

PSALM 23

THE SONG OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

David has left no sweeter Psalm than the precious 23rd! True, it is only a moment's opening of his innermost soul. But it is just as when one walks the winter streets at evening and sees the door of a house opened for someone to enter, and the cheery light streams forth for a moment, and the forms of happy children run to greet the returning loved one, and the sounds of joyful music are heard; for although the door shuts and leaves the night black again, yet it cannot shut back all that the eyes, the ears, the heart, and the imagination have seen. So also, even though this beautiful song is only a moment's opening of the Psalmist's soul – yet how wondrous and heart-warming are the truths of peace and consolation which are emitted! What would you say of a pilgrim who was commissioned by God to travel up and down the earth, singing a beautiful melody which – as soon as a person had heard it – caused him to forget whatever sorrow he had? Behold such a one! God has sent this “pilgrim” to speak in every language on the globe! It has charmed more griefs to rest than all the philosophies of the world. It has caused multitudes of dark thoughts, black doubts, and thieving sorrows to be imprisoned in the dungeon where they belong. It has comforted the noble host of the poor. It has sung courage to the army of the disappointed. It has poured balm and consolation into the hearts of the sick and dying, of captives in dungeons, of widows in their sorrowful griefs, and of orphans in their loneliness. It has visited the prisoner and broken his chains; and, like Peter's angel, it has led him forth to freedom and sung him back to his home again. Nor is its work finished! It will go on singing to your children and my children, and to their children also, through all the generations of time! It will not fold its wings

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

This is a surpassing ode, which none of the daughters of music can excel. Sitting under a spreading tree, with his flock around him – like Bunyan's shepherd-boy in the Valley of Humiliation – we picture David singing this unrivalled composition with a heart as full of gladness as it could hold. This is the Pearl of Psalms, whose soft and pure radiance delights every eye.

The position of this Psalm is worthy of notice. It follows the 22nd – the Psalm of the Cross. There are no green pastures or still waters on the other side of the 22nd Psalm. We must, by experience, know the value of Jesus' blood-shedding before we shall be able to truly know the sweetness of the Good Shepherd's care.

It has been said that what the nightingale is among birds, this Divine ode is among the Psalms; for it has sung sweetly in the ear of many a mourner in his night of weeping, and has bidden him hope for a morning of joy. Note the last words of the Psalm: “I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” These are celestial notes – more fitted for the eternal mansions above than for these dwelling-places below the clouds. O that we may enter into the spirit of the Psalm as we read it, and then we shall experience days of heaven upon earth!

until the last pilgrim is safe, and time is ended – and then it shall fly back to the bosom of God, from whence it came; and it shall continue to sound on, mingling with all those sounds of celestial joy which shall make heaven musical forever!



“The Lord is my shepherd.” In these words, the believer is taught to express his satisfaction in the care of the great Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and the Redeemer and Preserver of men. With joy, he reflects upon the fact that he has a shepherd, and that this shepherd is Jehovah. A flock of sheep – gentle and harmless, feeding in verdant pastures under the care of a skillful, watchful, and tender shepherd – forms an emblem of believers who have been brought back to the Shepherd of their souls (verses 1-2). A Godly person, who tastes the goodness of the Lord in all his enjoyments, may have only a little of the things of the world; and yet to him, it is a green pasture. The Lord gives quietness and contentment in the mind, no matter what the outward circumstances may be. The consolations of the Holy Spirit are the still waters (verse 3) by which the saints are led; they are the streams which flow from the Fountain of living waters.

The valley of the shadow of death (verse 4) may denote a severe and terrible affliction, or a dark experience from the Lord’s Providence, which the child of God sometimes finds himself under. But even in this, there are words in the verse which lessen the terror. Notice that it is only the valley of the *shadow* of death. Certainly the shadow of a serpent will not bite, nor will the shadow of a sword kill. And yes, it is a valley; but valleys are often fruitful places – and such is the case with this valley; it afterwards proves to be a very fruitful experience, full of comforts, to God’s people. See also how the child of God is called to *walk* through this valley; they shall not be lost here, but they shall assuredly get safe to the mountain on the other side! And even when the believer’s time does come to face death, it will not be the “king of terrors” (as it is often called) to the sheep of Christ! He has already won the victory over this last great enemy; He will guide them safely to heaven with His rod, and He will sustain them and bear them up with His shepherd-staff.

The Lord’s sheep feast at His table (verse 5), upon the provisions of His love. Satan and wicked men are not able to destroy their comforts; they are anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit, and they drink of the cup of salvation – which is always full and overflowing. All the believer’s past experience teaches him to trust that the goodness and mercy of God will follow them all the days of their lives, while they remain on this earth (verse 6). It is their desire and determination to seek their happiness in the service of God here, and they have the assurance of enjoying His love forever in heaven!

Lord Jesus! Good Shepherd! We thank You for the assurance that none of the sheep which the Father has given into Your care can ever be lost by You! Amen.