

Thank you.

Good morning, Sherwood Oaks, Bedford. I feel like I should probably introduce myself.

Becky and I, we've spent the summer traveling. We were in Japan for several weeks with the birth of our first grandchild. I should have. Should have put a picture up there to let you see how long the tike is. But he dwarfed every other baby in the, in the hospital nursery area and kind of outweighed them, too.

So he's on to a healthy start. But after being in Japan, we got back and had two and a half days to get ready to take nine other guys up to Canada for a week of fishing and enjoyed that. One of the fellows, to make sure that he caught the biggest thing of the week, he hooked himself.

It wasn't me, but it was an enjoyable time, other than a few mishaps with some hooks. But we, we're glad to be back with our church family. You don't know how much we missed you. There's just something that is great about getting together and seeing the name of Christ lifted up by those who love him. So I thank you for your singing.

I thank you for the way that you are letting God be at work through your life within this congregation. Tim had planned on being here this morning. He decided that he would maybe try and wrestle some illness. Kamal said that he had to do a COVID test, and so we'll wait to see how that unfolds. But you may keep him in your prayers going through the summer in psalms and the Jewish hymnal, the book of psalms.

It is a fascinating study that we tried to decide, well, which psalm would I tackle for my time with the congregation? I settled on. Maybe I shouldn't have, but I settled on psalms chapter 23. It's so well known that is there any way that we can bring some new light and some new impact out of these six short verses? Hopefully, we can do that.

You have an outline of our time together in God's word, and you have two different versions. We have the new King James version and we also have the NIV version. But I've kind of focused on the new King James version because it has a little bit of the old rhythm that I first learned psalms 23 out of the King James Bible. And if you would. Would ask that you might read that with me.

I'm beginning in verse one. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.

He leads 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 you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort

me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. You anoint my head with oil.

My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Let's go to God in prayer.

Father, it is such a well written reminder that you have loved us greatly and that you serve us greatly by the sending of your son, who is our good shepherd. And one who goes before us, leads us and guides us. We ask as we look at your word this morning, we will do so thinking back of the ways that we have seen you at work in our life. As a good, loving shepherd, it's in your son's name that we pray. Amen.

It's a very relational psalm. If you take a look at those six verses, 17 times, you're going to find I, me or my. Five times you're going to see the word you addressed to God. In verses four through six, it's talking to God five times. In verses one through three, you're going to see it talking about God, he or his.

And it's somewhat interesting in the structure of the psalm. You get psalms one, two and three, and it's talking about God. But by the time you get to the fourth verse and carrying on through the fifth and the 6th, it's no longer talking about God. It is you having a conversation with God. And that's why we find it saying that, yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

It's as though he's standing right beside us. 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 will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalms 23.

It's kind of interesting the way it's positioned in scripture. It's tucked in between psalms 22 and psalms 24. The significance of that is in psalms chapter 22. David, in a very miraculous way, is able to somewhat prophesy what Christ's experience on the cross is going to be like. You read through there and it's my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

One of the statements that Christ gives from the cross and what makes it so interesting is it kind of parallels what John writes about in Christ, making a statement in John, chapter ten about him being the good shepherd, and he has the ability to describe what it's like for Christ hanging on the cross. And the interesting thing is the cross is not invented as a means of execution for another 700 years. So in his meditations, David is looking at evidently the need for us to have a sin bearer, someone who would bear our sins upon himself on our behalf before a holy God. And then there's psalms, chapter 23, where he moves

from the suffering savior to the living shepherd. And then in chapter 24, he talks about the exalted sovereign, the exalted king, the one that we've been singing about in our songs earlier, talking about God and his sovereignty.

And it's full of the impact of the king is going to be coming in his kingdom, and we're going to be a part of that kingdom. So here is the living shepherd psalm tucked in between the suffering savior and the coming kingdom. And it's almost as if God is going to be with us from the time of his sacrifice of his son to the time that his kingdom comes in its fullness. He's going to shepherd us through that whole process.

Now we look at this and sheep. When you look at sheep, I kind of look at them as proof that the theory of evolution doesn't quite work out, the idea of survival of the fittest, because with the survival of the fittest, there's no way a sheep would have survived. As Max Locato writes in traveling light, notice what he says. Sheep aren't smart. They tend to wander into running creeks for water.

Then their wool grows heavy and they drown. They need a shepherd to lead them to still waters. They have no natural defense, no claws, no horns, no fangs. They are helpless. Sheep need a shepherd with a rod and a staff.

That's their protection.

They have no sense of direction. They need someone to lead them on paths of righteousness. So do we, he writes, we too tend to be swept away by waters we should have avoided. We have no defense against the evil lion who prowls around seeking who he might devour. We too get lost all we like.

Sheep have gone astray. We have turned each one to his own way, as Isaiah writes in Isaiah, chapter 53, verse six. And so I think it's good that David the psalmist said that the Lord is a shepherd. He didn't say, the lord is a cowboy. Doesn't quite fit the image.

