The Lord is My Shepherd

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Open with me to Psalm 23.

There is a danger and a real delight in preaching through a passage of Scripture that is so well known.
The danger is that it's words that we have heard so often that most in this room could quote in their sleep that sometimes we assume that we know it and there's not much else to gain from it.
That's the danger. The delight in preaching through something that is so well known is in striving to take this truth that we know and confess and see how deeply the Lord can drive our hearts into its fullness.
I have, over the course of the last 30 years, preached several hundred funerals and at many of those funerals, Psalm 23 has been incorporated one way or another.
[1:20] It's one of the best known chapters in the Bible. It's one of the most beloved chapters in the Bible. And it's an interesting part of Scripture because for most who are Christians, they know Psalm 23 very well.

And even for many who are not believers, if you talk to someone, at least in our culture, and said, the Lord is my shepherd, most, even if they don't go to church, would be somewhat familiar with what comes next.
It is a text that is so often at the end of somebody's life that is used and the family will print these words on their funeral bulletin or they will appear in some way.
Someone will read these words quite often at a funeral service. I have used these words at many gravesides as a final word to the family as we gather on the occasion of someone going to be with the Lord.
And yet, while these words are absolutely words of comfort and hope for those who are grieving in times of loss, Psalm 23 is ultimately a psalm for the living.
[2:35] There is hope, and if you're on the occasion of a lost loved one that's gone to be with the Lord, or if you're on the occasion of intense grief, certainly there are powerful words here, but they're powerful words because it helps us know how to live.

In fact, when you look at Psalm 23, if you just let your eyes scan down these very familiar words, you'll notice that only one of the six verses speaks of death.
The rest is about living. Psalm 23, as it's been well said, is a psalm about abundant life. It's more about the happiness of living than it is the sadness of dying.
This psalm helps us know how to live, how to truly, fully, really live. It teaches us how to hope, how to trust, how to have comfort in whatever it is that we face.
And for some that are in our service tonight, you've already been touched by intense grief. Next week, our middle school and high schoolers will be back in here with us, and we'll add 115, 120 that aren't here tonight that will be in our service next week when they rejoin us.
[4:05] And when our middle schoolers and high schoolers are back in here, for most, not all, but for most of them, when you talk about loss and grief, for most of them, it's imagining what it may feel like one day.

But for the adults in the room tonight, when I talk about loss and grief, for most of you, you don't imagine what that feels like.
You know what that feels like. You don't so much remember it because it's not something you've ever forgotten. It's something that you live with.
But that's the point. That even when loss and grief and pain invade your life, you keep living. That's the point.

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We move on. We press on. We hope and we trust. And when you look at Psalm 23, it describes the Lord in verses 1 to 4 as the good shepherd.
[5:10] And in verses 5 and 6, it pictures the Lord as the gracious host welcoming us to His table. David is going to begin this very well-known psalm by describing the Lord as His shepherd.

Of course, David can speak of this in a very personal way because He was a shepherd in His youth. And it's interesting, again, just taking a cursory look at this in chapter 23, verses 1, 2, and 3, He speaks of the Lord when He says that He leads me and He guides me.
He restores me. Verse 4, He shifts and speaks of in the first person, I walk through the valley. I will fear no evil.
And then He speaks directly of the Lord. You are with me. Your rod and staff, they comfort me. And I think this is helpful for us because it's good for us to speak of the Lord.
But when we speak of the Lord, it's important that we also speak directly to the Lord. In other words, our theology and our prayer must go hand in hand. If we were to be a people that are all theology, all study, all knowledge, all intake, no prayer, we very quickly become puffed up.
[6:48] If we are people who are all prayer, no theology, we very quickly begin to pray outside of God's revealed will.

So, the life of the believer is a life of rich theology and deep prayer. Learning of God and speaking to God.
Talking about God and talking to God. And so, my plan for the next number of weeks is just to take one verse per week.
Perhaps even a little slower than that, but predominantly one verse per week. So, this week we're looking just at Psalm 23, verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
And I want to look at just verse 1 tonight with three headings with you. First, make note of the comfort of the shepherd. The comfort of the shepherd.
[7:58] And it's just this first phrase, the Lord is my shepherd. That's the comfort that the shepherd gives us. Verse 1, in its original language, is just four words.

