call it, if I could, the Sheep Psalm for myself, because it is the sheep that we have speaking in it.

[ 2 : 57 ] That's perhaps not quite accurate, for although it is the sheep that is speaking all the time, the sheep is looking at the Shepherd.

And what Psalm 23 enables us to do is to look at the Shepherd through the eyes of the sheep.

Let me put that in plainer terms. Psalm 23 brings us into the heart of real Christian experience and enables us to look at Christ and the salvation of Christ through the eyes of the Christian believer.

That is something very wonderful. Only the inspiring Spirit of God could give us something like that. Men unregenerate, men who know about Christ but who do not know Christ can never really tell us what Christ is like.

Only someone who has been brought into a living relationship with the Saviour only someone who is truly a sheep of his flock can tell us the kind of Shepherd that Jesus is.

[ 4 : 14 ] And this Psalm enables us, as I say, to look through the eyes of the sheep at the Shepherd of the Psalm. Now, I think I've preached a number of times already from the pulpit here on Psalm 23 and I hope that God will spare me to preach many times from it yet.

I think that it's one of these great exhaustless streams that flow straight from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

And you know, when it's the stream of redeeming grace, we can never drink it dry, can we? That's one of the wonders of Scripture. But passages with which we are perfectly familiar, passages that we know of by heart, passages from which we've drawn blessings in times past, to such passages we can come again and by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Ghost, we can bring the fresh and see new truths and be given new insights into the love of God in Christ's horror and be blessed and refreshed again.

There's an immeasurably deep well in Holy Scripture for it is the Word of God. It would be a sore task for the preacher of the Gospel if this were not so.

And it would be a sore task for every believer reading Scripture whether it's not so. But Scripture is a wonderful, inexhaustible fountain.

[ 5 : 53 ] And personally, I feel that that is true for myself in Psalm 23. I suppose, naturally in some ways, I've had an interest in the Psalm and its teaching since the day of my conversion.

Because when I was converted, my main task in life was to shepherd sheep. That itself, I think, made this Psalm precious to me.

Once, grace had made this shepherd of the Psalm precious to me. I've been reading it and studying it for quite a long time.

And it was only the other day, in fact, one day this week, I think Wednesday as I was looking at the Psalm yet again, that I was greatly struck by the fact that in such a positive piece of Holy Scripture, such a positive insight into Christian experience, we find two negatives.

And there are only two negatives in the Psalm. and both are the kind of negatives that in fact make very positive affirmations.

[ 7 : 20 ] I want to look at these two negatives with you this evening. The first of them is in the very first verse. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

There's the first one. I shall not want. And the second is in this very center, in the heart of that great verse, verse 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

And it was Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher who said of this verse, God has made it into a comfortable dying pillow for many of his sins.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. I will fear no evil for thou art with me.

Here are the two negatives in this Psalm that teems with positive, confident, assured statements.

But the negatives, as I say, so stand us to make very positive affirmations.

[ 8 : 28 ] they assert two great things that will be true in Christian experience. And I emphasize Christian experience.

Because this Psalm belongs to not only to a living shepherd, but it belongs to a living sheep.

I remember preaching, I think it was in the spring of 1975, here in the public, preaching in this Psalm and putting it in its setting with you and pointing out that Psalm 23 follows on Psalm 22.

Psalm 22 is the Psalm that gives us and that brings us, that gives us an insight into the suffering and offering of the shepherd of the sheep.

It shows us the good shepherd laying down his life for the sheep. I said then, and let me repeat it this evening, I said then that there was only one way for God himself to find an entrance into the relationship and the experience that Psalm 23 speaks of.

[ 9 : 51 ] And we say it with all reverence, there was only one way by which our holy God could enter into fellowship with lost sinners and that was the way of the cross.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And because he stood there and died there and made that cry, because he was poured out as water of Psalm 22 says, he became the shepherd of Psalm 23.

And let me say again that there is only one way also for this sinner into Psalm 23. There is only one way by which you and I can make this Psalm our own and that is by will to cross.