A cowboy drives the cattle, but the shepherd goes before and leads the sheep. Whole different nature. We need not to be driven, but to be led by an example of a good, loving shepherd, there's all kinds of avenues that you could go. In psalms chapter 23, some of the greatest sources of stress for us today, psalms 23 talks about it. Worry, I shall not want.

I have everything I need. Busyness is contrasted with the shepherd that brings us into green pastures besides still waters. I had a sermon series a few weeks ago about Sabbath rest. God is concerned that his sheep find adequate rest, damaged emotions. We look and talk.

It has in there that the need for restoration, indecision, that we tried to decide, well which way to go. As Max Lucado writes about sheep, they need someone to lead them. They don't lead themselves very well. Or the dark valleys cause of great stress in our life. And the dark valleys, they can vary in a myriad of ways.

Another stress is hurt. How do I handle my hurt? Or another cause of stress is fearing the future. And the words of the song, it rings true. I don't know what tomorrow holds, but I do know who holds tomorrow.

It is a good, loving, caring shepherd.

The main truth of psalms chapter 23 is the Lord is my shepherd. If you take that and say, place the emphasis on the Lord, he's the one that's in control, he is the pilot in the pilot seat. Or the Lord is my shepherd. He's the one that has all the characteristics that shows God's care and love and availability. To you, to me, or it's the Lord is my shepherd.

Not everyone can say that. Not everyone wants to say that. God is not the shepherd of everyone. He is only the shepherd of those who will let him be the shepherd. And to let him be the shepherd means that you're also going to let him be Lord.

If you are not going to let him be lord, then you are not going to be letting him shepherd you either. So it is, the idea of God is going to be in control, but he is going to lead in such a way that we will find our most productive and beneficial and blessed life, because that is the nature of the good, loving shepherd.

In John, chapter ten, verses 14 and 27, John writes the words that Christ said, my sheep, they know me and they listen to my voice and they follow me now doing mission work. In Romania, you had a. In some of the outlying villages, you had people that had lots of sheep, and you would have some of the shepherds, they would get together and the sheep, they would just sort of commingle together. And then when they're done talking, this shepherd goes this way, this shepherd goes that way, and the sheep just follow because they recognize the voice of the shepherd and they listen to the voice and they follow the voice. The Lord is my shepherd.

Very quickly, ten characteristics of what a good, loving shepherd does for you and for me. We look at the first in verse one. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. The Niv says that I lack nothing. And so in that he satisfies my wants.

It doesn't say that it's my greed talks about. He meets my need, but not my greed. And when it's talking about this, of us lacking nothing, it's not so much talking about the material things, but it's really

focusing on the character of the shepherd, that there is nothing more. When I look at this shepherd, there is nothing more that I could desire than what he provides. Such a contrast between a good shepherd and a poor shepherd that there are so many things that the poor shepherd neglects and looks at the sheep not as something to be cherished but to be put up with.

But the good shepherd, he knows the sheep and the sheep know him. And they find that that relationship with him is all satisfying. And so they feel content that there is no distrust. It's a statement of our trust in God's provision to meet our needs and provide for our contentment.

God's care and provision. The psalmist is saying, it is trusted and it's satisfying.

Second one, he gives me rest. God is concerned not just about the work that we do or the testimony that we put forth, but he's also concerned that we have a balanced life and there is times that are needed for rest and recreation. And so the good shepherd looks at what is going on within the flock and the sheep that's in the flock. And he finds ways to give them rest, to help them lie down in green pastures and to lead them beside still, quiet waters. Sheep are very skittish and it's the work of a good shepherd to where the sheep can feel comfortable lying down in the green grass beside still in quiet waters.

What a good shepherd he is. You look at verses two and three.

He leads me beside still waters. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake. There's the idea that the shepherd is continually looking at where to lead his sheep from this field over to this field, of making sure that there is adequate food and there's adequate forage and that there is going to be some protection as well as we'll look at some of the other characteristics. But in the midst of all of my indecision to be able to sit back and say all I have to do is follow the shepherd, and he gives us his word. David in the psalms said, thy word is a light unto my feet and a lamp unto my path.

He said, thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee. And one commentator said that when David said, thy word, that's the best thing. He said, have I hid in my heart. He said, that's the best place so that I might not sin against you. That's the best reason to continually be spending time in God's word.

That's part of his leading. He gives us a spirit to indwell us, to start bringing out the fruits of the spirit in our life, transforming us from the inside out. It's not something that we're going to work in ourselves, but it's going to be giving God room, giving the shepherd room to let his spirit work and grow.

He satisfies, he gives, he leads. Verse three, he restores my soul.

I'm sure you've found that there are times when you are distracted or you are wounded or you have transgressed and you say, what do I do now? Psalms 51 is an amazing psalm that David wrote for worship in the presence of God, by the people of God. And it's about his transgression, his sins with Bathsheba. He doesn't try and hide it. He wants to put it out there and confess it and deal with it so that he can find ways for God to restore him.

