

The Good Shepherd

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Date: 03 July 2022

Preacher: Robbie Laidlaw

[0 : 00] Thank you very much, David. Now, if you were listening carefully, you'd have heard that Psalm 23 is all about a good shepherd. Reading Psalm 23 shows us exactly what a good shepherd should do.

And, well, we realize that if we have a bad shepherd, it causes some big problems for the sheep. So we're going to have a drama now that shows us just how important it is to have a good shepherd. So sit back and enjoy watching the lamb's lunch break.

Delicious. Hi, guys. Nice to see you.

How's your day been? It's been a while since I've seen you guys. Mate, it's been awful. We're so glad to finally get a lunch break. It's been so bad. Our shepherd is absolutely useless.

Doesn't have a clue what he's doing. It's not a good time to be a sheep with this shepherd. The whole flock are in outrage. We can't believe corporate have given us such a rubbish shepherd.

[1 : 07] If this continues, we're going to have to strike. What's happening? Surely it can be so bad for a strike. Think of all that grass that would be left to grow uneaten. Well, that's the problem.

We've not been eating any grass. I've been standing eating the same patch of grass for three weeks now. We've not moved once. I'm basically chomping on soil.

It tastes horrible and it's just terrible for my teeth. He won't lead us anywhere new because he's sitting reading a magazine under a tree. It is mad. He barely pays us any attention at all.

Yet he still gets paid the big bucks. Oh, having a rubbish shepherd is awful. Especially these new ones that think that they know everything. Maybe you could put in a transfer request.

My shepherd has been great. We've actually just moved to an amazing field. It's got so much grass for everyone to munch on.

[2 : 09] It's got a lovely view through the valley and it's absolutely lush. He led us through the valley to get here and when we arrived, he let us have an early lunch.

What? Seriously? I'm starving. Our flock has spread throughout three fields. I haven't seen Barbara for days. We've been left to ourselves and it's awful. And your shepherd didn't try to find her.

Our shepherd realized that Deirdre was missing yesterday and he searched everywhere for her. He really cares about each and every one of us. He was up the hills, down the cliffs.

He eventually found her with her head stuck in a fence, buying her head off. But he managed to ease her out and carried her back on his shoulders. On his shoulders.

He really put himself through that struggle to bring her back. Yeah, and that's not the only struggle that he's put himself through. We'd all been laid down to rest two days ago, but I couldn't sleep that easily.

[3 : 09] I was counting humans, hoping to drop off. When I heard a right racket, it turns out a lion had snuck towards us.

And before it had a chance to eat us at all, our shepherd got up on his feet, rod in hand, and fought the lion. What? It was the craziest.

I've never seen anything like it. He fought a lion? What kind of shepherd is this? Last week, I just fell asleep under that tree and three baddies came and stole Magnus and Archie.

I'm not even sure if he's aware they'd go on missing. Flippers, that's barmy. I am so glad to have a good shepherd. I trust whatever happens to us, he is there to help.

He's not guided us wrong yet. Even when the path gets scary and dark, he's been there to lead us through it. I wish I felt that way. Just this morning, I thought we were finally being taken to a new spot, so I followed the rest of the flock up the hill.

[4 : 13] The whole flock climbed this hill, and when we got there, we realized no one was leading us. Henry had just needed to stretch his legs, and we all followed in. Then we got scared, we turned

around, and there was no shepherd to lead us back home.

Thankfully, our shouts for help were loud enough that even our shepherd was able to realize what happened. It was such a waste of time, and sore legs for nothing. No leadership means we follow whoever looks like they know what's going on, and that never works out.

I really wish we had the same shepherd as you. I'd love to follow him. Imagine having someone to guide and to protect you. That would be so good. Yeah, he is pretty amazing.

Anyway, lads, I better get back to him. See you later. Bye. Wait, where's she going? We should definitely follow her.

Why? I don't know. We're sheep. That's what we do. Oh, yeah. Let's go. A big thank you to our sheep, some of whom got wrapped into that very last minute.