In English, I believe it's nine. And when you take a look at what just this first part tells us, every single part of this first phrase deserves to be emphasized for us to feel the full weight of the comfort that it gives us.
The Lord is my shepherd. shepherd. It's not an exaggeration to say that truly we could look in four different messages at just emphasizing all of that.
Who is the Lord? And the fact that He is current, present tense. The Lord is. And it's not that the Lord is a shepherd or is someone's shepherd.
The Lord is my shepherd. And what is the Lord? He is a shepherd. Every one of those four elements deserve our emphasis.
[9:17] So let's just look at those for a moment under this heading of the comfort of the shepherd. Make note of these four things that go with us. Number one, the comfort is singular.

The comfort is singular. It comes from the Lord. Using the covenantal name of God here, Yahweh, the Lord who has revealed Himself has allowed us to know who He is.
He is a personal God. And here is the one thing, when you think of Psalm 23, above everything else, I want this to be the first thought that comes to your mind.
This is a Psalm that is all about ultimately one thing and it is the Lord. It begins right where it should begin by focusing on the Lord.
We think about our trials, our temptations and the Psalm speaks to that. We think about our needs and the Psalm speaks to that. We think about our need for discipline and protection and the Psalm speaks of that.
[10:27] We think about death and eternity and the Psalm speaks to that. But it starts right where we must start and that is by remembering the hope of this Psalm is that it's all about the Lord.

The Lord is my shepherd. The comfort from the shepherd is singular. It comes from the Lord. The covenantal name of God used here, of course, comes from Exodus 3 when the Lord revealed Himself to Moses.
when you think of God in the Old Testament, the names of God, Elohim translated as God speaks of His power, but Yahweh speaks of His nearness.
This is His name. It is the Lord who is my shepherd. If somebody were to say to me, if I were in the hospital, I were sick, and somebody were to say to me, Michael, you have a visitor, my mood is

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going to depend on the answer to one question.
Who is it? Who is it? I know people are different. I'll just tell you, as for me in my house, if I'm in the hospital, I'll catch you when I'm back home, or I'll catch you on the other side.
[11:54] I don't feel like I'd be real into a whole lot of visitors. Who is it? When Marcy was in the hospital, having Benjamin 23 years ago, we had a visitor.

It was someone Marcy did not know, and the visitor would not leave. he meant well, but he would not leave.
At one point, the nurse said to Marcy, I really think you may want to ask your father to step out. And she said through tears, that's not my dad.
The question is, who is there to comfort me? Who is there? it makes all the difference in the world. My two beautiful daughters-in-law here on the front row, I've asked them, will you be there to take care of me when I'm old, no matter what, if need be?
One of them said, yes, I'll be there for you. One of them said, I don't know, what depends, what do you have? I won't tell you who's who.
[13:15] who's there to comfort you? My friends, the great hope of Psalm 23 is right where it starts, the Lord.

That's our comfort. It's the Lord. It's Yahweh Himself. Our hope is singular because it's the Lord who is our shepherd.
There's not only a singularity to the comfort, secondly, there is a confidence in this comfort because of the affirmation that He says, the Lord is my shepherd.
This is present tense. He is my shepherd. It's not that I think that He is. It's not that I hope that He is. It's not that I strongly think there's a good chance that He is.
He affirms with confidence the Lord is my shepherd. This is real. This is certain. This is said with confidence the Lord is.
[14:24] The Lord is. If you find yourself today or someday down the road with a heart that's broken with grief and pain, the first thing you remember is that your comfort comes ultimately not from a person, ultimately not even from the church or family, as important as all of that is.

Your greatest comfort starts this way. The Lord is confidently my shepherd.
The Lord is near. There's a third aspect to the comfort that we receive, and you can just write down the word relationship. It's a comfort that comes in the form of relationship.
Notice, it's the Lord is my shepherd. Charles Spurgeon wrote of Psalm 23 verse 1 that the sweetest monosyllable in the entire Bible is the English word my in Psalm 23 verse 1 that the Lord is my shepherd.
It would be one thing to say the Lord is a shepherd or the Lord is their shepherd, but David says the Lord is my shepherd.
[15:57] shepherd. The Lord is my protector. The Lord is my comfort. The Lord is my help.

