

**The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm – part one.**

## Introduction

Psalm 23 is one of the best known Psalms in the Bible. As you know the Psalms are Hebrew poetry, they are similar to Haiku, but different.

When the Japanese writer Masaoka Shiki changed the name of Hoku to Haiku at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century he made it easier for the common person to compile his own poems.

He tried to relate two elements using a cutting word. Hebrew poetry is different; there is one idea, presented in two different ways. In the original Hebrew Language it is very easy to memorize.

David repeats the same idea, but says it in a different way.

This Psalm is David's heavenly pastoral encouragement. It is the "pearl" of the Psalms. It was used in the past by Jewish families before eating their meals. It is a Psalm for the whole of our life, not just for weddings, Funerals and special occasions.

We need to study the Psalm in its context. We need to understand how a Shepherd operated in the countryside of Israel in the time of David.

We also need to know a lot about sheep, we will learn some of their habits and problems.

My hope as we learn from this Psalm over 2 weeks is that it will renew and refresh your faith. However if you don't have faith in the God of the Bible yet, perhaps you might trust the Lord Jesus as your Shepherd for the first time.

I don't just want you to learn something from the Bible for your head only; I want it to touch your heart too. In order to bring the Psalm alive, I will share some of my personal experiences with the chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. I hope that you will be encouraged that the same God who worked in my life can work in your life too. It will be different according to your individual situation, but the Biblical principles are the same.

So let us begin with verse one.....

"The Lord is my Shepherd....."

(Knowing the Shepherd personally – Power-point)

Until God called David to serve Him, he had spent his life with sheep. David knew everything about sheep that he needed to know. He educated himself about sheep by living with them all the time. David could identify his sheep even if they got mixed up with another flock of sheep.

The reason for this immediate identification is that he marked his sheep personally. The process that David used to mark his sheep is still carried out in some parts of the world. David used to make a cut in the sheep's ear. It was like a signature. Important documents in Japan have an official stamp, or inkan. You can have your own personal rubber seal made. However it is possible to steal your rubber stamp and pretend you are that person.

It is different with a personal signature, even in Kanji or Hiragana or Katakana, it is very difficult to forge (fake) a signature. The reason is that something of your unique style goes into your signature. Everybody has their own D.N.A. and everybody has their own unique signature.

Everybody does Kanji strokes in a slightly different way, also Hiragana and Katakana.

David made a cut in the sheep's ear in a unique way, and nobody else could forge it. (fake it )

Now David tells us in this Psalm that the Lord is his Shepherd. God has identified Himself with David and David has submitted to God in a personal way. There has been a role reversal, David is now the sheep and God is the Shepherd. This is how David writes the Psalm.

Old Testament Illustration

There is a wonderful Old Testament illustration that helps us to see David's position clearly. If you have a Bible with you, please turn to Deuteronomy chapter 15 and we will read from verses 12-18.

(I will read the passage of the Bible at this point )

<sup>12</sup> "If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. <sup>13</sup> And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed;

<sup>14</sup> you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. *From what* the LORD your God has blessed you with, you shall give to him.

<sup>15</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today.

<sup>16</sup> And if it happens that he says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you,

<sup>17</sup> then you shall take an awl and thrust *it* through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise.

<sup>18</sup> It shall not seem hard to you when you send him away free from you; for he has been worth a double hired servant in serving you six years. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.

When the Hebrew slave agreed to serve his master for the rest of his life, he had his ear pierced.

They put a little ring in the slave's ear. The slave was now part of the family forever. The slave had chosen not to go free, but to serve his master for the rest of his life. He was in a sense adopted into the family.

#### Application

To make the Lord Jesus your Shepherd can be a painful process too. You don't need to have your ear pierced, but you do need to have your heart changed.

We need to admit that we are a sinner before God. This is especially painful for nice people, like the Japanese. The culture is so nice and from the outside everything is wonderful. However everybody in the world is born with a sinful heart. – quote Romans chapter 5:v. 12. When God speaks to our heart and reveals His Holiness, we know we are not holy like Him.

It is painful to repent of our sin and say sorry to God. However a relationship with God is provided to us as a free gift. God has paid the price, through a painful process that He went through. He sent His only Son to die on a cross, to take the punishment of our sin.

Quote John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

I would like to ask you a question – Is the Lord Jesus your Shepherd? Do you have a personal relationship with Him, based upon His death, paying the price for your sin? If your answer is YES, then the rest of the Psalm is going to be a blessing to you. If not then perhaps today you might put your faith and trust in Him.

We now move on to the second half of verse one – "I shall not want...."

(Be content with the Shepherd's Provision – Power – Point Slide)

In the original Hebrew this verse has nothing specifically to do with material possessions. What David is saying here is that he is completely satisfied with God's management of his life. David is happy to let God provide for him.

If Jesus is our own personal Shepherd we will never "want" ( lack his provision) for anything.

This same truth is expressed in Psalm 34: v. 9-10. (Read it aloud now )

Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints!