[5 : 24] David earlier read out Psalm 23 for us, all about the good shepherd, and that's what we're still thinking about. That's what our little play was about. In the Bible, a psalm is a song written by someone.

So a lot of the psalms have been written by David. If you were in Kid Zone last week, you maybe remember you were looking at David and Goliath. Well, that's the David who wrote all these psalms that we're talking about, or a lot of them at least.

He wrote Psalm 23. But it was before he was King David that you wrote it, probably, maybe. He's the same guy, David, who defeated Goliath. He was the leader of all God's people, and he wrote a lot of the songs.

David himself was a shepherd when he was growing up. He looked after all his dad's sheep. He knows exactly what it looks like to look after sheep. He knows exactly how important it is to be a good shepherd.

Sheep need a lot of looking after. We heard that from our sheep on this stage. If you have a bad shepherd, well, the sheep get into all kinds of trouble. They got lost.

[6 : 24] They had no food. They were even taken away by bandits and lions. Having a bad shepherd is bad news. But in our psalm today, David doesn't call himself a shepherd, even though he was one.

He calls himself a sheep. I think that's a bit strange. If I were King David and I were trying to call myself an animal, I wouldn't call myself a sheep. I'd choose, like, a cheetah.

Or, like, a bear. Because they're cool animals. Sheep are a bit boring and stupid. They just follow each other and stand and eat grass all day. Why is David calling himself a sheep?

Well, I think David's calling himself a sheep because he knows what people are really like. And he knows what sheep are like, too. But they follow one another when they shouldn't. And they all get lost. And they all need to be guided.

People and sheep are pretty similar, if you think about it. But the other reason he knows that he's a sheep is because God is his shepherds. That's what verse 1 says.

[7 : 21] The Lord is my shepherd. And what does God do as David's shepherd? Well, he provides for him. God provides David all that he needs. And he makes sure he has safe, green pastures to rest in.

And plenty nice grass to eat. The good shepherd leads his flock. So he protects and he leads his flock along the right path. They know exactly where to go. The problem with sheep is that when one wanders off, they all wander off.

And that's an absolute nightmare for a shepherd. A shepherd needs to make sure they're all following him instead of the other sheep. If they get lost, they end up in danger, falling off cliffs or all these things that's in danger.

They get stuck in hedges and fences. But the good shepherd makes sure they follow him along the right path. And David tells us that the good shepherd doesn't just take him along the right path. But when they're on the dangerous path, he protects them.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, when David walks through the darkest, scariest place he could be, when there are vicious animals around him or predators or enemies, David knows that even if lions or bears or wolves are hiding in the dark valley, he can trust the good shepherds.

[8 : 34] The sheep has no fear because the shepherd is with them looking to protect him. Now, a shepherd doesn't just protect and provide and lead with only his hands. He doesn't just use hand signals to guide the sheep.

No, he has some tools to help him out. He has his rod and his staff, which is what David says he trusts in. These are two different tools that help him do all the kinds of jobs. Now, I have some of these tools.

First up, I have my shepherd's staff. It might look a bit like this. It might be a bit taller, less of a walking stick and more of a big staff. But it makes my point. So what does the shepherd use his staff for?

Well, the sheep learn to trust and follow the staff. When a shepherd uses it consistently, the sheep trust that when they see someone holding that staff, they can follow them, which is pretty amazing that sheep learn that.

They see the staff and know that it's safe and good to follow that way. But it's not just a sign to follow. It's a tool to save people or to save sheep, I guess. See this big bendy bit at the top?

[9 : 36] It would be a bit bigger on a proper one. But if a sheep starts going the wrong way or it gets lost, well, the shepherd can use this handy little crook to grab the sheep and pull them back. Maybe he has to grab their leg and pull them.

Maybe he has to grab them by the neck if they get stuck and pull them away. It's a pretty useful tool if you need to catch some sheep. So it's a sheep that follows and protects and it saves them.