And in your darkest days, it is the Lord himself who draws near to you. And with confidence through your relationship you have with him, you claim him to be mine.
the Lord is my shepherd. And then fourthly, you can write down the word protection. The Lord is my, what is he?
He's our shepherd. And everything that a shepherd is and does for the sheep is a way for us to think of what God is and does for us.
The Lord is my shepherd. Now, David's not the first person in the Bible to use the metaphor of God as a shepherd. Jacob did back in Genesis 48.
[17:08] In fact, let me just read this to you. I was thinking this week, where is another place that we see this, even before Psalm 23. And in Genesis 48, verse 15, it says, he blessed Joseph and said, the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day.

This is a metaphor the Old Testament uses from the very first book of the Bible, the Lord is our shepherd. Christians are referred to in the Bible as sheep, unbelievers referred to as goats and wolves.
promise. And one thing I want you to remember is that the promise that the Lord is my shepherd is a promise to the sheep.
This is a promise to God's people. This is something you as one of God's children uniquely can say. Someone is not a believer, someone has rejected the gospel in their days of loss or pain, just

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because of familiarity, even they may find themselves saying the words, the Lord is my shepherd. But in its truest sense, this is only true of those who have a personal relationship with the shepherd. When you say the Lord is my shepherd, what you are saying is he knows me and I know him and I belong to him.
[18:47] To say the Lord is my shepherd is to say he rules, I obey. He guides, I follow. He feeds, I serve.

He protects and I trust. The comfort of the shepherd is singular. It's the Lord.
The comfort of the shepherd that we enjoy is said with confidence. The Lord is definitely. It is a sense of relationship.
The Lord is mine. There's a relationship there and there is protection because he is my shepherd. That's the comfort that the shepherd gives to his people.
people. Notice secondly in the second half of the verse the confession of the sheep. The confession of the sheep.
[19:54] Because the Lord is my shepherd, that's the comfort, here's the confession, I shall not want. Now as you think about this phrase, I shall not want, let's do so with a few words to help us think about what's being communicated.

One, there's dependence when we say, I shall not want. Now understand the argument of verse one.
The Lord is my shepherd, that's established. Because that's true, I shall not want. Because I am fully dependent upon the Lord, I shall not want.
Now, this statement is often greatly misunderstood. This is not saying the Lord is my shepherd, therefore there will never be any other thing I desire, or I'll have no other desires of my heart. That's not what it's saying. It's saying the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not, and maybe a word that may in our world today communicate more accurately the heart here, is that I shall not be in lack.
[21:12] It's not that I love the Lord so I don't want anything else, it's that I have the Lord as my shepherd so there's nothing I lack. In other words, if Christ weren't my shepherd, there would be needs unmet.

but because the Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I lack. Now stay with the argument David's making here.
Because Yahweh, the one true God, has revealed himself to us so we can know him, because we have a relationship with him, because he provides and protects for us as a shepherd does the sheep, because that's true, I shall not be in want, I shall not be in lack.
the point is God decides what I need. In the very process of ensuring that whatever it is I need, he will provide it.
That's the promise of Psalm 23 1. That God himself determines what I need, and because he is my shepherd, he will see to it that I always have in that moment exactly what I need.
[23:04] That's the promise. We are completely dependent upon him. He who is all knowing, he who is all powerful, he who is all caring, he is enough, he is sufficient, and with him, we need nothing else.

The Lord is my shepherd, he determines what I need, and because he's my shepherd, he will give me what I need, therefore, because he's my shepherd, I will never be without what I need.
Psalm 73, 25 and 26, whom have I in heaven but you, and beside you I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
Psalm 34, 10, they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing. Here's the point. Left to themselves, sheep lack everything, but under the shepherd's care, their needs are met abundantly.
You see, to be a good shepherd, you could never get by with pointing the way. A faithful shepherd must lead the way. It would be impossible for a shepherd to have his flock and simply say to them with a point, go that way.
[24:35] They won't go. Or to say, avoid that predator. They can't do it. A shepherd cannot point the way.