Restoration is not something we do ourselves. It is something God does within us, restoring a good attitude, a good, clean heart. He restores my soul. If you're broken. He has the ability to love, to repair and to heal.

That's the grace of a good, loving shepherd.

Number five. He removes my fears. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. He removes my fears. It's amazing what the presence of someone beside you can help you in dealing with your fears and your anxieties, to have somebody come alongside.

When I was younger, I was raised by my grandparents for about three, three and a half years. My mom died when I was about three. And so I was living with my grandparents in the hollers of Kentucky. And they call it a holler because you've got a mountain on this side and a mountain on this side, and it's holler in the middle. My playground was the top of this mountain, the top of that mountain, the top of the mountain in the back of the holler.

And the main road out on Buckley's Creek and would confidently roam all over the place. Knew where every tree was in the holler. Went to some friends that lived up the holler, and grandmother said, well, be home before dark. Young, disobedient kid didn't make it home before dark. And as I'm walking home down in this dark holler, it's amazing what all you can see behind every tree.

I mean, I'm petrified. And just every step is hard to make. And then I look, and here comes my grandmother, and all of a sudden, my fear was gone. It's amazing what the presence of someone beside us can accomplish.

He removes my fears, number six. He comforts me. And it talks about the two useful tools that the shepherd has at his disposal, his rod and his staff. The rod is a symbol of authority, and he uses it for counting the sheep, of being able to guide the sheep, of rescuing the sheep, of protecting the sheep. And then he has his staff, and that's the instrument of support where we find some of our greatest encouragement.

And so he says, thy rod and thy staff. It comforts me. The 7th one, he serves me. You look at what he says.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. But this idea of you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. I don't know if he's looking back at an event in one Samuel, chapter 25 26, where he is fleeing and he has enemies that are pressing upon him. He and his men are hungry, and Nabal is getting ready to throw a feast fit for a kingdom.

And he's asking Nabal for some food, and Nabal says no. And so David's men comes back and tells him Nabal's answer. And David's getting ready to marshal the troops and to go and get what they need. Nabal's wife, Abigail, comes to him and brings provisions.

I think somebody found a.

We'll see what we find.

Do you think it's possible that Tim has control at home?

I'm waiting to see if they found smoke. We good? All right.

But Nabal refuses David. Abigail comes in to give the supplies, and Nabal doesn't find out about it until the next day after his big feast. And he evidently has maybe a heart attack. And eventually diese, David makes a statement that Abigail had prepared, as it were, a table for him in the presence of his enemies. But another way of looking at this passage of scripture.

And Philip Keller, in his book, shepherd looks at the 23rd psalms, he talks about the table and says it really may reference the Mesas, the tops of mountain plateaus. That would be a good place for the sheep to be able to graze. And it's at those mesas that you're going to have some of the predators there. And so it needs protection. And so that may be the idea of thou preparest a table because the shepherd, before the season started, he would have to go into those mountainous areas and find those plateaus and make sure, make sure that everything was safe for the sheep real quick before it goes again.

There is this little statement, and if you do hospitality, you may want to know this. When it talks about my cup overflows, my anger rises, but my cup overflows. When does a guest know when it's time to go home? That you come and they stay and they stay and they stay. Well, in some of the culture there, that you are welcome to stay as long as your cup is full.

And when your cup is no longer being filled, it's time to go. But here it says my cup overflows means that God wants that continuing ongoing

presence. Let me give you two more real quick.

He pursues me and the idea is goodness and mercy is going to follow me. The shepherd is going to be in front of and behind is almost like the sheepdogs that keeps everything herded, his goodness and his mercy. And it's not like when the sheep strays or starts to move away from the flock that they get herded back in. It's not judgmental. It is that God's goodness and mercy pursues aggressively follows after us.

And the last one, he guarantees my eternity and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. When you have that statement, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. It's not just talking about the tabernacle or the temple, it's most likely talking about the house of the Lord is the very presence of God. And there is nowhere we can go that the presence of God is not going to be there.

So he guarantees my eternity.

When I was at the funeral of my mother that I remember dad holding me and looking down in the casket and saying, why did she have to die? And he made a simple statement. He said, well, God wanted her to be at home with him. And that little statement gave me a definition that sticks with me today. Home.

It's not here, but it's there and it's not now, but it's then and it will be forever.

You look at these ten characteristics, we don't deserve these things. But the good news is God sent Christ to make psalms 23 a reality for us. John, chapter ten, verse eleven. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Revelations, chapter 17, verse 17.

The lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Get one more in just a moment, we're going to take communion. We're going to take the emblems that signify to us. Christ dying on the cross, his body being shedden, his blood being poured out. And as he said, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

When you take those emblems in hand, know that it was a sacrifice Christ willingly made for you. Let's pray.

Father, for your grace and your goodness, we thank you. We ask that you will help us as we seek to follow you closely. As the good

shepherd, it's in your son's name that we pray. Amen. Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church.

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