But it's not just the staff that he uses. He also uses a rod. So that's what I have here. Some of you might recognize this as our rounders back from Essex rounders. Please don't get angry at me.

We're not playing rounders. It's okay. Instead, this is my shepherd's rod. It would look a lot like this. So if a staff leads and guides the sheep, the rod keeps them safe and protects.

Now, imagine if you're a sheep and you're asleep, just like our drama said, and a lion comes up.

Well, the shepherd needs to figure out how to protect them. And he uses his handy rod to get rid of the lion.

[10 : 35] He'll hit it and he'll make sure the lion doesn't come away. If a wolf comes, he gets to fight the wolf with just this rod. He's pretty brave if you ask me. Lions are terrifying. Shepherds in David's day had to fight lions and wolves and bears.

There were even leopards in Israel back then. But the shepherd was brave enough and cared for his sheep enough that he would use his rod to keep them safe. And when it wasn't used against lions and wolves, well, if the sheep did something wrong, they probably got a quick whack with it too.

So it's a very useful tool for a shepherd to have alongside his staff. And David, in our psalm, in our song today, he says that the rod and the staff comfort him. The sheep are comforted by these tools because they know that when the rod and the staff are in the hands of a good shepherd, they're going to be cared for, protected, and guided.

So that's the good shepherd uses his rod and his staff and the sheep trust him. Now, in our psalm, we get to verse 5, and it's a bit weird. So if you have your Bibles, maybe look down at verse 5 with me.

It doesn't really make sense. If we're in the middle of a shepherd psalm about sheep, why does he start talking about cups and tables? I've never seen a sheep use a cup or a table.

[11 : 50] So what's going on here? Well, David isn't deliberately only writing about sheep. He's writing a song that helps us feel something about God. That's what psalms are.

So it doesn't need to always be about the same picture. It doesn't need to always be about sheep. David, as he said, he's trying to get us to trust God. So he shifts pictures from shepherding sheep to tables and cups.

And in fact, it's probably about a leader or a king. It's picturing God as our great leader and king. Verse 5 says this, While the shepherd's staff and rods provide a sign of hope, guidance and protection, well, God, in verse 5, we see the same thing happening again.

God provides a banquet for all of his people, for David. And this banquet is not just a normal banquet, but it's one that's held with all the enemies around him. That doesn't sound like a very fun banquet.

If all of David's enemies are at the banquet with him, David must be absolutely terrified. But thankfully, that isn't what David's saying God's doing here. God isn't hosting all of the bad guys at his banquet.

[13 : 09] What David is saying is that for God's people, God hosts an amazing meal whilst the enemies are still out and around him. God is able to protect and look after David so much that he can put on the finest banquet, all the best foods you can think of, even when his enemies are there.

God has that much power and protects David that much. As long as he's with God, David is protected. And it's not just a decent meal. It's not just a quick half-hour oven meal. No, this is more than David could ever imagine. His cup overflows. It's filled to the brim. You can picture David just holding there and just constant pouring because there's so much to go around. One of the best things about Psalm 23 is that this provision, these things that God give them never ends. In fact, David sings to God that his God's goodness and love will follow David forever. All the amazing things the shepherd gives to his sheep, that the king gives to his people, provision, protection, and guidance are David's forever. Psalms are songs that are made to help us feel something.

[14 : 21] David wrote Psalm 23, this song that we're reading, to help us trust God. So when we read Psalm 23, we shouldn't just think about sheep and shepherds and all the fun facts we can learn.

Instead, we should be thinking about just how good a shepherd God is. We should realize that it makes us trust him more every day. Even when we're in the darkest valley, even when we're sad and scared, we can trust that God will look after us and guide us.

It makes us feel like we can take on the world only because God is leading the way. We can't do it on our own. We can't follow other sheep. We have to follow our good shepherds. And when we realize that, when we read Psalm 23 and it makes us feel these things, well, it's really good to say thank you to God.