A faithful shepherd must lead the way and must meet the needs of the sheep every step of the way. One of the things in our trips to Israel, it's always striking to me, is that today, in our world right now, in that part of the world, there are still shepherds.

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Today. It seems so archaic, but there's people today doing the work of shepherding. And when we were there just about exactly a year ago, we're on our bus going to one of our sites, and we're going down the highway, and right in front of us, here come a few shepherds with their flock just crossing the road.
And the shepherds have to be right there, because if not, the sheep won't keep moving, and they won't eat, and they won't be able to defend themselves, and they'll fall over and not be able to get back up again.
The sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd. My friends, hear me clear. the reason why you can say, therefore, I will not lack anything, is because you are completely dependent upon your shepherd.
[26:10] And if you get to the place in your life where you think, I no longer need the shepherd to be my shepherd, you have stopped depending upon him.

You never outgrow your need for the shepherd. there's dependence. Secondly, there is trust. I picked these words very carefully, and I want you to follow the argument here.
There's dependence upon the Lord, and there's also trust in the Lord. The reason you have all that you need is because God sees to it that you have all that you need.
The reason your needs are met is because God knows what your needs truly are. So on your worst day, in your hardest season, in your darkest night, you say to yourself, I fully depend upon the Lord. I fully trust the Lord. those two things aren't the exact same thing. You can be fully dependent upon somebody, but not trust they're going to come through.
[27:39] If you're at a restaurant, you're fully dependent upon a cook you don't know, cooking your food, and hoping that it's going to be done well and done right.

But if you don't know who the cook is, you're just at best hoping. But what the shepherd does for the sheep is so takes care of us that not only are we dependent upon him, but because we know him, we fully trust him.
My very first day that I worked at Brahms, I'm going way, way back a ways here, but my first day I worked at Brahms, I was supposed just to be there and just watch.
They're just going to show me some things. Well, wouldn't you know it, the man who was running the grill did not show up. So they said to 15-year-old me, the same me who yesterday, it took a phone call and a FaceTime because Marcy said, would you bring home a head of lettuce from Walmart?
I'm at Walmart, she texts me that, I go to the produce, I can't find it, so I call her, she tells me where to go, take two steps to the left, look up, look up one aisle, and I can't find it, so I FaceTimed her.
[29:06] Through FaceTime, she was able to direct me to the head of lettuce. Okay, that's the person, I'm not changed, I'm not even better today than I was 40 years ago, that's the person they said, you are in charge of the grill.

I was 15. Now, I don't know what kind of cooking, grilling experience you had at 15, but I had none. Incidentally, I'm 50, I still have none, but I had none. And so I'm in charge of the grill.
And so I've been working at Brahms for a total of 10 minutes, and I'm over this grill. And I don't know what to do, and the people who hired me don't seem to be concerned.
I was greatly concerned. You know who else was concerned? The people who came in as customers. They were depending on me to cook their meat.
Here's the problem. I had no idea what I was doing. And I thought I was going to kill someone that day, unintentionally, because I have no idea what I'm doing.
[30:11] doing. And there are times in our life where we find ourselves dependent on certain people or certain things, but we think to ourselves, I don't know that I trust them.

There are people who have responsibilities to protect us, to make decisions for us, but there are people in leadership at certain places where you think, I don't know if I trust them to make these decisions.
decisions. But for the believer, we are fully dependent, we fully trust, and now because we do, it leads to a third reality, and that is complete security.
The confession that we have here, the confession of the sheep, is that we depend on Him, we trust in Him, and because both of those things are true, we feel secure.
We're secure. How do you know you're going to make it through your darkest night? Because you know the shepherd. How do you know you're going to make it through your season of grief and

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loss?
[31:25] Because you trust the shepherd. And the shepherd knows everything you need. need. And because He knows everything you need, He will provide it.

And so you depend on Him, and you trust Him. And dependence plus trust equals security.
you rest at night, not because life is easy, but because the Lord is my shepherd. You have everything you need, not because there's not other things you might could think of that would make life easier, but because the shepherd knows what you need, and the shepherd Himself will provide it so completely, so thoroughly, that here is your confession.
confession. Because the Lord is my shepherd, I will always have what I need. That is the confession of the sheep.
Let me show you one third reality from the New Testament to help us from the passage that Joey read for us from John 10. That's the characteristics of the saved.
[32:43] Turn with me real quick, if you would, to John 10. For us to understand in fullness what this metaphor means for us, let's look at the characteristics of the saved.