*There is* no want to those who fear Him.

<sup>10</sup> The young lions lack and suffer hunger;

But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good *thing*.

If the Lord is our Shepherd, God will not hold back any good thing in our life.

If the Lord is our Shepherd there are three definite promises God makes us which we need to hold on to. (Grasp)

### 1. The Salvation of our soul.

Everything essential to the welfare of our souls is provided for in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul had to deal with many false teaches who were adding extra things that were needed for people's salvation. He tried to correct their teaching in Colossians chapter

2: v. 9. – 10 ( I will quote this verse from the New Living Translation Bible) ☺

“For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.”

No supplements are required, you only need Jesus.

The last thing I did before going on holiday was to take a funeral for a 93 year old lady in my Church. Her last words to me before she died were “Pastor, it is well with my soul”

Jesus provides all that you need for the eternal welfare of your soul.

### 2. Life Situations.

God will provide for all our life situations. (I will quote Matthew Chapter 6: v. 25-34.)

Nearly 30 years ago God called me to train at the Faith Mission Bible College in Edinburgh.

Before we went God spoke clearly to my wife Wendy and me that after training he wanted us to go to Japan as Missionaries. I sold my lovely home in Exeter, handed back the company car and we went off in faith. After about 4 months our savings ran out, we had no food and no money and no assurance of how God could provide for us.

My wife and I met for prayer in our home. We had a Bible text on our wall which read “My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in Glory by Christ Jesus.” ( Philippians 4:19 )

I felt that God had let us down and I could not get enthusiastic about driving to Bible College that day. I only had enough petrol to get to the College but not enough to return home. It was about 12 miles to the college from our home. My wife Wendy looked up at the Bible verse on the wall and said. “God has provided what you need, you have enough petrol to get to College, I will stay and pray that He will provide you some to come home, when you need it.”

My wife pushed me out the door and I drove off to College. During the coffee break a student who had very little money said that God has spoken to him that morning and told him to give me a sum of money. It was enough to fill the car with petrol and I returned home rejoicing.

This was my first bungee jump of faith. Although there have been many others since, this was the first and hardest, but always sticks in my mind.

Yes God will provide for you too, not what you WANT, but what you NEED and WHEN you need it. I have discovered that God is never late and seldom early in his provisions. He wants us to live by faith and trust HIM.

God will provide for your life situations, good or bad. Don't run after things that God hasn't planned for you. Many Christians make this mistake and the consequences can be disastrous.

### 3. The Shepherd will provide for your ultimate destination.

Just as David led his sheep out for grazing and then he brought them back to their winter home, God will bring us to Heaven our ultimate destination. We will talk more about Heaven next week.

This idea is also described in Psalm 78 and verses 52-55. (I will quote these verses now )

God will take us down roads that we never expected to travel, to places we never expected to be, but if God is our Shepherd, He is ultimately taking us to Heaven.

The next verse is “ He makes me lie down in green pastures...”

(Following the Shepherd’s Directions – Power Point Slide)

In verse 1 David told us what God means to him personally. David now tells us what God does for him. God is now working in David’s life and experience. Remember David is the sheep in the Psalm and God is the Shepherd.

David is telling us here that God makes him lie down in green pastures. It is not always in our nature to lie down and rest. However God speaks to us with a still small voice. Sometimes we can be too busy to hear God’s voice.

In the context of the Psalm we must consider how difficult it is for sheep to lie down.

There are 4 things that make it impossible for sheep to lie down.

1. The first is “fear”. Sheep can’t lie down if a dog is barking, or strangers come and start shouting. Also sheep sense other wild animals from a distance that threaten their peace.
2. The second reason a sheep can’t lie down is through “conflict.” Often there is a bully sheep in the flock that wants to be in charge. The sheep sense the conflict and will not lie down. Sometimes a sheep farmer has to remove that sheep from the flock and it is sold early for slaughter.
3. The third reason a sheep can’t lie down is through irritation. Flies and insects, especially the nose fly really annoy sheep. They can’t lie down, they must keep moving.
4. The fourth reason a sheep can’t lie down is because it is hungry.

If you see sheep lying down, then you can be sure that they are well fed, not afraid, have no irritations and there is no conflict in the flock.

It takes a Good Shepherd to create the right conditions for a sheep to lie down.

Application

Q. What has this got to do with us?

We are like sheep too. There are things that make us afraid, things that bring conflict into our lives, things that annoy us and then there are times when we lack spiritual food.

Can we identify any of these 4 things in our lives now? If we can then Jesus is wanting them to be removed so that we can be at complete peace with Him. (Jesus)

We can’t enjoy the peace and presence of Jesus until these things are removed.

(I will quote Psalm 34: v. 10)

The second half of verse 2 is “ He leads me beside still waters...”