And it's good to sing more songs to God for helping us that way and showing us who he is in the Bible. So we're going to stand up together. Now the band are going to come up. We're going to sing another song. And then we're going to think a bit more about what else we can learn about our shepherds.

So let's all stand together and sing. He's not like the bad shepherd that leaves his sheep behind. And we know that we can sing Psalm 23. We get to sing it to our God about how good a shepherd he is for us.

[15 : 32] We can feel comforted and confident that God looks after us completely. But the idea of a good shepherd isn't only found in Psalm 23. In fact, Jesus, the Son of God, claims to be the good shepherd that we need to follow.

In the book of John, chapter 10, Jesus says this, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.

The worker who's paid to keep the sheep is different from the shepherd who owns them. So when the worker sees a wolf coming, he runs away and leaves the sheep alone. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them.

The man runs away because he's only a paid worker. He does not really care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, I give my life for the sheep.

I have other sheep that are not in this flock here. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice and they will be one flock and one shepherd. Jesus knew David's psalm very well.

[16 : 38] In fact, David probably knew it off by heart. And Jesus tells him that he is the good shepherd that David is writing about. When we read Psalm 23 and think about all the good things the good shepherd does, we get to think of them as being about Jesus and how he does those things for us.

So we learn that the good shepherd led his flock through the dark, deep valley and into the green pastures. Well, Jesus leads our lives. He's told us through his word, the Bible, just how we should live.

He promises that if we love him and follow him, Jesus will guide us all the way to heaven, which is the greenest of green fields. No matter how scary things get, how hard life looks, whether it's at school or home or work, when things are difficult, we trust that Jesus, the good shepherd, will guide us through all those difficulties.

And we see the good shepherd gives the sheep whatever they need. Jesus promises that too as the good shepherds. He's given us a lot already. He's given us a church family around us to encourage us and to teach us and to give us things.

He gives us his word in the Bible so we can learn about him and how to follow him. He gives us our mom and dad to look after us. He gives us friends to care for us too. And best of all, he gives us the Holy Spirit to make sure we can do everything we need to.

[18:00] The Holy Spirit strengthens us to follow Jesus even when life is really hard. We can ask for help and Jesus will give it to us because he is our good shepherd.

We'll lack nothing when we follow Jesus. And then the good shepherd we learn uses his rod to fight off all the big scary animals, protecting the sheep from harm.

Well, Jesus did that too. Jesus protects us from the ultimate harm. Jesus protects us from a forever death. But death couldn't be defeated using just a rod.

You can't beat up death like that. Instead, the way Jesus protects us from death is that he died for us. So he said in John 10, Jesus was such a good shepherd.

He cared for his sheep so much that he gave up his own life for the sheep. He died on the cross to protect us from that enemy forever.

[18:57] And because he did that, we know that when we follow our good shepherds, we have a forever home with God. We don't have to worry about death or all these scary things in the dark valley. Instead, we can trust that our shepherd has led us the way home by dying and rising again.

When Jesus came back to life, we learned that we could live forever with him as our shepherds.

Now, because we have Jesus as our good shepherd, we can sing loudly with joy that he leads us and guides us home.

We know that he guides us and keeps us safe and refreshes our soul and that he will do that forever and ever and ever and ever. So what we're going to do now for the next five to ten minutes or so is we want to think more about what it means that God is our good shepherd.

But we're going to do it, you guys, you're not going to hear my voice anymore. Hopefully, as you came in, you all got given a lovely little worksheet. There are a few things on there. So for the boys and girls, you can go back to your mums and dads and start doing these mazes and you can talk about these questions that there are.

If you are not a kid, you're still allowed to do the maze and the word search. That's fine. But there is also a whole page of discussion questions for if you're slightly older to talk about. So turn to whoever's beside you.

[20:06] Ask them these questions and discuss. And let's apply what it means that Jesus is our good shepherds. So yeah, kids, you can head back to your mums and dads and we'll be five, ten minutes.

I'll come back up. Okay. Okay. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.