We too must journey through Psalm 22 and come to know the one who was the good shepherd laying down his life for the sheep.

Psalm 23 is a picture of the one who has been brought again from the dead. Do you remember Hebrews 13 is it verse 20?

[ 11 : 11 ] Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep.

This is him here. and you see that is the foundation there is a link between the experience of the soul that can say I shall not want there is an eternal link between that soul and the shepherd who has risen again from the dead in order to save his sheep.

You see the Psalmist first of all said the Lord is my shepherd. And I think it was Martin Luther who said that real saving religion lies in the ability to use personal pronouns.

My, I, Thy, these great personal when we can make spiritual and eternal realities our own by the grace of God.

The Lord is my shepherd. and it's only then that we can go on to say this great thing I shall not want. My friend whether you can say it or not it's true of you if you're in Christ.

[ 12 : 35 ] The Lord will give grace and where he will give grace he will give glory and in between the giving of grace and the giving of glory and we're in Psalm 84 now verse 11 where he gives grace and where he gives glory in between this is true he will withhold no good thing from them walk upright but fear his name.

I shall not want. Now it means and in some modern translations it's so translated it means certainly I shall not lack.

Now isn't that a wonderful thing? In a materialistic age when men and women are living in order to acquire things when men and women feel that they can't live without certain things isn't it wonderful that God's people with calm assured confidence can say I shall lack nothing I shall lack nothing that I need I shall lack nothing that will be for my good I shall lack nothing that I require to take me all the way through the wilderness and that's where the psalm is going the sheep led by the shepherd in the wilderness of this world I shall lack nothing that I need to take me all the way through the wilderness and climb the mountain at last to the top where I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever I shall lack nothing but the word I think means more than that

I think we have to go back to the word that we have in the authorized version I shall not want now that word has a sense which we are tending perhaps to lose in our familiarity with this psalm here I shall not want means that in mind and in heart we will not be disturbed or upset or frustrated by the craving for any one thing I shall not want it is not merely that I shall not lack the good things that God must give to his people if they are to be saved it means this I shall have no sense of dissatisfaction because of that it means as Paul puts it this that in whatsoever state

I am of any one time in my journey and in my pilgrimage through the wilderness in any particular state that I may find myself because he is my shepherd I shall be content I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content let me pause there my friend and ask you yet if yet the shepherd has taught you that that I was going to say simple but it's profound has the shepherd taught you that profound truth and has he taught you that profound truth by experience I have learned in whatsoever state I am not to be abjured not to be frustrated not to be upset not to have my day clouded over I have learned not to want because you see when I am the shepherd no matter what state the shepherd sees fit to have me in at any one time

[ 16 : 28 ] I will not lack I will not lack his love I will not lack his care this is the job of a shepherd to manage his sheep to care for them to spend himself for them and the shepherd's reputation hangs upon the condition of his sheep now that doesn't mean to say that the shepherd has always to see that his sheep is happy and that no difficult experiences come its way of course they do sometimes for a sheep's own good a shepherd has to give it rather a rough handling he has to drive it down sometimes miles down the mountains and through the glens and blade into the fun and deal with it in a way that someone who did not know sheep would think was very hard and very cruel he has to lift it and turn it over and shear it sometimes sometimes he has to stick needles in it and give it injections it would be very unpleasant for the sheep sometimes he has to take it and dip it right down in a very smelly fluid dip he has to do things that while these things have been done the sheep must be saying to itself what on earth is my shepherd doing to me what a terrible day has come in my experience when the man that

I thought cared for me and loved me the man that shepherded me onto the best grass in the hill when he's taking me and he's doing this one is he going to drown me he's giving me pain and so it is with us we shall not lack anything that is for our good and you know sometimes for our good God must bring hard and difficult experience to us the shepherd will handle us God will handle us the old Gaelic speaking people had a lovely word for God's dealings with them dear God handling you and they had a thing sure they had the shepherd and his sheep in mind when they used that word they would meet each other and they would say how is