John 10.
Verse 25. Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.
We believe because we are a part of a sheep. Verse 27. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.
And no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
[34:00] I and the Father are one. What are the characteristics of the saved? What does it mean to be a part of His flock?

It means that we know Him as shepherd, that we hear His voice, that we hear Him calling us by name, that we trust Him, that we follow Him, and because that's true, we are with Him forever.
The Lord is my shepherd, and because He is, I'll never be without what I need. And so let's just think through this for a minute.
Take a husband and wife, been married for 70 years, in their 90s.
Faithfully, walking side by side, living out their commitment to each other until death do us part. And one night, one of them takes their last breath and goes to be with the Lord.
[35:15] And for the first time in 70 years, we'll say it's the wife that passed away. That husband is alone for the first time.

70 years, every morning, first conversation he had with his wife. Every evening, last conversation of the day, with his wife.
Every holiday, every Lord's Day, sitting side by side. But now death has parted them.
The promise of Psalm 23 is not that there's nothing you'll ever desire. Because if you ask that man, do you wish your wife were still with you?
Of course he would say yes. Here's the promise. In that moment, in that season, because the Lord is his shepherd, he will have everything he needs.
[36:33] There will be nothing he needs that the Lord will not provide. Because the Lord knows exactly what he needs.

It's not that that husband would stand up and say, I'm so happy to be alone. I wondered when this was going to come. It's not that that man would say, I love going to church by myself.
70 years, I had a best friend. I love sitting by myself. Of course not. But here's what his promise that he can rest in is. That while I'm lonely, and while the night is dark, and my heart is broken, because the Lord himself is my shepherd, I am dependent, I am trusting, and I have the security that he will give me everything I need.
That's the promise of Psalm 23. This isn't, as so many people want to use this, this isn't some kind of magical card you play that you can quote and get you out of every pain that earth brings.
And that's impossible. What it is, is the promise that on your hardest day, your comforter is none less than the Lord God himself.
[38:15] Who knows you, and because he does, will give you everything you need in such a way that with complete confidence you can say, because he is my shepherd, I will have everything I need.

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I hear his voice, verse 27. He knows us, we know him. We have eternal life. Here's the great promise in verse 28.
Because we are his sheep, no one can ever take us away from the Lord. Now here's in that illustration what that husband, who's now a widow after 70 years, here's what he has to remind himself of.
Long before that lady was his wife. She is first and foremost the Lord's sheep.
And for those of us who are married, let us remind ourselves that is as important and meaningful as our marriage relationship is.
[39:35] my wife of almost 28 years belongs first to the Lord. My sons of 23 and 25 belong first to the Lord.

Anyone else the Lord brings into our life and brings into our family belong first to the Lord. and the greatest thing I could ever say, the greatest affirmation of trust I could ever give is not that I will physically always be with my family.
It is that everyone who knows the Lord will always be with Him. That's the hope. That even when a loved one passes because of grace covered by the love of Jesus Christ here is what we affirm for the believer to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.
That does not mean you will not grieve. What it does mean is you will not lack anything you need. Because the Lord is my shepherd I will have everything that I need.
David was a shepherd when he was young and it prepared him to write one of the most meaningful comforting passages in the entire Bible.
[41:13] Don't think that the Lord is wasting any day of yours. He is preparing you strengthening you teaching you helping you and one day even your hardest darkest season will be used by the Lord for greater good than you could ever imagine.

So much so that no matter how hard life may be today you can say this moment that because the Lord is my shepherd I will never lack anything that I need.
It is God himself who absolutely is through a relationship my shepherd I depend on him I trust in him and I rest secure in him because I know him he knows me I hear his voice he holds me secure and one day when I take my last breath on this earth I know I will forever be with him I need not worry about the threats around me because no one takes the sheep out of the father's hand my concern need not be the predator if my security is in the shepherd that's the promise of psalm 23 verse 1 want to man as can he or can he know he or he're he just here throughout him see you
Thank you.

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