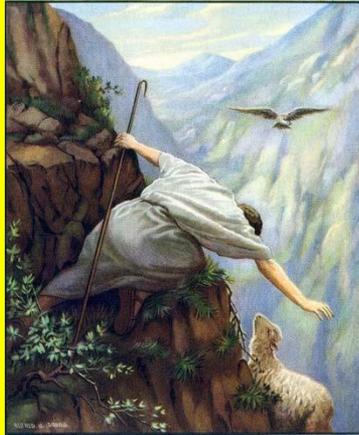


True Love



Sunday, 4/22 – 8:00 & 10:45 + Monday, 4/23 – 7 PM

Fourth Sunday of Easter – 2018

Join us on Ascension Day – 5/10: Meal at 6 PM; Service at 7 PM

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Today we are focusing on one of the most familiar parts of the Bible, the 23rd Psalm. God the Holy Spirit moved David, *who served as a shepherd in his youth*, to write down the very words of God the Father.

Even though many choose Psalm 23 for a funeral, the Psalm focuses even more on God's care *in this life* for all who have Him *as their shepherd!*

- Summary Statement:** **¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.** // So who is the LORD? We confess in the Athanasian Creed that **“the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Spirit is Lord...”** Here, *in Psalm 23*, we focus on the Son, who, *in John 10*, identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd. And we are like sheep – ignorant and helpless, *so we desperately need the shepherd's* ♥ *provision,* ♥ *leadership,* and ♥ *protection!*

- a. When we hear the term “**shepherd**,” we normally think of someone who cares for sheep, but in the culture of the OT Scriptures the term “**shepherd**” was also used to describe a king. So “**shepherd**” has three levels of meaning:
- i. *A normal shepherd* who provides for and protects his sheep.
 - ii. *A king* who provides for and protects his subjects.
 - iii. *The LORD* who provides for and protects all who trust in Him!
- b. Because the LORD is our shepherd, we shall not want; in other words, *the LORD freely gives us everything we need!* As we go through the Psalm, we will learn some of the details of what our LORD does to provide for us and to protect us – *both **physically** and **spiritually**.*

2. **Food and Drink:** ² **He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.**

- a. Since our Shepherd loves us—*His sheep*, He makes us lie down to eat and leads us to still water – *rather than rushing water* – so we can drink; in other words, *we are all blessed with an abundance of food and drink for our bodies!*
- b. Our Shepherd also abundantly provides our spiritual needs ♥ as we remember: *I am baptized into Christ*, ♥ as we daily *read and think about God’s Word*, and ♥ as we weekly *receive Jesus’ body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins!*

3. **Encouragement and Leadership:** ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. // In this life – physically, emotionally, and spiritually – we are sometimes attacked, injured, and weakened. Therefore, *because of the true love of our shepherd*, He restores us – *freely granting* ♥ *forgiveness*, ♥ *strength*, and ♥ *healing*; then He leads us down the right paths for *our good and God's glory!*

4. **Peace and Protection:** ⁴ Even 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. // Being fearful is normal and natural; in times of



physical danger, we might think, “*Someone may hurt me or murder me,*” and spiritual danger, we might think, “*the forces of evil may tear me away from my Shepherd.*” Therefore, our Shepherd wants us to remember His presence with us – carrying ♥ *His rod to protect us* and ♥ *His staff to help us when we fall*; consider **Isaiah 41:10**, “*Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand*” (NAS).

5. **Safety and Assurance:** ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. // As ones who follow the Good Shepherd, we are not immediately taken out of this world *but we are left here among*

those who oppose us. So we live here in the presence of our enemies for a good purpose, so that we might be salt and light – preserving the world from total evil and shining the light of Christ in the spiritual darkness! So we don't fear our enemies, but we love them! Furthermore, our shepherd is present to assure us of His forgiveness, which causes us to overflow with joy!

6. **Now and Forever:** ⁶ **Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.** // Because the LORD is our Shepherd, we are constantly benefitting from His goodness and mercy. What does that mean?
- a. Since our Shepherd hung in our place and received God's wrath, we – in Christ, *though we deserve God's wrath* – are shielded and delivered from God's wrath!
 - b. Since we have sinned, no good *should ever* come our way – but it does; *our Shepherd freely gives all that is truly good for us!* So let us understand why: **Not** because we are good, **but** because of *the perfect goodness of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!*

Conclusion: Let us pray: Dear Father, we are such foolish and helpless sheep, so we give You our hearty thanks for ♥Your true love, ♥Your Son—our shepherd, ♥Your great goodness to us now, and ♥Your rock-solid promises of eternal blessing! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!

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