God handling you in these days and they were meaningless you see what kind of experience of God's grace are you living in at the moment do you ever ask yourself that or do you ask other Christians what is your testimony of God's dealings with you just now are you lively in your soul are you enjoying fellowship with God are you having better days than you've ever had since you were first converted is your Bible meaning more and more to you becoming richer and richer as the green pastures of God's word is your fellowship with his people deepening are you coming to love them more is your heart being extended how is God dealing with or is he dealing with you in such a way that you say with the psalmist I go mourning all the day long or you say with the prophet oh my leanness my leanness and you know there are times when a sheep can get too fat there are times

when a shepherd may have to go to the hill very often with this dog and run the sheep or keep them on the move because they get too fat when a sheep gets too fat one of the things it can do is lie down in a nice green place and we called it in our geisha it gets cooked it gets cast over it lies down and it stretches out and then the centre of balance in its body shifts and it can't get its feet under it and if it lies here for a little time gases begin to develop in its stomach or stomachs and then these gases put pressure on all its blood vessels and its veins and the blood supply to the legs where it needs it most gets cut off and if it lies like that sometimes on a hot day it will last only for hours it can't get up until the shepherd comes to lift it so the shepherd doesn't allow his sheep to get too fat and you know there are times when not material prosperity only but there are times when spiritual prosperity would be bad for the sheep of the shepherd too and there are times when you keep us in the mood lest our very spiritual prosperity will be a great danger for our soul

I shall not want I think it was John McNeil the great Scottish evangelist of our past day he's got a little book in Psalm 23 if you ever get your hands on it keep them on it it was John McNeil who said this shows the Christians dependence upon Christ and then he illustrated that he said just think of a family and he said I mean a family not the two or three that are just samples today but a family think of a mother with five or six children from morning till night she's made aware of her dependence and he said in his own Scottish way it's written in the book too I could just imagine him saying it although I never saw her demand mommy mommy mommy mommy I want I want I want from morning to night he said that dims in her lungs

I want why because her children are dependent on her for their very life and then he went on to say it's gimme gimme gimme because children have endless needs and he said it's the same with the sheep of kind they have nothing but wants he said they have a continual want a continual need of the forgiveness of God they have a continual need of the eye of God to be upon them they have a continual need of his mercy and of his grace they are in want all the time and yet it is out of the experience of God's grace in Christ meeting that want that the Christian believer can say he is my shepherd

[ 24 : 04 ] I shall not want and let's go to the other negative because time has almost gone already I shall not want ah if there are wants in the life of the Christian believer there are fears in the life of the Christian believer also verse 4 I will fear no evil for thou art with me now let's compare this with the other negative for a moment the other negative you see was a consequence the psalmist had made a great statement and it's the statement that the most simple believer can make the Lord is my shepherd and then you see he'll use the logic of grace and the bible's full of it you make a statement you draw consequence from it the Lord is my shepherd therefore I shall not want and there's no logic department in any other universities that could teach you better logic than that take the logical strong reasoning and it's the strong reasoning of the holy ghost and you and I as Christian believers need it here is cause the un-consequence coming together the Lord is my shepherd therefore

I shall not want now this statement is a little bit different I shall fear no evil that's his assertion and then he gives us the reason assertion based on sound reason you and I especially in spiritual and eternal things should never make assertions unless we can root them on sound reasons but here's good sound reasoning here isn't I shall fear no evil for thou art with me did you notice something the first three verses of this psalm we're looking through the eyes of the sheep of the shepherd and the sheep is talking about the shepherd I shall not want I shall not want rest rest for he makes me to lie down