(Experiencing the Shepherd’s Leading – Power Point Slide)

A sheep is composed of 70% water. Although sheep function well in a dry climate, they still need water. Water is essential to the health and well-being of a sheep. It is a known fact that sheep can’t drink from running water. They must drink from “Still Water”. If they drink from running water, it gets into their lungs and they can die. A Sheep must also drink from healthy water.

If a sheep drinks from polluted or stagnant water they can pick up diseases.

Therefore the Shepherd is responsible for guiding the sheep to the right place in order to obtain their much needed water supply. Any water will not do.

However sheep can survive for a couple of months without drinking water. How can they do this?

They survive by rising early in morning when the vegetation is soaked with morning dew. There is enough water in the morning dew to give the sheep nourishment until they are able to drink from a slow moving stream.

There is a place below Mount Hermon in Israel which has the heaviest dew in the world. If you camped in this area, you would wake up absolutely saturated in water.

Jesus leads His sheep beside the still waters of God's word the Bible. He expects us to get up early to benefit from the "dew" of God's refreshing presence. In England we call this our quiet time with Jesus. During this quiet time we drink in the water of God's word and we are refreshed by God's presence. It is like having a "Spiritual Onsen" every day. First thing in the morning is the best time to spend with Jesus before the busy day begins.

The devil will try his hardest to stop us having a quiet time with Jesus. We must win the battle and make this a priority in our lives.

We now move on to verse three. "He restores my soul...."

The word "restore" in Hebrew has three meanings. It means to repair something that was broken. It also means to refill something that is empty. It also means to replace something that has been lost or destroyed.

David here is talking about the restoration of his own soul.

David says in Psalm 42 verse 11 "Why are you cast down O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.

In sheep terms David is thinking about "Cast Sheep". "Cast Sheep" is a Shepherd's word for sheep that have fallen down and rolled on to their back. A sheep can't get up on its own if it is on its back. If it is left for too long it will die. As soon as a Shepherd sees a sheep on its back it will roll it over immediately.

#### Application

Many Christians get into very difficult situations in life. Sometimes it is their own fault. Sometimes God puts them in difficult positions. The reason He puts them in difficult positions is for His purposes. Joseph didn't like being put into a pit and into prison. However God had a plan for Joseph to be in a position of power in Egypt.

Sometimes a Christian will be in a position like a "cast" sheep. You are in a position where you can't seem to get any help. You need somebody to roll you over like the farmer does to the cast sheep. The ultimate answer is to cry to the Shepherd, that is Jesus and He will help you, He will roll you over, He will help you in your difficulty. However sometimes as Christians, God calls us to roll people over from their problems.

We might be called to do something practically. Perhaps to give someone a gift of money? To support them as they go through bereavement? Sometimes it is a problem that we have had in the past and God has helped us with. We can now help them with the help that God gave us.

#### Example from my life.

Several years ago I went to a Pastor's conference in London. I went 1 day early. The Pastor said to me "What are you going to do to-morrow?" I said I think I will have a day of prayer. He said "What are you going to pray about?" I said "I don't know, God will tell me at the time"

The next morning at 8.30 a.m. after breakfast I got down on my knees to pray. Suddenly the Pastor's father burst into the room. He was not a Christian. He said – "You better keep praying because my grandson has been taken into hospital with a serious medical problem and he might die" Now I knew what I had to pray about. I stayed on my knees for about 5 hours prayer for the little boy to be kept alive. After this time I had the assurance in my heart that God would keep him alive and he would be alright. Praise God He did this miracle through the best hospital in London. If God calls you to help a Christian in need, please be obedient. You never know how God is going to use you.

Finally we come to the last part of the sermon for today. It is the second half of verse 3.

"He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His names sake..."

If sheep are left to graze on their own, they are great creatures of habit. They will graze on the same bit of land until it is totally ruined. If left to their own devices, the sheep will not only destroy the land so that the

grass will not grow again, but they will destroy themselves. The well worn ground areas become quickly infested with parasites of all kinds which bring diseases.

So what is the answer? The sheep must be continually moved on to new ground. The best method is weekly.

If we are left to our own devices we will be like the sheep that Isaiah talks about.

Isaiah 53 verse 6 "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, everyone, to his own way...."

So to be led in a path of "righteousness" requires obedience to go God's way.

This is a pivotal point at which a Christian either goes back, or moves on with God. We all have potential growth experiences in our Christian lives. To go forward in faith and to trust God's leading strengthens of our faith. It will also refresh our soul and deepen our walk with Jesus.

It is not only for our welfare that God leads us on with Himself. It is also for the benefit of our people who by our step of "Faith" to follow Jesus will be strengthened too.

Shepherds will tell you that when sheep get moved to new ground they get really excited. They kick their heels and leap for joy.

It is not quite the same with humans. We sometimes kick and scream and want our own way.

Proverbs 14: verse 12 says "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death ..."

However the Good Shepherd comes to us and says "I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.." John 10 verse 10.

I would like to encourage you today to be led by the Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ for His name sake.

The cost is high but the rewards are eternal. May God bless you as you follow Him.