I shall not lack guidance for he leads me I shall not lack refreshment for he restores my soul I shall not lack correction for he will lead me in the path of righteousness and the Lord loveth he chastened but then you see when you reach verse four you're still looking at the shepherd through the eyes of the sheep but the sheep is no longer talking about the shepherd she is talking to the shepherd I will fear no evil for thou art with me and you see you were seeing before the wonderful things that the shepherd could do for the sheep but now you're seeing something else you're seeing that all these wonderful things culminate in this that the shepherd himself is with the sheep and you know that's where a shepherd should be even in my past experience why did sheep die why were sheep lost why did sheep sometimes become a very poor paying stack as we would say basically because the shepherd was not looking after them and in order to look after them the shepherd had to be out in the sheep on the hills among the sheep at all hours of the day and all hours of the night the sheep had to in their own way know that the shepherd was amongst them this is what he is saying this

shepherd is never away from his flock remember psalm 121

I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come my name my safety cometh from the Lord who heaven and earth hath made thy foot hill not let slide nor will he slumber that he keeps the shepherd doesn't have to go to rest there were times during the lambing season when the shepherds got very little rest I knew what it was to be in the hill at four o'clock for six or eight weeks in the springtime to be in the hill from four o'clock in the morning till ten in the afternoon and go to bed after a bite and get up at four o'clock again and be in the hill till ten o'clock at night and of course I was no exception that was done by all the lambing shepherds but these shepherds no matter how much devoted they were to the job they are to go and rest and sleep but the shepherd of these sheep he slumbers not nor sleep he's always awake and he's always out there on the mountains and you know from the mountains the shepherd could see the sheep all the shepherds that I knew anyway the first thing they did when they set out from home to get among the sheep was to climb towards the highest point in their land and from there they could scan all their various hissholes or parcels as the hissholes we called them where the sheep were they could see how the sheep were they could count them if there was one who was missing they would go and seek the sheep that was lost they could see trouble coming

I think I told you before about how one day on the hill I saw a fox walking at the sheep way down in a valley driving them into a soft doggy mushy place and I'd never seen the like of it before it was like the best trained collie dog you could imagine walking these sheep until they were going to stick in the bogs and then you see old Raynaud would have pounced and a sheep would have lost her life and I sat down and I watched through binoculars for ages until I saw that a sheep's life was in danger and then you remember how I told you I did a very simple thing I took two fingers into my mouth and I whistled loud and clear and the fox was awfully got shot now all these sheep were very worried they could only look at the enemy that's all they could see their lives were in danger and sheep are very sensitive and they get upset very easily and they were running hither and thither and they couldn't get away and you know their salvation lay entirely in this that at that moment their shepherd was on top of the mountain now that is true for you and for me if we are

[31:39] Christ he is on top of the mountain and his eye is never offered and we can dispel all our enemies disperse them and put them to flight and triumph over them just as easily as I did on that occasion over the fast we have an enemy let's never forget this as being the sheep of Christ if we are his there is one who goes about the enemy of our souls as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour what a picture the man who wrote this psalm knew what a lion could do with a sheep he knew what a bear could do with a sheep in fact he he put his life at stake in order to save his sheep remember how he could say to king Saul when they were facing Goliath oh he says I slew a lion and a bear they would have been away with his lambs and he wouldn't have it what a man

David was I don't know how he managed it but slay a lion he did and slay a bear too and you see David out of his experience of that kind was looking up to Jehovah God and was saying Jehovah is my shepherd and if I could slay the bear and the lion in order to save my sheep how much more shall the shepherd Jehovah slay the enemies of my soul I will fear no evil for thou art with me and David is talking about the valleys of the shadows he's talking about the dark places in life and despite what some commentators think and say I believe that he is talking about the experience of death the valley of the shadow of death and even there you see he can say I fear no evil won't it be lovely to have all the fear of physical death and dissolution taken completely away perhaps if you're a

Christian you think that should be away already perhaps you're concerned sometimes because you still fear death well I would just say this my friend God never gives needed grace until the need is there and when the need is there he never gives fails to give the grace that meets the need now I met a culler the other night an old lady down in Wales and she was saying to me you know all the fear of death is completely taken away she was an old lady she was actually a minister's widow whether that made her better or not I don't know but she said to me I find now that all the fear of death is taken away and I had it with me for years she said and you know the moment the Lord took away my fear of death I began to be ready and I've got my cases packed and the moment he calls I'm ready to go with them because he said

I think it won't be long now that he's given me the grace to face it and you see we shouldn't look for the fear of death to be taken away until God gives the grace to remove the fear death yes it's conquered for the believer yes the sting is out of death yes our savior went through death and he

lives in the power of an endless life but still let us remember this that the apostle Paul calls death an enemy it is the enemy it's another of the enemies of the believers ah but do you remember what Paul says about it it's the last enemy the last enemy you'll ever see for all eternity the last enemy that will have any power to touch your soul my friend you'll see and you'll leave behind as you go through the valley of the shadow with the shepherd

I shall not fear I shall fear no evil for thou art with me a sheep's safety and let me say this I don't know of any domesticated animal that is as dependent upon its owner or its shepherd as a sheep a cow I think would survive whereas sheep could not there are many reasons let me give you one very simple reason a sheep cannot shear itself and most sheep will not cast a fleece and in fact the better they eat the more likely they are to hold on to their womb I have seen sheep brought in from the high tops as we used to speak of them with three fleeces on it very few sheep would survive with being unsheared or unclipped for three years it would die and the one with the three fleeces was an exception it had a fearful pud of wound it could hardly get its neck down its face its mouth down to the ground to eat the grass a sheep is a very dependent creature so is a

[ 37 : 36 ] Christian my friend you need Christ and you need his presence every moment of every day and the wonderful thing is that you have his presence pledged to you I will never never leave you I will never never never forsake you we don't always feel his presence the sheep is not always conscious of the shepherd's presence on the hill in fact it's a poor shepherd that makes his presence known sometimes amongst his sheep there was a neighbouring shepherd to me a fellow who was always on the hills and he was always letting everybody else know that he was on the hills he would be bawling at his dog whistling loud shrieking whistles shouting at the sheep and rounding them up until the poor beast had no time hardly to eat he wasn't a good shepherd

I thought for there are times when the shepherd should be on the hill and his sheep scarcely know that he's there but the occasion the time when the shepherd inevitably has to let the sheep know that he's there is in the time when the sheep is in any danger when she gets stuck in her briar or in her bush she would die and she falls into a drain and will get drowned he has to lay hold of her there and it's the same with the Christian believer Christ is always there but he is not always making his presence known but he will when we need him and you know there is nothing to banish fear and doubt and uncertainty is there like the presence of Christ no one experienced him we can read great books and doctrine that reassure our minds we can listen to strong sermons that bring us strong meat and that reassures our minds too we can talk in

Christian fellowship and learn from others experience that reassures our minds also but you know there is nothing that will reassure the heart but the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ himself what a lovely thing his presence is and how careful we should be in our living to see that we do not grieve or lose his presence two negatives that really are very great positives I hope my friend are yours I shall not want I shall fear no evil there are some here tonight and I have to speak to them as I close these things that we have been talking about are not yours and they are not yours for a very simple reason they are not yours because the shepherd is not yours you would like to be in Psalm 23 wouldn't you oh my friend

I would like it to be in it too but let you be honest with your soul and let me be honest with your soul you're not yet in Psalm 23 it doesn't belong to you and it will not belong to you until you get to know the shepherd that's revealed in Psalm 22 come by the way of the cross the way of humbling and of casting yourself fully into the harm that was used for our sins and if you come through that Psalm if you call on his name if you repent of your sin and turn from it to him my friend you'll find that he himself is the gateway into Psalm 23 and you too will rejoice in these great things that we've been talking about great blessings great experiences may God grant it that you too will come to the place where you say the Lord is my shepherd therefore

I shall not want the Lord is with me therefore I shall fear no evil let us thank you our gracious God we thank you for thy word and we thank you for the blessings that thy word extends to us we thank you for the saviour that it brings within our reach and yet we have to confess that we need the Holy Ghost to teach us to teach us our own and to teach us of his glory and of his power bless each one of us oh Lord give us to know him whom to know is life eternal give us the confidence and the assurance which lie in the words which have been before us this night give us these as reality in our hearts grant it oh Lord for the glory of

[ 43 : 31 ] Jesus the shepherd of thy sheep unto the glory of thy name how are His love how His invented his name upon his name the for how Son Stephen woo ■■■ Eisen by May ounce early

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